

Osama Hamdy, '13

I was a shy thirteen-year-old who had already lived in six locations and attended five schools. Having recently moved, I was relieved when I finally began to develop a new group of friends. However, the days following September 11, 2001, were marked with change. People began to stare at me. Many conversations came to a nervous stop when I walked by. However, it wasn't until one of my peers asked if I was a terrorist that it really hit me. Osama, my name is Osama. I went from having a unique name that served as a conversation starter to having the same name as the most wanted man in America. The stares and the comments were just the beginning. Eventually I received a death threat at school. I remember crying alone in my room, afraid to tell my parents in fear that they might not let me go to school anymore.

My experience opened my eyes up to racial and religious dynamics in the United States. I started to see how these dynamics drove people's actions, even if some were not aware of the reasons. The more I looked at my surroundings with a critical eye, the more I realized that my classmates had not threatened me because of hate, but because of fear and ignorance. This realization was extremely empowering. I knew that mirroring their hostility would only reinforce the fear and prejudice they held. Instead, I reached out to my peers with an open mind and respect. My acceptance of others served as a powerful counter example to many negative stereotypes I had to face. With this approach, I was often able to transform fear into acceptance, and acceptance into appreciation. I chose not to hide my heritage or myself, despite the fear of judgment or violence. As a result, I developed a new sense of self-reliance and self-confidence. However, I wasn't satisfied with the change that I had brought about in my own life. I wanted to empower others as well. My passion for equality and social justice grew because I was determined to use my skills and viewpoint to unite multiple marginalized communities and help foster understanding and appreciation for our differences and similarities alike.

The years following September 11th were a true test of character for me. I learned how to feel comfortable in uncomfortable situations. This allowed me to become a dynamic and outgoing individual. This newfound confidence fueled a passion to become a leader and help uplift multiple minority communities. During the last two summers I made this passion a reality when I took the opportunity to work with underprivileged minority students. All of the students I worked with came from difficult backgrounds and many didn't feel as though college was an option for them. I learned these students' goals and aspirations, as well as their obstacles and hardships. I believed in them, and I constantly told them that they would make it. I worked relentlessly to make sure my actions matched my words of encouragement. I went well above the expectations of my job and took the initiative to plan several additional workshops on topics such as public speaking, time management, and confidence building. My extra efforts helped give these students the tools they needed to succeed. One hundred percent of the twenty-one high school juniors I worked with my first summer are now freshmen at four-year universities. I feel great pride in having helped these students achieve this important goal. I know that they will be able to use these tools to continue to succeed.

Inspired by my summer experience, I jumped at the opportunity to take on the position of Diversity Outreach Ambassador for the San Francisco Bar Association. In this position, I was responsible for helping organize a campus event that brought educational material and a panel of lawyers to UC Berkeley in order to empower and inform minority students about their opportunities in law school. In this position I was able to unite a diverse group of organizations, including the Black Pre-Law Association, the Latino Pre-Law Society, and the Haas Undergraduate Black Business Association. Working in this position was instrumental in solidifying my desire to attend law school. The lawyers who volunteered their time had a significant impact on me. I learned that they used their legal education to assist causes and organizations they felt passionate about. One of the lawyers told me that she volunteered her legal services to a Latino advocacy association. Another lawyer explained to me how he donated his legal expertise to advise minority youth on how to overcome legal difficulties. Collaborating with these lawyers gave me a better understanding of how my passion for law could interact with my interest in social justice issues.

My experiences leading minority groups taught me that I need to stand out to lead others and myself to success. I need to be proud of my culture and myself. My experiences after September 11th have taught me to defeat the difficulties in life instead of allowing them to defeat me. Now, whether I am hit with a racial slur or I encounter any obstacles in life, I no longer retreat, but I confront it fearlessly and directly. I expect law school will help give me the tools to continue to unite and work with a diverse group of people. I hope to continue to empower and lead minority communities as we strive towards legal and social equality.

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May 2, 2011

Leslie Jones
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Dear Ms. Jones:

I am writing in response to your January 15th posting in DoreWays for an Entry-Level Civil Engineer (Sustainable Design). I first learned of GreenOrder when Andrew Shapiro spoke on “Using Green to Win: Sustainable Innovation and Competitiveness” at Vanderbilt University this fall. I was very impressed to hear about GreenOrder’s interdisciplinary approach to using green leadership to spur innovation.

You will find that my interests, experience and background are well-suited for this position. While interning at The Tennessee Environmental Council, I worked as part of a team which reviewed sustainability practices for higher education initiatives across the state. We conducted phone interviews with five universities to discuss their current green strategy and pulled together a report that was presented to the CEO. Through that experience I participated in every phase of the project, utilizing and enhancing my knowledge of project management, legislation, marketing and reporting findings. The knowledge I developed through this project about green practices would allow me to step in and make an immediate impact within your organization.

In your posting, you mentioned a desire for a candidate with strong quantitative and analytical skills. I demonstrated these skills while leading my senior design project team to design a concrete canoe. We were charged to overcome several design challenges while adhering to the ASCE Steel Manual and Concrete Specifications. We were able to incorporate sustainable materials in our design including a carbon sequestering cementitious material used to offset the carbon footprint of our canoe. Ultimately, our team canoe won 2nd place overall nationally among 37 teams in the American Society of Civil Engineers competition. I am confident that my technical skills, combined with a passion for environmental sustainability would add value to the GreenOrder team.

To further discuss my qualifications, you may reach me at (615) 555-5555 or Sally.johnson@vanderbilt.edu at your earliest convenience. I look forward to speaking with you and learning more about this opportunity.

Sincerely,

(Signature)
Sally Johnson

Enclosure