

Tom Coverstone Memorial Scholarship Essay: Finding Connections

It was 11:45 a.m. on a cool Monday morning in Nashville. I had just finished my classes for the day and was making my way to my first day of work on a new job site. Rather than having an official co-op term, I was now working over winter break to help the survey team. As I drove to the site, my nerves prevented me from thinking rationally. What if no one liked me? What if I did not meet their expectations? It was a whole new environment with all new employees I had never met. This is the story of a time I worked hard for personal growth and ended up making a new family in the process.

My prior work experience for Independence Excavating (IX) consisted of being a co-op the spring and summer of 2020. I had reached the point where both the construction crew and the survey team from the Cleveland office became my second family. Although I did not expect to have the same relationship with this crew, I had hoped to at least be a satisfactory worker. This crew was from the Pittsburgh office, and was informed that I had a lot of potential. The raving reviews and high expectations for me came from Jeremy and Todd, my boss and mentor, from the Cleveland office. I now felt a sense of pressure to fill these big shoes set before me. The only issue, I am exceptionally average at everything I do. What sets me apart is my dedication to work hard until I fully understand, and my ability to make connections with people. I loved working with Todd in the survey department, and a large contributor was due to the similarities to Tom Coverstone's characteristics. Rather than working until something was done, we worked until it was done correct. We were not afraid to go beyond the traditional role of a surveyor to help the construction crew. As a result, we made a perfect team. I was initially scared my inquires to understand the reasoning behind our actions would lead to Todd becoming annoyed and impatient with me. However, it was quite the opposite. He answered all my questions, whether they were construction related or not. As a result, I began to solve more problems on my own. The initial plan was to work for the surveying department only one term. However at the end of spring, Todd pushed the idea of me staying for another term, and I accepted. I grew more independent over the summer and could handle the work on my own when he took every Friday off. The construction crew trusted me and would call me with their problems. By the end of my co-op, I was devastated to be leaving the people who I now considered family. Consequently, I asked my boss, Jeremy, if he needed any additional help over winter break. This is how I ended up in Nashville.

As I pulled up to the job trailer, I ignored the nerves telling me to stay in my car. I figured, at the very least, it would be an opportunity to make some money between semesters, since I am funding my education on my own. Walking up the steps, I told myself I did not want to just be the "puppy dog" who carried the surveyor's lath, but rather I would show them my ambition and the skills I had acquired over the summer. It was five minutes till noon as I walked into the trailer. There were only two people inside, an older man with a kind smile and a younger man who looked to be related to the owners of the company. Little did I know, at the time, they would both help me gain confidence in myself. The older man spoke to greet me and asked if I

was the new worker. After my response, he called Brian to let him know I was there. Brian would be the surveyor I would be working alongside for the next month-and-a-half. When Brian arrived, he introduced himself and then showed me around the job site. The plan was for me to be on the job from Thanksgiving until the middle of January. This time was about to be entirely different from what I had experienced in the eight months in Cleveland.

Throughout the next few weeks, I demonstrated my knowledge and skill level to Brian, while he taught me new things along the way. We would work eleven-hour days, seven days a week. As a result, Brian and I were constantly by each other's side. During the first two weeks, I would sit in the job trailer to take my classes online while the semester came to an end. Brian overheard my Zoom calls during classes and with my professor/ advisor. As the current president for the student chapter of ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers) for the University of Dayton, I needed to wrap up the semester and make plans for the spring with our advisor. Online classes broke up my day, for the first few weeks, as I became acclimated to the job. It was a new build site for a large car company, so there were a lot of regulations and expectations. We were constantly working and being pushed to exceed deadlines. On the occasional downtime, Brian and I would chat about home and school and our families. He learned about my experience in ROTC. How I was team leader, but eventually decided to co-op instead of contracting in the Army. As Christmas approached, Brian trusted me to take over the job by myself for a week, while he took a vacation to be with his family for the holidays. That week resulted in me getting to know the rest of the crew a lot better. I learned more of their names and they no longer saw me as Brian's assistant but rather a surveyor on the job. That week provided me enough time to get to see them all as friends who I could depend on, and vice versa. When Brian returned from vacation, the dynamic had changed, and he sensed that people did not solely go to him for help anymore. Instead of having only one surveyor on the job, there were now two.

As January approached, and my time to return to school crept closer, there was a sense of sadness. I had spent enough time with the crew that it felt like the end of summer all over again. That sense of fear I once had of feeling inadequate or an inconvenience, was long gone. They all wanted me to stay and to come back for the summer. My time in Nashville reconfirmed what I value most in a career. I want to enjoy the work, but also have a good team on my side. I have always been a hard worker, whether it be at home working with my dad building our chicken coop and planting our garden, or in school taking engineering classes and working together with my roommates on homework and studying for tests, or working alongside a crew for over seventy-hours a week. All of these have one thing in common: working together with other people in a team setting.

I plan on doing Engineers in Technical Humanitarian Opportunities of Service Learning (ETHOS) before I graduate, where I can go to a developing country with a small team to accomplish something meaningful. We would get to use our engineering skills to help a community progress. It may be a challenging experience, but I do not give up easily, especially when I have a team depending on me. Not only just working in a team but in my everyday life, I aspire to help others and make the best of every situation. I like to think I embody the qualities of Tom Coverstone and believe I would be a great fit to memorialize him.