

Eyes closed, in a cold auditorium, I feel the adrenaline traveling down my veins. My heart races as I lose control of my thoughts. I take a deep breath to ensure that I am able to present my ideas in a professional manner. I hear the TEDx Talks cameraman opening the live stream to thousands of viewers worldwide, and I begin to tremble from the anticipation bubbling up inside me. I look around to see the seats filled with teachers waiting to hear from me, and I begin to question my choice to live out my childhood dream.

My childhood anxiety developed as a byproduct of previous childhood experiences. As a victim of bullying in grade school, I embodied an underlying fear of rejection surrounding my appearance. I was overweight at the time, so my classmates often referred to me as a “fat Mexican” for several years. These people’s words developed my sense of identity, and I assumed that my appearance was a byproduct of my genetic makeup. For this reason, my self esteem remained low for the majority of my childhood.

A portion of my adolescence consisted of several hundreds hours watching Ted Talks on social skills. I had never developed those skills from experience as a child because of my fleeting self confidence, so Ted Talks provided great insight.

By the time I was 14, I began drafting my own Ted Talks, with the dream of my own performance on stage. This typically included a few introduction sentences, followed by a fresh paper thrown in the trash because I did not believe I could do it. Every video I watched on public speaking felt like a dream that I could only complete in my next life. This was a complete lie.

As I presented my first public speech to thousands of online listeners and hundreds of audience members, I understood then that TEDx Talk was more than just a speech. It was a chance to prove to my childhood self who I had become.

Prior to the official night, I presented the same talk to a committee while auditioning, and I was deeply embarrassed after being asked to present the talk again without stumbling over words or reverting to the phrases, “um” and “like”. The very first time I presented a rough version of my presentation, the judges assumed I lacked the knowledge for my topic.

These words destroyed me. The overwhelming feeling of guilt from my childhood was rekindled. This time, however, I decided to change myself entirely. I devoted the next several months of my life to prove the judges wrong. I developed new methods to conquer that fear of rejection. These methods were inspired by the 100 Days of Rejection challenge and they ranged from: introducing myself to random people in public to singing my favorite song out in a park. At the same time, I reached out to an administrator within my school district for a mentor, which dramatically expanded my understanding on the subject.

The next time around, all of the judges were completely blown away by my performance. The judge that had neglected my understanding of Social Emotional learning was particularly astonished. He noted that I was a completely different person this time, with a newfound stage

presence he had never witnessed before. With these words, I envisioned my younger self smiling and congratulating me for my successes while I chased my dreams.

Since November 11, 2019, I have been personally invited by my school's principal to voice my opinions at a private professional development meeting. Additionally, I have been invited to become a youth representative for the Social Emotional Learning department within my district, and I have spoken at the request of numerous educators within my community. I was even interviewed on a national radio show after gathering attention as an ambitious Mexican-American within my community. (Link: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-04-21/latino-teen-voter-worries-about-prom-graduation-and-economy>)

Aside from the major challenge I have overcome, I have since created a personal tutoring business available to friends and students in my general vicinity. I teach my clients how to connect their own creative interests with the information taught to them, and I share my personal experiences with the TEDx Talk that allowed me to embody a growth mindset. This is only the beginning, however, as I am currently planning on attending the University of Texas at Austin for engineering. Throughout my personal development journey, I discovered my passion for learning. Through learning, I discovered my aptitude for innovation and large scale changes. I believe a college degree for engineering will provide me the lasting fulfillment that comes with those revolutionary advancements. I hope to receive any awards from the Anderson Cummings Scholarship while I continue my education and personal development in college. Thank you. The full talk is available at https://www.tedx-youthfortworth.com/Presenter_Izcan.htm.