Don't Be Perfect: Just Be You

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The transition from high school to a college has been a challenging one for me. Independent of the issues from the pandemic, and having been somewhat underprepared academically, I have learned one important point that I hope will help others: Just be you.

Most of my high school years were spent on the ice. As the sun came up, you could typically find me at the ice skating rink; hours of jumping, spinning, and frequently, falling. Hour after hour, day after day, I typically spent around 60 hours a week skating. Bruises oftentimes covered my body. But I honestly kind of hated studying—so skating gave me purpose.

However, that all changed one day in my junior year. I had the opportunity to shadow a team of resident trainees at a university medical center, and suddenly realized where I wanted to be in life. Watching these physician trainees go from patient to patient—helping to save lives and giving hope to their patients—was the most powerful, inspirational thing I had ever seen. Empowered with incredible skills and knowledge, they were devoting their lives to helping others. This was what I wanted to do. I wanted this type of meaning in my life.

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Now, I just needed to work on the skills and knowledge. Yikes… Catch-up commences. I suddenly felt like I had just taken one of the worst falls ever on the ice. I was paralyzed—and realized it was going to be pretty hard to get back up where I wanted to be. I enrolled in a small private school for my final year of high school and fully dedicated myself to studying. I eagerly applied to colleges— and was so excited to get accepted. I started.

My first few weeks in college were terrifying. I had no idea what I was doing. There were assignments— tons and tons of assignments – that I wholeheartedly felt underprepared to complete. I studied, but I didn't really understand how to study. I tried to complete assignments, but I always felt they needed to be better. I hated my work—but the deadlines came, and I submitted it. Sometimes I cried… I felt like I was going to a big figure skating competition without having learned my routine. How was I truly going to be worthy of being a physician if I couldn't even create an amazingly inspirational paragraph in Canvas?

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I reached out. I talked to my faculty. I talked to the few friends that I was able to make. (Making friends has been really challenging given the pandemic and being virtual.) I talked to my parents. I realized that I didn't need to strive for the perfection that I had always sought of myself—I realized that I needed to just do the best that I could within the parameters that I had. I just needed to keep strong—keep remembering my passion—and to keep pushing forward. Try, try again. I get up from the ice, and just pick up the pieces each time I fall. Excellence comes from practice. Learning comes from mistakes (and wow, I have made a lot).

I now do my best every day, but have self-compassion. I always reflect on what I did well—and pick a few things to do better. Every day I want to be a better version of myself—so that I can eventually be a wonderful physician. I have learned to embrace my academic jumps, spins and falls. Even then I am sure I will continually challenge myself to be the best I can be, but in the interim, I have decided that I will enjoy my education. I will find passion in every class—and will love the road that I am on. I don't want to be perfect—I just want to be me. So to all my peers and future aspiring students that have similar aspirational goals, I encourage you to join me in this quest. Let's make our educational experience as awesome as possible—and just work on being the best we can be together. Soon we'll master these jumps and spins, and take on the world!
Remember, just be you.