

Stepping up to leadership responsibilities

By **Baily VenJohn**
Online Editor



We were all there once. The baby freshman afraid of a new place, new people and a whole new world.

For those of us who are athletes that was a completely different kind of fear. You once were one of the best players on your team, now you're just one in a crowd of standout athletes.

The returners are intimidating. They're older, stronger, knowledgeable and loud. They're also a family. I've never been around a team as close as this group.

Jump forward three years and I'm that big bad senior that I, as a freshman, was afraid of. We welcome all the babies at move in day and ship them off along with a group of OL's and staff to Builder Camp.

I recall my ride to Builder Camp as a freshman as I once again take the ride as a senior. I skipped Builder Camp my sophomore and junior years but chose to go for one last time as a senior.

I chose to go this time as a leader. I wanted to be the friendly face after Builder Camp the freshmen see around campus and aren't afraid to talk to. I wanted to be the upperclassman who a freshman is always excited to see and knows would help them out when they get into a tough position. How did I go from being the little freshman, overly eager to take on the world with no idea of how to do it, to the senior, who wants to

be a leader and someone for an underclassman to look up to?

I can tell you it hasn't been an immediate transition or an easy one. It isn't something I had noticed until I took the time to reflect on my years at Southwest-ern.

As a freshman I would say I already considered myself a leader. Not the kind who is ready to come in and lead a team to a championship but one who isn't afraid to be loud and speak my mind.

A leader who was willing to develop into a person who is deserving of being in charge. I found out a lot about myself that year. I learned I actually wasn't invincible. I learned you can't cheat your way to an A and I learned I kind of sucked at basketball but there was still hope.

Hard work is something that has been instilled in me since the day I was born. It was tested daily in my time as a Lady Builder Basketball freshman.

It was easily one of the most frustrating things I had endured thus far. The transition from a high school athlete to college isn't an easy one. Yes, there were nights I was up until 2 a.m. crying in the Cole Lobby simply because I couldn't make a shot in practice that day.

And yes, my teammates were also in that same lobby at 2 a.m. with me pushing me to be better and keep my head up. Freshman year was a whirlwind and I'd be lying to you if I said my mind was in the right place and I had my priorities straight. But man, did we have fun. To this day I wouldn't change a single mistake I made.

Sophomore year and junior year

were a blur in time. They flew by in the blink of an eye.

I am a firm believer that sophomore slump is a real thing and it sucks.

I found myself trying to recover my GPA from the damage I caused the previous year. I was fighting my way towards a varsity jersey and the right to be the player to move coach's chair during full timeouts.

I struggled hard this year. I was trying to find balance and it seemed I had forgotten how to play basketball altogether. I did earn that varsity journey and my right to claim a piece of the title LBB earned that year as the best women's basketball team in college history. I developed into a leader on the junior varsity squad for basketball regardless of my inability to play as well as I thought I should be.

Heading into junior year I had high expectations for myself. Not only did I want to earn that varsity jersey for basketball but I wanted minutes. I also had to remain focused in the classroom because I had proven everyone my sophomore year that I actually wasn't stupid, just lazy my first year.

Junior year was lame and boring. The memories are never ending regardless.

This year is when I made strides in becoming the leader I had dreamed to be. I didn't earn the minutes on varsity that I

had hoped for. I was once again placed on the junior varsity squad except this time I looked at it in a positive way.

I took it as my chance to prove myself and to better myself. I was one of the few juniors to play JV that year and this gave me the opportunity to be the leader.

I loved playing with this group and I couldn't ask for a better team to lead. They taught me what a leader is and how to be a respected one. Finally senior year is upon us. It has been an unforgettable journey, and one that I am not sure I am ready to end yet.

My definition of a leader is someone who leads by example, they aren't hypercritical and you find yourself doing the same thing simply by seeing them do it.

A leader must be kind but tell it how it is too. They must be critical but tell you how to fix your mistakes. They have to be twice as positive as they are negative and always reinforce a negative comment with a positive one. Above all they must be unselfish and know what is best for the success of the team.

I am still pushing myself daily to embody this definition. It is absolutely crazy to see the transition of myself from freshman year to senior year and how much I have grown to reach this definition.

What is it that motivates one to keep moving forward and to reach these goals?

It is the fear of sucking, or as most people would say, the fear of failure. Someone is lying to you if

they say they aren't afraid to fail.

Yes, failure is great and necessary because without it you can't improve but no one straight up wants to fail.

Failure is also something that is relatable to everyone. You're also lying if you say you haven't failed at some point in your life. I fail daily, if not hourly.

People want a good reputation. Society wants to be looked at as successful. Why do something if you're not working to excel at it?

Learning to care about failure is where I struggled. I was afraid to fail but at the same time I didn't care. I would move on to the next thing and hope to be successful at that.

I gradually matured and realized that I did care and that I didn't want to fail anymore. I wanted to succeed and I wanted people to be proud of my actions. I dug deep and found it within me to change my ways to be the person that I needed to be.

Fear of failure drove me to be a leader as well. It taught me that

I want to be the upperclassman who was there to help the freshmen just like they were there for me. I've been through it so why not put my knowledge to use and help them.

As the time draws nearer for me to close this chapter of my life and move on to the next I am hit with a variety of emotions. Mostly gratitude for those who helped me get to where I am now. I can only hope that an underclassman can say that I have influenced them to be who they are now when they are a senior.

If there is one thing I have learned it is to let it be and don't stress. You will get there.

Baily VenJohn is a senior majoring in communication. You may email her at baily.venjohn@sckans.edu.

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