

Pre-LiA Observations

I arrived in Singapore four weeks before my LiA starts. Here are some things I've learned about myself in the context of a...

① Leader

- It's important to force yourself to get off the "training wheels" when you transition into a new role; it can get overly comforting to say "I haven't learned enough yet to do things on own". Take the leap, fail and try again.
- Leadership can mean only speaking up when you truly have contributions to make. It is deliberate and bigger-than-life.
- You need to bet on yourself and your abilities as a leader, even when you don't have all the answers. No one has all the answers!
- Gaining trust and building relationships can never happen when you don't give your time and energy to others. Networks require time, energy and authentic investment.
- It's okay to find that majority of the people in your team don't see eye to eye with you. That means you likely see the world differently from you, and that is a strength not a weakness.
- Having unique lived experiences from the people around you is great. But if you have joined a team, you need to understand and follow their systems (feeling free, though, to add your own touch or flair).
- Be responsive to your team, even when you are tired. This investment in others is critical.
- Lighten up sometimes ☺
- Don't forget your why, or your priorities. Ensure they don't get swept under the rug - especially when others are asking you for your time or favours.
- Trust that you'll learn and grow after you've made a mistake. Trust your intuition too, after you've seen enough of your organization's workflow. It can be more important to just push a task forwards than wait for management approval, and you can make that judgement call.
- Your brain looooves making excuses. "You are too tired, your colleagues don't want you to join them for lunch, it's going to be awkward, it's not my place to say this". It gets tiring listening to your brain. So get it to shush more often.

② Daughter

- Homesickness comes in waves, and hits strongly on important days. Don't skip the important days. You are always, in some way, close to home.
- They haven't forgotten you !!
- You do have responsibilities and roles as a family member. But these can change with time, and you can guide those changes.
- Evolve with your family close by, and it'll be less scary.
- Home isn't a place. It's people.

③ Student

- Doing the things assigned to you is great. But understanding why those things are assigned to you is even more critical
- Completing tasks for a grade or a check-mark on a to-do list isn't what life or productivity is about. Ask yourself - if no one was looking and no one ever found out, would I still do this task? Would I do it because it helped me? Because it helped my cause? Because it helped someone else?
- If you feel you aren't finding people who support your endeavors or allow you to see the world the way you want to it is okay to look for community elsewhere. You'll probably thank yourself for it. (and it really does require you to look; it takes effort, it's not passive).
- Sacrificing sleep, eating, bonding time, clubs and events or down-time isn't what learning was intended to do. This is for two reasons: ① you learn by sleeping, eating, bonding, going out etc. You aren't supposed to just shut your brain off of learning mode once you stop reading your weekly readings. ② Learning is about spending your day acquiring a skill to address some gap, challenge or grey area. It's intended to be approached with an open mind, curiosity and understanding. Learning thrives, for me at least, with balance.
- Memorizing is learning. It's part of the learning process, at least. Knowledge acquisition requires memorization and it's your job to then practise applying those concepts to a real-world scenario.
- University isn't meant to infantilize you, but empower you. Don't leave without exploring as much as you can.

④ Person

- Tracking your productivity is a task to help you better reflect on your skills. Not tracking your work doesn't change how much progress you've made nor does misrepresenting your time/progress.
- I do know how to cook! Look at that ~
- Being vulnerable in every space isn't wise. Be vulnerable with the right people and it will make you stronger
- Sometimes, you can just yap without having a purpose for yapping. Not every story needs to have a cool ending or a spicy twist or philosophical meaning
- Say no when you need to, and don't be ashamed.
- You are who you are because of your sets of privileges, and that can make you blind to other people's struggles. Remember; no one chose to be born into the conditions they were raised in. But advocating for causes that you aren't directly impacted by isn't wrong. It does, however, require great humility, knowing your place, understanding of your why, and taste to know where you should shut up.
- Don't presuppose pity. You can meet an underpaid, discriminated migrant worker or hunched elderly person with more humility, grace and true happiness than the young couple with the fancy car and white collar dressing sense.
- People will judge you no matter how you act or who you are. Stop judging what you should do by trying to enter their brains, use yours and you'll be more satisfied.
- Do things that allow you to go to bed peacefully at night
- Your interests and attention will be pulled in all sorts of directions. Not every interest needs to turn into a startup and not all your reading needs to make it into a blog or essay or oped. Sometimes you should just do a deep dive into something because it interests you. That's life! And you are still being productive that way.
- Know when you aren't welcome, but don't be the one to shut the door.
- It's okay to live in phases, jumping from mood to mood or inspiration to inspiration. That doesn't make you lost.
- If you never tell people the truth about you, don't be upset when you find many of them don't understand you.
- If this path isn't pretty, look for a tree to sit under. Take deep breaths, put your phone away, close your eyes, and tell yourself that not everything is beautiful. And that that's okay.
- It's good to be vigilant about if you are being taken advantage of. But maybe, just maybe, there's joy in giving and not wanting anything in return. After all, there are things happening "behind the curtains" of your reality for you to be able to live. It's foolish not to pull those curtains back - you may just find that you've actually been free loading or contributing less - than equal all along. And perhaps you don't always need to "keep score".
- You've been shaped by many forces, good and bad. Distance yourself from bad influences fast. (Good and bad at-in morally)
- Saying hi first, even when you don't think they'll hear or they look busy, doesn't affront most people. So go crazy
- There's such a thing as a kind yet firm and strong person.
- The more you stare at a "wall", the more it becomes a wall or the object of your thoughts.
- The productive things you do come back to help you in strange ways, and perhaps years down the line.
- Avoidance seems to save you energy, but it actually takes up your energy.
- You have enough energy every single day to revolutionize the world.
- Control isn't the same thing as deprivation. Respecting that isn't the same as rushing. Being reckless isn't the same as a mistake. Being kind isn't the same as being used. How you approach your life matters, and how you frame things to yourself matters too.
- Negative emotions (eg. guilt, lost, unmotivated) aren't the enemy.
- Be your own best friend and stay positive. It's how you respond.

⑤ Canadian / First Gen Immigrant

- I actually grew up more Asian than I thought!
- There's no such thing as a correct way to do things. There's only just many different ways to accomplish shared goals.
- You don't need to be immersed in your culture to learn about it. You can be that person who experiences culture through videos or books.
- It's okay to let other cultures in. It's not disrespecting your own to learn about another or engage in religious practices.
- Feeling lost is okay. Remember you are your own blend of cultures; you aren't ever just one category anyway.
- Cooking can bring you closer to culture!
- Listening to other people speak their mother tongue and thinking to yourself "wow" is one of the richest experiences you'll have
- Hotels are a scam if you are looking for cultural immersion. Find yourself a local guide, leave the shiny city center and go to a fruit shop or food stall.
- Find a way to introduce yourself and your ethnic background that makes you comfortable, and own it. My new introduction is "I look the way I do because I'm the daughter of Indian immigrants, and I sound the way I do because I was born and raised in Canada".
- Being "exotic" gets old. But it's a great opener to talk to new people so don't be afraid to mention it.
- It's okay to be a tourist, even after you've stayed somewhere for four weeks. We are technically all tourists on this planet aren't we ~. But also, you don't need to act like a local. You probably won't be able to and that's okay! Make tourist-like errors and be proud.
- Passport privilege, genetic lottery's, citizenship/cultural privilege is real. Acknowledge it and don't forget it.
- Stop being ashamed of your cultural privilege. Instead, use it to further your causes and travel more so that you can better understand other peoples/practices/cultures.
- Don't, don't DON'T speak for others if you are unsure.
- Ask stupid questions to learn about other cultures. People don't mind.
- Culture can come with prejudice. But know that prejudice isn't everywhere where culture is.
- It can be hard to speak to people more "cultured" than you. But choose not to move or look away - even passively observing can be a great teacher.
- The "majority rules" really does play out. It's strange to go to one place and see someone as oppressed and then go somewhere else and see that same person as the oppressor.
- Every country has a hidden, mistreated group. Find them and learn about why that is.

Ready to start my LIA!

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