

Updated Self-Growth Paper

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Let me begin by apologizing for the naïve eighteen year old Patrick that attended the first Scholar's Institute in 2010. He was a selfish, unfulfilled individual with no strong personal vision. He treated other people as tools and thought himself an island of brilliance in a rolling sea of stupidity. To young Patrick, individualism meant isolationism. Only now can I see how unsatisfied he was with his life.

When I think back through the winding passage of my last two years of life I can only laugh at the immense personal shift in attitude. Suddenly I find myself with a well-developed personal charisma and a genuine love for human relationships and human activity. I removed any trace of public shyness and can comfortably work and play around large groups of people. I have become involved in multiple student organizations and was even elected officer to one of them. My sense of humor has changed; my taste in music has changed. Really, I wish I could do justice to the overwhelming shift in personality I have experienced.

Perhaps just as importantly, I have learned how to facilitate growth in others. If you were to ask me about group work two years ago, I would have told you what a waste it was — somebody always there to hold you down and ride off your coattails. Group work was inefficient and only benefited the weak. By continuing the process of self-assessment I have slowly come to realize how powerful a well-conditioned team can be. I have learned how to facilitate discussion and make everybody feel comfortable by creating a calm and relaxed atmosphere. Certainly, without the collaboration of my fellow classmates, I would hardly be able to perform in some classes at all. I thought as a freshman that I did not need to have high levels of emotional and social intelligence; I have discovered I could not have been more wrong.

Maybe I could explain it best by claiming that now I am who I truly desire to be. I have commandeered my own life. How can I describe it? Before, I would go to class solely to get the grade and would copy whatever was necessary to obtain it. Now, I enter a classroom with the conscious intent to better myself — I take away from a class the information necessary to continue on my chosen path. The shift in thought is very subtle, but powerful. I sincerely want to know everything about everything. I feel some natural curiosity bubbling in everything I do. I seek a sage's understanding of the universe; in every conversation and every classroom I consciously act behind the mindset of growth, understanding, and improvement. Continual betterment has become ingrained in my character. I seek to relate, to connect, and to expand knowledge. And no, it is not as though I did not learn before, but now the motivation is sincere. I see purpose and am happily satisfied in my self-image as an independent and able learner who can successfully walk through life as a genuine human being.

The world is so beautiful and wonderful. Never before have I experienced such an exalted state of bliss. I have learned to feel for others, to love others- people have so much to offer. All my prior prejudices and disparaging beliefs stemmed solely from my own insecurity. In order to feel important other people had to be inferior. I had fallen into the exact trap I was warned of during the Scholar's Institute; my entire life had been spent searching for external rewards and motivation. That meant that any good or worth in another was an immediate threat to my own success. I had to be the best and be recognized as such. I remember lying in bed in abject horror — realizing that I actually wanted my best friend *to fail*. No wonder I thought people were so cold! How could I ever form an emotionally fulfilling connection to another when I desired to snuff out everything that made them good? I only wish it had not taken so long to come to such a realization.

It strikes me to mention the sheer importance of developing confidence as an able learner. The belief in your self-efficacy keeps you from giving up when put out of your comfort zone. This semester I am taking Real Analysis for my mathematics degree. Never before have I experienced such a conceptually engaging and challenging course. When I began in January, it took my group and me over fifteen hours to finish the first homework assignment.

True to Scholar's Institute teaching, though, we sat and assessed our own performance. We identified key areas for improvement: we noticed our biggest need was to dive right into the problem and start writing down the definitions we knew. We identified a lack in optimism and a decided lack of courage in the paths we chose to complete our proofs. Each time we met we worked more and more efficiently. Six weeks in we finished a similar length homework assignment in three hours. That improvement testifies to the power of self-assessment. We did not simply understand the material better — we had moved on to a new topic. Instead, we had assessed and improved upon the process of learning Real Analysis. We had enhanced our learning ability, and *that* is genuine improvement. I may forget everything about Real Analysis but I will never lose the skill and the way I have trained my mind to think at such a level. I can now carry my improved skill into any other area of knowledge I choose.

A burgeoning belief in being an independent learner creates the self-assurance necessary to take risks. After two years I have grown enough to realize that I do not have to fear risk. I know I have the ability to take possible failure and turn it into personal success. Hesitating to take a risk can cripple accomplishment. If you allow me to define failure simply as the lack of success then I cannot count the number of times I have refused to try something solely because I felt I had no chance of victory. I have passed on innumerable scholarship opportunities and internship offers because I did not think I had a chance at winning or obtaining the job and have forever forfeited the chance to meet hundreds of potential lifelong friends because I did not believe in my own social skills. Now that I have consciously pushed myself out of my comfort zone I have found that I am affable and sociable at heart. I continually wonder why I always defined myself as an aloof and shy person. Did I honestly believe I had a genetic predisposition to silence? Fear of failure had kept me silent for eighteen years; self-growth brought back my voice in two.

Because I have now defined the term "Patrick Herta" I feel comfortable forging new paths and trying new things. In a very broad sense I suppose you could call it an increase in creativity. I carry an admiration for the new and the unknown that has lead me to completely unexpected experiences. Through following my personal interests I have performed stand-up comedy for the CEO of the Meijer Supermarket Chain at the end of an internship and created a presentation about a medieval dancing plague in a statistics class. I met a friend and this fall I will be running a marathon with her. Take away the hesitation and follow any interest as far as you can; you will be awestruck by what will happen. I hope I have clearly conveyed the magnitude of personal change I have experienced in the past twenty four months. Admittedly I have not related many specific examples or written a detailed treatise of my entire life. I do not think such detail is necessary, however. The important change cannot be captured in any number of concrete examples — my entire outlook on life and the way I think, and the way I think I think, has been altered forever. I am in control and am capable, and I know it. It seems so obvious: I determine my path through life. Why should it be otherwise?