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“If it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you”

These were the parting words of wisdom I received upon my departure from South Africa. I was embarking on a journey to fulfil a dream of mine, one in which I will be standing on the greatest platform from which to begin building the career I envision for myself. This Masters at Cass was the final rung on the ladder to that dream. After conquering numerous hurdles such as luggage size and weight restrictions and visa delays that had already caused me to miss orientation week as well as the first week of



lectures, I was finally nestled in my airplane seat with a combination of anxiety, excitement, fear, hope, confidence and anticipation all running through me.

Upon arriving at Cass, the one feeling that I was not expecting suddenly quelled all the others I previously had. That feeling was astonishment. I entered the building expecting to be one of a handful of foreigners, let alone Africans, amongst a sea of British students but to the contrary, I ended up being one of the few Africans in a sea of students from all over the globe. I had no time to take it all in as I was immediately brought up to speed on procedures, locations of lecture theatres and different buildings, student cards and all sorts of other administrative activities that are part and parcel of moving to a new country to study. I attended my first lecture and established that I was required to form part of a group that would complete assignments together for each of our modules. “That’s just great”, I thought sarcastically. Now I would have to battle language barriers, differences in accents, varying working styles and differing work ethics along with catching up on the work I’d missed. I couldn’t afford to plan around my convenience alone because I had to accommodate for the group I was now a part of. I couldn’t afford to let them down and I hoped they would reciprocate that sentiment.

I caught up with my team and discovered that they were all Asian. 2 students were from China and the other was from Thailand. We had varying proficiencies in English, vast differences in backgrounds and dissimilar working styles but what we all had in common was the Masters rung on the ladder to our goals. The parting quote came to mind once again, “If it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you”. The quote came to mind with new meaning as well, in order to achieve a change in the platform I was going to build my career off, I was going to have to keep changing too. I shrugged off my resistance to working in groups and dived in head first. The result I experienced changed my perspective entirely.

I learned more than I could have imagined about the countries my new teammates came from. My learnings ranged from social and political information to food and cultural practices. We shared time with each other which allows for new shared experiences and the forming of bonds and relationships. Most importantly, regardless of our different strengths, weaknesses and learning styles, we all grew to be accountable to one another and to do our part. What I thought would be a hindrance to my progress actually ended up being the catalyst I never expected. We soared through the workload that seemed to never end and I had people to pick me up when I was weak or lacking motivation.

What aided this even more was the openness of lecturers and their willingness to afford students help individually. They constantly pushed us to think differently, to seek higher knowledge than merely what was subscribed through our coursework. They continually evoke a spirit of community learning and each of us learning not only from them, but from each other as well as learning from and by ourselves.

This series of experiences led me to my own shift in mindset. Success now looks more like adapting to and conquering different scenarios regardless of how they are thrown at us. So as much as we’re often taught not to bite off more than we can chew, my experiences here so far have changed my perspective on that. My Cass experience has taught me that I’d rather choke on greatness than nibble on mediocrity.