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“Unique Approach”

What makes you stand out? Everyone has something that is unique to them- it is what makes you, you. May I ask, do you embrace this and value its true worth? How unfortunate the person who does not realize the potential value of embracing uniqueness. Value is found in rarity.

Rare it is to see a woman of my stature indeed. There is something to be said about being 6'5" and female. I am graduating from Stanford University with areas of study in communications and sociology, am a professional basketball player having played overseas and in the WNBA, and am interested in work in sports broadcasting, journalism, advertising, PR and marketing. All of my life experiences incorporate aspects of what it means to me to be 6'5" and female, but all that I do and who I am as a person is despite me height. I say this to make a point. Embracing your uniqueness is key to understanding its value, but to define yourself by your unique aspect is to discard its value. This reflects the difference between internal and external personal development. Internally I have come to embrace what it means to be 6'5" and female, happening to have a true passion for the game of basketball.

Externally, people often associate my height with my career. This is an interesting topic to discuss. My height is what makes me unique, and it is what initially got me involved in one of my true passions, basketball. However, my height does not serve as an explanation for what I do nor a definition of who I am. The WAY I have come to understand my height and how it reflects what I do and who I am is what I would like to discuss. What I have done with my height is recognize what it can do for me. This is true for anyone- the most important step is to understand how your uniqueness can set you apart and work with what you internally have already established. Internal aspects are reflected in your personality including such aspects of work ethic, morals, direction in life and more. I don't define myself by my uniqueness, but rather my uniqueness is a reflection of my inner self.

Inner self is created through personal interaction, including cultural norms/expectations and overall life experiences. The influence my height and presence has had in my life experiences can probably be explained best through words or specific life experience stories. What makes us distinctive contributes to how we define ourselves and others. So, it is natural that height would play some part in the socialization process. You will be able to relate- maybe not by being 6'5", but by being you, that is if you have discovered what makes you unique and you have grown to embrace the experience that reflects that uniqueness. Some may shy away from how they stick out and to me I see this as denying yourself. Denying yourself of all that you are and can be.

Let me share some life experiences with you to paint a picture of the 6'5" female. There is not a single place I could go inconspicuously- so I have come to take joy in constantly being in the limelight. From a casual jaunt to the post office,

to going out for dinner, I am sure to have some fixated eyes at some point. The time in my life when it was not so easy to embrace my height and all that it had to offer is not forgotten, however. To share with you the perspective of a 6'0" female girl in the 6th grade is something unique. One particular story involves the middle school Friday dances. We all remember our middle school dances. I loved music and dancing- I still do- from hip hop, R&B to techno and more. Head above my friends I would not be shy on the dance floor, even as a spindly 6ft 13 year old. One boy – cute, athletic, but only 5'7" at the time approach as that infamous slow song hit- I always would shuffle off to hang with my girlfriends-he took my arm put a chair down, stood on it and flung his arms around me. I did not know if I should run and cry or laugh- so I laughed and gave him a smile. It was not easy, though and shed a few tears that night when I got home. My confidence was strengthened with the presence of a 7th grade science teacher Ms. Julie Grim-beautiful, intelligent, basketball player and 6'5". She told me to just wait and soon enough I would come to love all that my height had to offer. I was introduced to the sport of basketball at that time as well.

At this age you are trying to find yourself. Finding yourself means developing your personality, your approach, your direction- maybe wanting a bit less of a spotlight to do so at times. For me, most of the time I have developed in the light and I made a decision not to hide. If you hide in life, chances are that people and life experiences will not seek you out. That is just a reality. Again, internal embracement of your unique aspect is key. It serves to not define who you are and what you do, but rather reflect your inner core. When I realized this I came into my own.

Timely as it was, I was introduced to basketball at the end of 6th grade. I did not see basketball as a way to find a reason for my height, or a means to take comfort in my height, but a way to express who I was and what I was about from the inside. This is a topic often raised or thought about by tall women and something I enjoy addressing. That is because it applies to all people who embrace their unique aspects. I do not embrace my height for what it represents or what it gives me, but more what it brings out of me. Basketball brings out my confidence as it allows me to compete, to be aggressive to assert myself from failure to success- it allows me to establish myself and grow. Height as a unique aspect finds home in the basketball context. I can also strongly state that these characteristics that were developed initially on the court will ever be part of my personality- in whatever I pursue. This is a true gift.

I would like to stress that even though my external height initially opened the doors for opportunity to play basketball; I was out to be more than just a player seeing this window of opportunity. I was not playing because of my height- I was playing to show how hard I wanted to work to reach my potential; I was playing for reasons beyond the external factor of being tall. This approach, for me, was manifested in my search for a real sense of being and genuine confidence. Often one's uniqueness puts extra stress on confidence and the development process, due to the typical 'development in the limelight' context as previously noted. But, it is this specific development process that just aids in the strength of an individuals core. Confidence breeds its most strength while

developing in the limelight. Developing and experiencing while embracing uniqueness forces one to search more deeply and in this process nothing is left undiscovered. That is what basketball has given me, the context to search.

I would like to address assumptions as linked to uniqueness. This directly ties in with height and basketball. I recently was flying back from working the Men's World Basketball Championship when the passenger next to inquired about what I did (most often the question I get) what do you do, where do you play? After our discussion of my overseas experience and WNBA and continuing to train for the 2003 season- we got into an interesting topic. How women or people deal with a unique aspect that may not coordinate with external assumptions. As one example, you may look at the tall women who do not excel at basketball who are faced with that similar question I have come to expect in public. My new friend on the plane and I began to discuss.

I believe human's natural tendency to label is a weakness; however it is inevitable because we are biologically programmed to categorize in order to form cultural norms and expectations. At the same time, I will say that immediate act of labeling or assumptions narrows norms and expectations thereby more often than not throwing us off. When looking at a unique aspect, it is often that one feels a need to explain or justify that difference/distinction in order to facilitate an appropriate expectation. So, if one sees an incredibly tall individual they may feel the need to inquire about how that individual makes of that feature. Again, I do not feel that burden of having to justify anything external, as the internal describes the external – causing the external to merely reflect who we really are in this world. Don't get me wrong – I am the first to say that a unique aspect does come with immediate assumptions or reactions. With height I have found that people at times may be intimidated- ironically this means that I in fact have to be more outgoing- when you would think that the person who stands out the most would be the most obvious to approach.

In some sense I have become less aware of how my height and appearance draws attention; less aware in the sense of being consciously concerned about its social role or impact. I would link this to a few aspects. First of all, I define myself by who I am, not what I am. This means that what is most important to me is manifested from intelligence, capability, drive, desire- such things that make a person who they are beyond external features. Again, my external self is a reflection of my internal core. The uniqueness of my external self has open doors to which only my internal development could manifest. I do not take for granted what it means to find this point of existence- to embrace that which makes you stand out- not for what it is, but what it brings out of my core. I would not change my 6'5" female stature for anything and I am continually grateful for all that it means to me.