It was 5:00AM in the morning on Tuesday 21st of May, my co-leader Tan and I were still sitting on the floor of my bedroom editing the final proposal of our team 7. Our eyes were sore and heads were spinning. The deadline was approaching soon which caused me a tremendous anxiety from the inside. My self-doubt began to take over me with an overwhelming flow of questions.

Is this essay good enough? Can we win this? What is the meaning of winning? Is it worth it in the end?

I took a deep breath and reminded myself of the first reason why I joined the competition. I realised that my deep desire for learning leadership skills and dedicating my career path for sustainable tourism has brought me here. The ambition of being the better version of myself, overcoming my inner fear and contributing my knowledge to a create a dream business became my biggest “WHY”. After thinking of it, I felt so empowered and motivated that if you put enough will, effort, and belief into work, dreams will definitely come true and you will be able to inspire others to make action. And so, we decided to put our best into the essay and I have never felt happier with our team’s finished work.

The key to successful leadership is through solid commitment and ability to take initiative and constantly maintain team progress and momentum so that every team members can be inspired and perform at their best. The first time I received the list of team members, I was very excited and together with Tan, we wrote the very first email to welcome the team. I’m very grateful to have him as a co-leader as he demonstrated a clear commitment, work ethics and foremost, his passion in entrepreneurship. In the first email, we considered the team’s communication channels and the upcoming meetings based on everyone’s preferred time. However, since we have members from UK, Rwanda, China and Netherlands, the time zone is varied which we took into serious consideration. We created a Google survey to encourage everyone to decide on their suitable communication tools and time as I want to establish a respectful, positive, and collaborative team culture.

It went very smoothly! We decided to use email, whatsapp for informal text messages, and Zoom In for webinars. Before the meeting, I prepared the goals and objectives so that I can lead the conversation in an efficient manner. Everyone was shy at first; however, I took the first initiative and introduced myself, the team members became more relaxed and attentive. Some of us did not have a specific ideas to kickstart the business so I proposed our idea of creating a sustainable tourism project in Vietnam based on my previous travel experience to remote villages there. During the discussion, team members raised lots of questions and adjustments with no interruption and disrespect to others and that, I found very valuable in shaping our solid concept. After the first meeting, we now had an official business theme, communication channels and the time for the next meeting! I quickly wrote a meeting brief and since then, it became an essential tool to deliver clear messages to all members.

However, the online communication issues happened. At first, I did not think it was an concerning problem until the following week when one Chinese member expressed that he was running out of VPN and finding it difficult to attend the full meetings. Another Nigerian member continuously missed meetings without informing us beforehand; instead he just texted me via whatsapp that one time he had to go to church and another time he was diagnosed with malaria. I was frustrated, yet, remained calm to evaluate the noise in the lack of communication between me and those absent members. I always have a soft spot for people around me and I believe in the power of being straight-forward, but also patient and forgiving. I decided to privately message the absent members that if they did not read the meeting briefs and contribute work into the team, they would be eliminated. Luckily, the Chinese member replied and wished to continue participating in our group. However, I lost contact with the Nigerian member and unfortunately, I had to remove him. That was when I learned that being decisive, at the same time, giving people a second chance and opening to others’ contribution can work in the long run and earn respect from other members as well.

Although everyone was busy with their personal schedule, I always made sure to frequently message the group to maintain the momentum which is the key strength to our success. For instance, I inspire others by suggesting new ideas to add into the concept and ways to let others envision the project not just as a normal essay but an actual plan for creating a real business. I went as far as asking my flatmate to help me design a proper brand and app logo design which I sent to whatsapp and got everyone thrilled for the progress! I was so proud of myself for fostering unity through my work dedication and that, without the team, nothing would be done even if I have an amazing idea to execute.

In the end, after hours of discussing, writing and editing, the work is now done! The proposal was sent away and I was left with a heartfelt moment of how proud I am toward my leadership lessons and my awesome team. Although the group only remained 6 members, I share no hard feelings toward anyone and I believe that no matter what the result will be, I will forever cherish this opportunity.