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Don't Give Up

Regardless of the person or lifestyle, there will always be a personal path to education and success. Malcolm X grew up on the streets hustling in order to survive. In later years he went to prison, and self-educated himself through a single dictionary and books. With this self-education, he became a very successful man during the Civil Rights Act. Frederick Douglass was born into slavery, and although it was illegal, he found basic education through several teachers. In later years, he learned to read and write by himself. Both men faced difficulties in their life, but they had a desire and goal that couldn't be stopped. Through life I have learned the importance of finding your own way of learning, taking risk, and overcoming obstacles just as both Malcolm X and Frederick Douglass did in their own lives.

By looking at both Malcolm X and Frederick Douglass and how they found their own ways of learning, I have learned that everyone learns in their own personal way. At the time of his writing, Malcolm X had been isolated from most educational resources, but that didn't stop him. He used what resources he had and learned as much as he could. His main resource being something as simple as the dictionary. In the reading "Malcolm X", X stated, "I'd never realized so many words existed! I didn't know which words I needed to learn. Finally, just to start some kind of action, I began copying....it was inevitable that as my word-base broadened, I could for the first time pick up a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying."

(X,2). Malcolm X took his few resources and found a learning technique that worked best for him. In this case, he learned from copying down words in order to learn both their meanings as well as how to understand them. Using similar techniques and ones of his own, Frederick Douglass also found his own way of educating himself. Douglass lived during a time when it was illegal for white individuals to teach slaves, in other words, he too was restricted from education. When he was younger, he found his own way of learning by bribing white school boys with bread in exchange for their knowledge. Frederick stated in his writing "Learning to read and write", "The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street." (Douglass 1). Instead of being pushed down by discrimination, Douglass' curiosity in knowledge helped him fight against it. Like Malcolm X, he took his limited resources and did what he could in order to educate himself. Both Malcolm X and Frederick Douglass found their own ways to learn regardless of their restrictions, and although I have almost unlimited resources, I have had to educate myself on several occasions. There have been many instances in harder subjects such as Calculus and accounting where I have not understood the material taught. However, I try not to let that hinder my progress, and I apply the technique both Malcolm X and Frederick used. That is copying down the information; whether it was formulas or definitions, I would eventually nail the material by this technique as well as learning from others. Just as Frederick Douglass found others to teach him, I have found that asking teachers and peers for advice or help results in me learning many things in a different perspective. For example, while taking photography class, I would ask local photographers I knew of their preferences and techniques as well. This not only taught me, but it also allowed me to share my knowledge to them. By obtaining a marketing internship at Butler Community College, I have grown closer to my marketing teacher who has

given me advice and tips as to how I can progress and improve my techniques. However, I learned this all by pursuing the individuals out of interest and passion instead of obligation. Another way I compare to Douglass and Malcolm is although I am not discriminated by others, I have external forces being placed upon me. It has always been a requirement to set my education as a priority for the purpose of making my peers proud. I too want to do well and be proud of myself, but with the added pressures and high standards others set for me, it can be very discouraging to keep the motivation. I want my success to be because I strived for it and worked hard for it; not for the sole purpose of giving other individuals bragging rights. Despite the resources an individual has, it is up to the person to use them and obtain knowledge to the best of their ability.

Looking at the risk and sacrifices made by both Malcolm X and Frederick Douglass, I have also learned that if a goal is important to someone, they will take the risk and sacrifices. Both men lived in times where racism and discrimination were prime, and their opportunity to learn was hindered by this racist mindset. However, both men knew they wanted to learn, and chose to take the risk involved. Malcolm X, for example, would stay up past the prison's curfew in order to read. He stated in his writing, "At one-hour intervals the night guards paced past every room. Each time I heard the approaching footsteps, I jumped into bed and feigned sleep" (X, 3). Malcolm could have lost all his reading privileges as well as his little freedom in prison if he were caught breaking the rules, but his desire to read and learn was worth the risk. In Douglass' case it was illegal to teach African-Americans, but he risked even his life in order to pursue his education. Alongside taking risk, both men also made sacrifices. One sacrifice they shared was the ignorance of the times in which they lived in. Malcolm X had his eyes opened to the realization of the civil rights and stated, "My homemade education gave me, with every

additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America.” (X, 4) Before learning, Malcolm didn’t fully understand things or everything going on with the Civil Rights. However, as his knowledge broadened, his perspective and understanding improved as well. Although in a different time, Douglass also realized the bliss of ignorance during the Civil War. In fact, he often wished he hadn’t known as much as he did when finding out about abolitionist and their cause. Douglass was finally seeing what he and the other African American people were being robbed of, and it made it difficult to bear. Although I am a privileged white individual whose circumstances don’t require me to break laws, I have made several sacrifices in order to pursue my education. By taking the Early College Academy, I have sacrificed a major necessity in my life and that is time. By taking on full time college courses on top of my high school as well as balancing two jobs, it seems as if I didn’t have any time for myself. Before this program I had time to sleep, hang out with friends, and pursue hobbies such as piano and photography. I have had to sacrifice these hobbies immensely in order to be successful at my academics. I also sacrificed the ‘easy’ route in order to challenge myself and obtain my goal of higher standards. I could have taken the standard course requirements, but I wanted to challenge myself and get as much education as I could. I have always strived to get ahead and be prepared, and I feel that this program is the best opportunity I can obtain at this point in my life. Therefore, since it is important to me, I am willing to sacrifice the time and effort. Just as Malcolm X and Douglass, I had a desire to learn, and with that goal there were things that had to be given up. Despite the risk and sacrifices made, if one has their heart set on a goal, they will take those risk in order to achieve it.

By looking at the obstacles Malcolm X and Frederick Douglass faced and eventually overcame, I learned the key is to face the obstacles in order to overcome them. Looking at both

Malcolm X and Douglass, they both didn't have a high level of education, but they faced that obstacle and found their own personal solutions to it instead of running away from it. Take Malcolm X, he copied the dictionary and read despite his lack of education. He used the resources he was given and used them to the best of his ability. Douglass also faced the obstacle by searching out opportunities and people to learn from and learned simply by asking and watching others. Although I face different obstacles, I have had to face several of them in order to successfully achieve my main goal. Contrary to X and Douglass, I am pursuing a higher education at college, and one main obstacle I have faced is time. With the nineteen credit hours of college on top of my high school classes it is hard to manage and focus on everything sufficiently. Sometimes this makes it harder to comprehend a subject fully or complete my assignments to their full potential. However, I am overcoming this obstacle by managing my time in a more efficient way, and to teach myself the topics I struggle with in that free time. Other obstacles I have faced are difficult classes. My junior year, I was taking Algebra two, but I was simultaneously taking College Algebra and Calculus at the same time. By just now taking Algebra two in high school, it made these two college courses very difficult. However, I was determined to give it my all and pass. By passing those classes, I overcame one of the hardest obstacles in my school career. Overall, in any situation, one can still obtain goals if they try, for you won't overcome obstacles by doing nothing about them.

There are always risk, sacrifices, and obstacles in anyone's path to success, but it is how that individual handles them that will determine the results. Although you may not live in slavery as Frederick Douglass was or imprisoned like Malcolm X, you will always have things that seem to be blocking you from your success. However, if you take initiative as these two men did, you will overcome those bumps in the road and reach your goal. By observing the lives of these two

men's and the actions they took despite their situations, we can learn simply not to give up on our dreams and to work hard to achieve them even if it involves risk.