



Never Would Have Made it

Alright, Before I start with my TED talk today, I want to take a moment to thank everyone for coming to our inauguration today to join us in this celebration of the incoming USG leadership and our amazing Senator - Elects. Again, my name is Jacob Chang, and I use he/him pronouns. I am double majoring in Psychology and Political Science. Hailing from my home, the beautiful Nanjing City of China, I just reached my third year at Ohio State and this country.

Three weeks ago, I stumbled upon an instagram post from someone talking about the idea of “Never Would Have Made it.” It hit me. I cried. The story resonates with me. It was the morning after the election result. I woke up and was crying in my bed as the result of the election finally registered in my brain. Therefore, I want to center the time I have here today in front of you to the idea of “Never Would Have Made It.”

Three years ago, I first came to this country with nothing but my passport and two suitcases. Everything was so distant. My first week at Ohio State, as many of you know, someone told me that “*Your accent is so thick. You should stop talking.*” That made me question my own reality and my existence. I was ashamed of my accent, my identity, my culture, and my lack of understanding for American norms. **I was ashamed about who I am as a person.** And that stopped me from engaging the rest of the Ohio State Community. I was thinking that I would never have made it as a member of this big family here at Ohio State.

In my second year here at OSU, I joined USG, after my mentor Lei Guo introduced this organization to me. But, that wasn't an easy experience. When I first joined as a committee



representative and as one of the few international students in this organization, in this American majority organization, I felt isolated and alone. A lot of my initiatives advocating for marginalized communities in USG suffered a lot of push backs, but I never let that stop me. I pushed forward my first #EmbraceTheDifference campaign, my International Student Peer Leader Resolution, and the Transfer Credit Policy with the support of many, many others in USG. And that made me think that my voice matters. I was thinking that at the end of my college life here at Ohio State, I want to become a Deputy Director in USG. That's probably how far I can go.

Also in my second year, someone entertained me with the idea that *“Oh , have you ever thought about running for the student body President?”*. I was literally sitting in the Cane’s with this person thinking that it is impossible. I never thought about it. To be honest, like even nowadays, I cannot believe this is real. Because, when the march hit, the pandemic hit. This whole world was shut down. What came along was also the anti-Asian racism and the ruthless attack on APIDA Community here in this country. *I was called Coronavirus. Someone told me to go back home. I was grabbed by people on high street. People kicked snow to my face.* Someone at my residence hall, my very home for my second year, asked me, *“Do you know anyone from Wuhan? Maybe I should distance myself from you, because I think you might give me the China virus.”* So that's the moment I thought I would never have made it as the Student Body President here at OSU, because I'm not only shocked by that idea, I'm also scared. I'm scared that I'm



going to have to put my identity on full display in front of the whole Ohio State Community or even Columbus.

But there were so many friends around me who empowered me, specifically my mentor Lei, the first ever international student who made it to a director level position in the Undergraduate Student Government. She told me that *“You should do the things that you want to do and thrive to become the person you hope to be.”* That empowered me to think: my voice matters, my power matters, and I can change the status quo. I can break that glass ceiling.

That's the moment I decided to assemble this amazing team and made the decision with my running mate Anna. She empowered me throughout the entire journey with every member of the Jacob & Anna team, everyone in this current administration, and Roaya & Caleb. Their support told me that I can run for this position. I have that self determination of what I can achieve. Then I kicked off my campaign, and, eventually, today I am in front of you. I won this election.

After I won this election, Dr. D’Andra Mull, our former Dean of Students, called me. She said *“Jacob, you don’t know how happy I am for you. Almost ten years ago, when we first started the Pre-Departure Orientation in China. I told my international students back then that they can become whoever they want to be, an artist, a researcher, a student org leader, an athlete or even the Student Body President.”* 10 years later today, I was just inaugurated as the first international student to serve in this position.



With gratitude, appreciation to everyone who supported me, empowered me, and made me who I am today, and pride. I want to tell everyone that “**you would have made it**” and “**you will make it.**” The only boundary stopping you from achieving is the boundary that you set up for yourself. If you overcome that, believe in the fundamental power of your voices. You will make it.

During this campaign, Anna and I made the commitment of mobilizing the Undergraduate Student Government to help students pave their path here at Ohio State. And this year, we are hoping to do just that. Nothing more and nothing less. We want to make sure USG is a platform where all the students can stand on and where we not only preach the slogan of students serving students but also truly act on it. We want to challenge the organization to think in the motto of our University “Education for Citizenship” but also go beyond that to think in the mindset of “Education for Global Citizenship” and look at our policy initiatives, events and operations and system processes in the lens of those who are most marginalized.

As Tara Westover said in her book *Educated*, “*My life was narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs.*” **Your voice is powerful. And your voice is as powerful as those opposing voices around you.** Grasp on it, fight for what you believe in, and stand for who you are. You are more than just a character in the stories narrated by others. You write your own story and you will pave your own path here at USG, Ohio State, and beyond.

Thank you!

