

Pranav Sharma

What are you most proud of personally and why? How does it shape who you are today?
(400 words)

When I was 15, my family of four moved from India to the suburbs of Washington DC. We spent our first year in the US living in my uncle's basement. My father, a successful tax attorney in India, had professional credentials that meant nothing in the U.S. He worked one temp job after another to make ends meet. My mother went from being a homemaker to embarking upon a 'career' in retail.

I went from feeling secure in the world to being thrown into the unpredictability of life. I started feeling guilty about focusing solely on my studies. In India, my father was our sole provider. Here, I sensed that each of us needed to contribute to our collective welfare. I needed to contribute to the family. I needed to find a job.

I approached my high school career counselor about this, but came up empty. Next, I discussed my situation with Mrs. Kimber, my high school English teacher. Her husband happened to be the IT director at a financial research startup in DC, and she graciously put me in touch with him. He hired me! Saving all my earnings, within nine months, my family was able to move into a place of our own. I had never felt as good as I did when I saw the look of pride on my parents' faces.

I started at Mr. Kimber's company as a data entry intern, but asked my supervisors for more challenging assignments. One day, they allowed me to play with reporting software that they had recently acquired, but had not yet implemented. I created the company's first management reporting system, still in use today after 13 years. Being promoted made me feel that I was in control of my own career, and I learned that I had the power to change my situation.

To watch my father go from being a successful tax attorney to a struggling accountant made me especially vigilant about updating my own skills. Had he been open to change, he could have obtained his credentials in the States. Instead, he dwelled on the past, made excuses, and avoided updating his skills because he felt he was too old. In an effort to learn from his experience, I vowed to constantly improve myself and be open to change. I decided to determine my own destiny and to improve my situation, no matter what the challenge.