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Confessions of a Child Dictator

If you really care, you'll probably want to know what my childhood was like. At a young age, I learned about two of the most important, significant aspects of life: love and responsibility. Love came easy to me. Every day, at around 11 am when I had completely exerted my mother's patience, I was handed a five dollar bill to buy an Oreo McFlurry and "stay out of her hair until Dad comes home." Like I said, love was easy, uncomplicated, essentially effortless. Responsibility, on the other hand, was a lesson I had to teach myself. It wasn't as straightforward, but thanks to my constant need for attention and validation, at seven-years-old, I conquered it. My first duty, and perhaps most impactful, was Tree House Master.

Tree House Master was an extremely demanding debut leadership role. Thank goodness I was a brave, persistent seven-year-old. The Tree House, a Mesquite tree located in an empty lot behind my best friend's house, was the ultimate hang out spot for the children of Country Lane Estates. It was an elite club—think secret societies, government agencies that use a paper company as a front, southern university's sororities. But the Tree House was about ten times as exclusive and cutthroat as all of those "special" clubs.

Once members were accepted into the club, I did not loosen up. I did not want those six, seven, and eight-year-olds getting sloppy. I mean, it was my reputation that was on the line. So naturally, we had very strict rules that are listed as followed: one, I must be addressed as Master and Master only. Two, my executive branch, also known as my three closest friends, are to be addressed as Servant 1, Servant 2, and Servant 3. Three, Servant 1, 2, or 3 must pick me up from my house and take me to the Tree House by connecting a jump rope on their bike to the handle on my wagon. Four, we will meet as a club every day at a time determined by me on the day of.

And five, the most important rule of all, what happens in the Tree House, stays in the Tree House.

As you can tell, the Tree House was pretty hardcore but I loved it. I loved being in charge, I loved being slightly intimidating, I loved the influence I carried. Not unlike certain American presidents and/or German and Russian leaders, the power went straight to my head and I attempted to expand that power across nations—or what I thought were nations. In addition to being a Tree House Master, I was also a summer school teacher, talent show coordinator, Chop Stix on the piano instructor, music video producer, international (neighborhood) superstar (talentless singer), and much, much more. I did all of that and I was great—fantastic, really. If I had kept on that power-hungry, child dictator track, I probably would've made history.

Fortunately, I had something to humble me: real life. Outside of the neighborhood, I was normal. I went to school, attended sports practices, went to McDonalds every day, and acted like a sane person. See, child dictators! They're just like us! I would even go so far to say that outside of the neighborhood, I was quiet. I didn't have Servants 1, 2, or 3 with me so who else was I supposed to interact with? My peers that I would be growing up with in a small town for ten more years? As if.

Eventually, as brave seven-year-old neighborhood dictators do, I learned to make new servants—I mean friends. And I thrived with those friends; not as much as I did in the neighborhood but I still found ways to take on responsibility by involving as many people as I could in my middle school love affairs, planning whose house we would toilet paper each weekend, and choosing which lucky friend would be ditched by the friend group at the High School football games. Clearly, I did well for myself in the friend department by finding people who would blindly follow my every move. But for the remainder of my time in Moapa Valley,

Nevada, I was known as quiet. And that was okay with me. It got me out of talking to people I had no desire to talk to, it got me out of giving presentations and speaking in class, and it almost got me out of giving a Valedictorian speech at graduation. I was known as quiet and it never held me back or made me feel like I was missing out on anything.

But enough about all this childhood garbage. I'm aware there were a few minor "character flaws" and my life coach has already given me the "you'll need to make a lot of money when you're older because you're going to need a lifetime of therapy" line. I know this, I've accepted this, and I've already made my Sugar Daddy For Me account. Don't worry about me—I got it all figured out. Where I really want to begin is in a situation I found myself in every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:45 am to 12:05 pm Fall 2019 semester: my Marketing Management class.

As we all know, universities tend to store their hidden gems, their future geniuses, their thought leaders in the marketing department. As a marketing major (no big deal) I know this with one-hundred percent certainty. Just look at marketing compared to all the other majors. Do computer science majors get to hear thought-provoking comments, on the daily, like: "That Colin Kaepernick ad by Nike was pretty controversial?" No. Are chemistry majors privileged enough to be involved in class discussions about how Zappos—who is known for their customer service—has, and get this, great customer service? Obviously not. Will parks and rec majors ever experience the sheer brilliance that is just abounding during a hypothetical pricing conversation for fidget spinners? I don't think so. Clearly, marketing has proven itself time and time again as the superior major. No doubt about it.

Oddly enough, most marketing classes have this weird requirement built into them: participation. Professors give this aspect of the class 30% of the final grade meaning daily

participation is expected in order to achieve a decent grade. Thankfully, I've developed a little life hack, if you will, to bypass that requirement. At the start of every semester, I make it a priority to attend my professor's office hours, introduce myself, suck up a little, and explain my undiagnosed, but very serious, disability: social anxiety. In the past, this technique has brought nothing but success; and when it doesn't bring immediate success, the fact that I've trained myself to cry on demand usually helps hurry the process along.

So, like with every other professor at every other start of the semester, I attended my Marketing Management professor's office hours. The meeting began with the usual formalities, then I recited my rehearsed and well-practiced line of: "I'm so excited to be learning from you! I've been wanting to get into this class for so long," and then came the hard part—the entire point of this meeting/suck up session. I took a deep breath, gave the puppy-dog eyes, and said: "This is so embarrassing to say and I'm so ashamed that I even have to say this, but I have a really hard time participating in class. I've been working on it since freshman year, but I just get this overwhelming anxiety when it comes to participation." In my head, I was already patting myself on the back. There was conviction in my voice and a perfectly timed single tear sliding down my cheek; the "I completely understand, I'll work with you on this issue," was sure to follow. But no. Something that has never happened before happened. I was completely confused. Instead of the correct response, "I understand. I'm so sorry. You're so brave," I got the completely insensitive, demoralizing, heartless response of: "Do you think you're going to get a free pass in the real world for not being able to speak up? This is preparing you for your future career."

Immediately following my professor's very rude response to my very serious disease, I went through the seven stages of grief. The first stage: denial. He didn't mean that. There's no

way he meant that. Nobody is that heartless or that concerned about my future career. Second stage: pain. It felt like he just stabbed a knife in my heart. I bore my soul to him and he chewed it up and spit it out. Third stage: anger. How dare he? Rob, if that's even your real name, who do you think you are? You can't tell me that I'll actually have to speak every single day in a "real career." Stages four through seven all kind of bled together but eventually, after complaining about the audacity of this guy to anyone who would listen, I accepted this hard and unfair truth—I was going to have to participate in Marketing Management.

Which brings us to the very moment this paper is about. A moment that took place in the David Eccles School of Business, room 1180, where the degree of genius is absolutely astounding. Fifty marketing majors all in the same room? That amount of concentrated brain power should not be allowed. The United States' enemies should be quivering with fear. Anyway, Rob (again, how dare he), starts class with a discussion on Tailor Brands, a branding website that uses artificial intelligence to create logos for a very small fee. We had to do a case analysis on Tailor Brands as homework so obviously everyone is an expert on the company. I only spent twenty minutes writing the assignment and skimmed the twelve pages in about fifteen minutes but I could probably step in as CEO if needed.

Anyway, back to my personal hell—I mean class. Rob begins the discussion by talking about branding in general. Everyone spurts off some really high level answers but there was one response that was really just incredible; some might even say mind-blowing. I don't think anyone could dispute the fact that this man deserves a Nobel Prize for this level of thinking. Get ready, this will rock your world: "Nike probably has the best branding out there." As soon as he said that, it was like the universe stopped. Poverty? Solved. Climate change? Erased. Cancer? Cured. Can you believe I had to deal with that magnitude of brilliance every single day?

As class continued, I became increasingly enlightened with profound comments by my classmates. But like Rob said, I needed to contribute to the class discussion; he wasn't going to give me a "free pass" or whatever. So I did what any sane, rational person would do—wrote out my exact response, memorized it word for word so it would seem natural and not like I had written a response down on paper, and told myself that if I participate today, I would reward myself with the new Rotate Birger-Christensen dress I had been eyeing.

The time came when my memorized response would fit perfectly into the conversation. Rob asked the class, "What could Tailor Brands do to improve?" This was my time. I had been preparing for my class participation debut for years. I gave myself a pep talk; I told myself I was brave, dressed better than everyone in the room, I could do hard things, and participating was simple so no one would even remember what I said. I had rehearsed my response, "Tailor Brands should add customer service for a premium price to attract larger companies," at least ten times and I was ready. No, I was brave.

As time progressed, I talked myself out of it. I felt this deep pit in my chest. My palms grew sweaty. I felt like the fear was drowning me. I convinced myself that this was how I would die. I couldn't do it. I decided that those feelings weren't worth it and I told myself it was okay to not participate during the first discussion and I would do it next class. But I still bought myself the dress because it was a very good try.

So, the next class came along. I had my "participation points" memorized, I had a new item of clothing to reward myself with, and I had already given myself a pep talk. But when the time came to raise my hand, I couldn't do it. I felt that same drowning sensation. I felt an overwhelming urge to remove myself from the situation. I thought my heart was going to beat

out of my chest. And once again, I couldn't do it. The next class, I did the same thing and went through the same ritual. Every single class, I couldn't do it.

At some point in time, completely unbeknownst to me, my shyness had evolved into social anxiety. Maybe it's because, as Rob would say, I had a "free pass" my entire childhood. But who knows? All I know is that I would spend class period after class period wondering why I had to confront this paralyzing disease to receive a decent grade. It felt so unfair.

As the semester progressed, I stopped rehearsing my answers. The fear of messing up while speaking was incapacitating. Each time I had an idea that would add to the conversation, I wished I hadn't thought of it. I would even spend the days after class just thinking about how I should've just spoken up. Which inevitably led to the next reasonable thought: I am stupid. I cannot bring myself to speak up, therefore I am stupid, incompetent, undeserving, pathetic, and every other word that falls within that category.

Although public speaking anxiety affects 20% of the population, I determined that my inability to speak in my Marketing Management class classified me as stupid. I went through that class without saying a single word (kind of impressive if you ask me) and my grade suffered for it. Except, it made sense. Letter grades are obviously the best indicator of intelligence and creativity. I was stupid and I deserved that grade. I deserved to live with that worthless feeling.

But, you know what? It's kind of comical—the gradual depreciation of confidence and self-worth. I went from being a marketing major, the cream of the crop, to stupid. I went from being Tree House Master, Child Dictator, Drama Queen to totally incompetent. I went from adequate to pathetic. I went from having ridiculously petty, imaginary issues to living in an inescapable nightmare.

Isn't it kind of funny?

Works Cited

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