

LESSON 5

Example of Personal Statement by Kenny L. - Cornell University



FULFILLMENT *Fundamentals*

“Vote Paul Lee for District Leader!” My face brightened as morning commuters passed by and took flyers from my hand.

As they turned the corner, they carelessly tossed the flyers away. My brows furrowed. Is this what I woke up at seven in the morning for?

To hand out flyers to indifferent strangers who won't give the time of day, nevertheless a second glance? I was just a background character, a boy handing out flyers in the scene of a lively street. I was a mannequin, easily passed by unnoticed.

After my flyer shift had ended, my boss took me out to lunch at a diner. My eyes were darting back and forth, unsure of the situation. My boss slouched casually in his seat across from me. I had only met him twice before and instinctively, I began surreptitiously examining him. I slyly lowered my menu and peered over the “wall.” He wore a simple white polo shirt and his greying hair was brushed back in an old 60s hairstyle. He seemed like just an average Chinese man. The waiter came and pulled me out of my idle thoughts. As we made our orders, he put down his menu, and said, “how about a story?”

He opened with a story about his stint with the army, when he brashly enlisted at the Chinatown recruitment center. Next was a lighthearted tale of his moment of “stardom” when he debuted on the silver screen in Hollywood. Finally, the curtains closed with a story of an “extreme makeover” of his parents’ antique store to a game shop.

I vicariously experienced the vivid fragments of his past through his stories. I felt the hope and energy of a young man slightly short in stature, but big in heart, enlisting in the army, the excitement of a risk taker trying to make it big in Hollywood, and the freedom of a high-spirited man who followed his hobby and turned his parents’ antique store to a game shop.

In my mind Paul Lee had transcended the typical mannequin of an average Chinese man. I had inadvertently made the same oversight as the people that passed me on the street. I fit him into a general mold without trying to see him as an individual, just as they did me. Looking around me, I had been blind. Every person in the room had their own unique story and character just like Paul had his, and I had mine.

Upon my realization, I found the courage to convey my own unique character to Paul through my ideas. There is a balance between practicality, creativity, and fun that I have come to hold at the highest value in my life. I proposed to Paul an idea that was the embodiment of all three: to host carnival games at the Pavilion with a voter registration stand on the side. Instead of discarding my idea as I had expected, Paul encouraged it. Throughout the next week, the volunteers worked to create flyers, brainstorm ideas for games, and gather prizes. However, on the day it all came together, it rained.

Discouraged, I looked at Paul only to see that he was still in high spirits. In that moment I knew I couldn't be the same defeated, overlooked mannequin handing out flyers in the street. Optimism and vitality surged through the mannequin within me. I wiped the scowl from my face and proudly presented to him the six registration forms we received that day with a smile. The mannequin had come to life; I was no longer a background character but the center of the scene.