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3rd Place Essay for IEW 2012

Not Networking, but Feetworking
with Faith, Hope, and Love

Standing up with Faith

Inside of a huge auditorium at The University of Texas at Austin, a lot of recruiters and students were talking about job opportunities. I was talking and asking questions to one of the recruiters, but all I was thinking about was ways to finish the conversation! All sorts of thoughts were battling in my mind, “What should I ask next? Am I making grammar mistakes? Oh God I have nothing to ask next. Is there any way to end this talk?”

It was this temptation to run away that I had to overcome during my first year in the U.S. in order to learn how to get to know people. Like most international students studying at Rice, I was one of the smart students in my country and so I was not comfortable making mistakes. I could not understand what people were talking about either because I did not comprehend English and because I was not familiar with the name of celebrities or TV shows! Therefore just standing up on two feet while dealing with the uncomfortable feelings about myself was really torture and unhappy hours.

However, I started realized that it is not my language that makes the networking. It was my feet and faith to stand there to fight against my own self-ego and unnecessary pride. Since then, my goal was to be present no matter how uncomfortable I am and no matter how badly I feel about myself not saying anything during the conversation with bunch of people. That was the faith that being there itself was doing something. With the faith, I started realizing that everybody knows that I am a foreigner. I was the only who does not recognize that fact! I do not have to pretend I am not a foreigner by practicing better pronunciation! This was the moment that I overcame my fears.

Walking along with Hope

Since then, I started having hope that someday I will understand everything Americans are talking about. Someday I will say something funny in English. Someday I will not think in advance what I am going to say next. With this hope, I started to hang out with people. Even though I did not drink coffee, instead of avoiding the situation to talk, I started walking along
with other people to the coffee shop. Also, I started going out for a lunch and a dinner. Most of time, I could not understand most of their topics and sometimes had to make fake smiles, pretending I understand what you guys are talking about. However, it was the hope that I understand this much today and will understand a little more tomorrow that makes me to get to know other people and the culture. That was the hope that I had to bring with me every day whenever I felt like not walking along the roads that make me feel not important.

**Running with Love**

As time goes by, things were getting better but in order to make friends with people here, I had to know their culture in and out. This was the time I started watching TV shows, going to the football games, and learning how to play black jack. This was the time to run hard to learn their culture, not just standing or walking. Like a swan which is fluttering their legs under the water, I had to work hard to learn their culture behind the scenes. Sometimes I thought why I have to learn all of these things and it would have been much better if I grew up in US. However, I realized I have to love myself as I am, my culture, and my country because those are the unique and distinct values that other people do not have. And I am the one who makes Rice global, not Texans! With such love and confidence in my own culture and country, I was able to truly love U.S culture as well. It was at that time that my networking was working.

Based on my experience to stand up still in the uncomfortable environment, to walk along with hope, and run hard to learn U.S. culture, I realized networking is not about talking. Networking is more about making your feet work with faith, hope, and love in yourself and growing as a better person.