

Video Transcript - Q?Crew Captain Talk – 'Bridging Boundaries'

McKenna: Hi guys, my name is McKenna Wirth. I'm here to tell you about the day I learned to bridge boundaries.

McKenna: So, I'm a high school senior. This means that the first question anybody asks me is, "So, what college are you going to?", or, "Where are you applying?", or, "What are you thinking about majoring in?". It seems like everyone else has these answers all figured out.

McKenna: I feel like I was expected to plan out the rest of my life over the summer, and I missed that memo. The reason that this is so hard [00:00:30] for me is because I've got too many interests. I like science, but I also really enjoy performing. Writing brings me joy, but so does solving a complicated calculus problem. I'd love to learn more about anthropology or geology, but I really enjoyed my engineering class this year, and everyone expects me to choose between these.

McKenna: I'm supposed to pick one thing I'm interested in, and stick with it for the rest of my life. Maybe my other passions will be [00:01:00] downgraded to hobbies or worse, I'll have to give them up completely. I didn't know how to bridge those boundaries, and I've gotta make that decision right now.

McKenna: But, I'm equally passionate about everything I'm involved in. I feel stuck. I feel like I'm being forced to choose between things that I care deeply about, simply because there is not enough time in the day. And it was tearing me apart.

McKenna: So, the summer of 2017, [00:01:30] I decided to conduct an experiment. Instead of focusing on just one of my passions, I decided to try and make two happen. I started rehearsals for a musical called Rock of Ages, and an internship at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. I wanted to be able to combine these two halves of my life into something that would represent me as a person. I didn't want to chop off the part of me that loves science, but I didn't want to sacrifice performing either.

McKenna: The summer began, and I launched myself headfirst [00:02:00] into both my rehearsals and my internship, but they didn't come together until Tuesday, July 25th. That's the day I learned to bridge boundaries.

McKenna: In four days, I'd be leaving to perform at the International Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. At the moment, I was working on writing a report, detailing everything I'd learned from all the research I'd done throughout the course of my internship. But, that week, the museum was different. It was filled with performers. These performers [00:02:30] were a part of Tuko Iho, an exhibit which celebrated New Zealand's Maori culture and took over part of the museum for a full week.

McKenna: They captivated the audience whenever they performed. They sang and danced with traditional weapons, and then explained the significance of what they were using, and how it was created. Watching them, I learned a lot about Maori culture and how they prepare their warriors for combat.

McKenna: Here were actual representatives from the culture. You could go up and talk to them, [00:03:00] ask them questions like, "What is it you're carving?", or, "How have you seen your culture change in the past 10 years?". Everyone involved was an integral part of Tuko Iho. They brought their culture to life.

McKenna: So there I was, watching the best performance of my life, not on Broadway or in Scotland, like I'd expected, but at the Natural History Museum, where I'd been interning all summer. As their voices filled the rotunda, I realized that, [00:03:30] in the real world, nothing is divided into departments like they are in my high school classes.

McKenna: You can be a performer and still be involved with science, history, and museums. I hadn't been sure if that was possible, but there's a way to combine interests into something meaningful. That's what the Maori performers did. They bridged boundaries in a major way, and they did this by performing, which is something I absolutely love to do. Not only that, their performances [00:04:00] educated the public and gave everyone who watched an incredible experience. It was really inspiring.

McKenna: Now, I'm not sure what impact this will have on my whole life, I mean, I'm 17. But now I'm hopeful that I'll be able to find a place where I can do all of the things that I love to do, not just one. I'm not saying I want to perform for the rest of my life, or even do it professionally at all, but it's nice to know that science [00:04:30] and theater aren't completely incompatible.

McKenna: And that's what I learned from my summer internship, how to bridge boundaries between academic interests. The Maori performers did exactly that, crossing literal borders, coming from New Zealand, as well as the borders between academic areas of study, combining science and culture with performance and art, and inspired me to do the same.

McKenna: Thank you.