

QUEST BRIDGE

The following essay is an example of a well-written college admissions essay and is intended for educational purposes only. Plagiarism of any type is unacceptable.

I picked up the phone and paused – just for a moment – before taking a deep breath and dialing the number written on the sticky note. My voice was trembling and my mind was a jumble of words.

“Oh, hi, uh, I’m Alex, um, I got your message and, um, I guess I’m just wondering if you still need someone to, uh, plant trees?”

Ever the shy child, I’ve struggled with speaking up my whole life. At home my brothers were loud enough for all of us, and I preferred the quiet escape of books and music. My parents, who barely made it through high school, never pushed me to speak up. Instead, they subscribed to the “better seen than heard” philosophy of raising children. These factors produced Alex Woods, a child that preferred to take the path that was expected. I was always a follower, never a leader.

I could have stayed this way, and I easily would have done so, were it not for my parent’s financial struggles. From an early age, they made it clear that they would be unable to pay for anything outside of food, clothing, and the basic necessities. I knew I shouldn’t resent my parents for what they couldn’t provide, but resentment crept in anyway. I always managed to push it down until one day during fall of my freshman year when my band teacher asked me to stay after class. She told me that she had been impressed with my chair audition, and recommended a summer music camp for gifted musicians. I was elated – this was the first time I had been told I wasn’t average. But when she mentioned the price, \$1,750, I felt the familiar resentment and disappointment crushing down.

I spent one day eating ice cream and feeling sorry for myself. But instead of slumping into listlessness, my mind was churning. This was the first time I had been told I was special and I wasn’t about to let this opportunity slip away as I watched. As I finished that carton of ice cream, I began to write feverishly. I listed every possible way I could earn \$1,750 in a small community with few jobs.

The next morning I went down to the local newspaper office and asked to place an advertisement. Fortunately, in my local six-page, weekly newspaper, advertisements weren’t that expensive. Still, I had to take all the money out of bank account to pay the \$36 necessary to run my advertisement for four weeks. It read:

High school student seeking odd jobs. Saving to attend music camp. Please call: 222-555-1212.

Calls began pouring in. Retirees needed help with lawn maintenance, the marina needed someone to scrub down their boats, \$20 here, \$30 there, and six months later, I had raised the entire \$1,750.

Music camp was challenging – and I enjoyed every moment of it. However, I soon came to realize that it didn't change my life nearly as much as the process of earning that money did. Placing that advertisement, returning phone calls, meeting and working with people I didn't know; all of these experiences forced me out of my shell. I learned how to communicate professionally and how to shake someone's hand and look him or her in the eyes. I was transformed from a follower into a leader.

Most importantly, I am now immensely proud of my parents. I understand the effort that goes into earning just \$20, and can finally appreciate the long hours they work to provide for our family. I am grateful that they expected me to cover my own nonessential expenses. My parents did not coddle me, and I am stronger for that. The work ethic they instilled in me will stay with me for the rest of my life. It is a gift worth far more than any money they could have spent on me.

Since I placed that advertisement, I've gained a reputation in my small town as the go-to, reliable high school student for odd jobs. Now, when I return calls to potential clients, my voice is strong and my mind is clear:

"Hi, this is Alex Woods. I'm returning your call about the trees you need planted. Is this a good time to talk?"