

Topic: THIS IS MY START

Good Morning, Toastmaster of the day, fellow toastmasters and esteemed guests. My name is Gaurav Maniyar, I'm 19 years old and an engineering student at D.J.Sanghavi College of Engineering.

I am an outgoing introvert: Oxymoron, you say? No, you said wrong! People often clump shyness and introversion as the same thing, and they're not. All of my life I was told I was shy, I believed it too until I learned that shyness is the fear of people due to insecurity or social anxiety. When I learned this I thought, wait a second: I'm not afraid of people although being too many people for too long always leaves me feeling drained. I also know that I require alone time to recharge my energy. It was then that I thought to myself, I'm not shy at all, what I am is an introvert.

My personality type can be described in one word: obsessive. Whatever my current interests are, I obsess over them. Some of my obsessions include reptiles (snakes specifically), personal development and trekking.

You know I've always wondered, why people hate snakes? Is the fact that they are legless, stereotypes or do they think they aren't as cute as a bunny. I would tell people about snakes and they would look at me like I was crazy for even considering liking them. Hell, my mom thinks I'm a weirdo. You can imagine my parents' horror when at the age of 17 I fell in love with snakes and no amount of deterring could stop me from reading and learning about them. In fact, it was because of my love for snakes that my interest in the natural world and conservation of our environment grew. Snakes are really fascinating creatures. They are completely unlike us in every regard. They collect scents with their tongue, move without any appendages, their organs are aligned in a row fashion and they swallow food whole. You may not believe it but reptiles are capable of love too.

Towards the end of the 12th std it dawned on me that I might as well use my personality to my advantage and choose a beneficial obsession to have: personal development. I admit I didn't know the importance of personal development until my 12th std math tutor recommended reading the 7 habits of highly effective people. The book taught me to learn better time management, set personal goals, think of things from the other person's perspective and constantly invest time in improving my skills—which is why I joined Toastmasters. Before that event I was living my life solely focused on achieving academic success which is why I would ignore all other areas of my life like physics, health, personal relationships and emotional growth. Personal development created so much positive transformation with who I am and how I live my life now. It turned my negative and closed mindset into a positive and open one. I minimized my complaining, became more conscious about how I spent my time which helped me prioritize and minimize fatigue. These changes would never have occurred had I ignored personal development. The legendary entrepreneur and motivational speaker Jim Rink said it best: Your level of success will rarely exceed your level of personal development. I'm a strong

believer that personal development is the best investment you can ever make. It's an investment in the greatest asset you will always have: yourself.

Another of my recent obsession is trekking. There's no question that trekking offers the ultimate thrill that I constantly yearn for but there is so much more to trekking than exercise and adrenaline rushes. Along with adventure comes a means of happiness and inspiration. In the 7 habits of highly effective people Stephen Covey said Habit 7: Sharpen the saw which is about doing the things that make your soul happy. Getting back to nature makes my soul happy. Mountains never fail to make me feel renewed. Trekking is an amazing way to get away from the chaotic life in the city. It's a perfect way to think, calm down and find yourself. I may not feel like a superhero when I'm sweating through my shirt and panting on the side of a mountain but when I haul myself onto the summit I feel like I could outrun Usain Bolt.

There's something else that the mountains do. Days spent in the mountains help us understand how precious a warm shower is, how valuable it is to find a comfortable seat in a bus, how wonderful it is to eat regular home food. A trek helps us understand that we can live life with very little. In fact, stripped down to the bare minimum we can spend days in just two sets of clothes. That's very sobering. In this age of gadgets, it provides a sense of moderation and contentment.

You will never feel smaller than you do when you're on the top of a mountain. Everything in the civilized world from taxes to bills to a cell phone that constantly drops calls seems insignificant when you're up against the scale of nature. It's nice to be reminded that everything in your life that seems like a big deal only really matters because you let it. As Reinhold Messner said "I've been accused of going to the mountains to show what a big man I am. The reality is I go to be reminded just how small and insignificant I am."

They say every step you take brings you closer towards your goals. Well, this is my first step towards my goal of being a public speaker. I know I'm nowhere even close to the public speaker I aspire to be but as Zig Ziglar said, "You don't have to be great to start but you have to start to be great."

Well this, is my start.

Thankyou!