“Harder!” I shouted to my teammates. We were rowing as fast as we could. “Faster, faster! You can do it!” the other team was way faster than us and it was nearing the finishing line. Suddenly, my teammates started arguing with each other. Our teamwork started to fall apart.

It was a week ago. I was busy at the riverside as usual, practicing rowing as part of my dragon boat co-curricular activity. Suddenly, my coach, Mr Robinson, came up to me.

“Jeren, do you have a moment? I need to talk to you,” he said.

We walked over to the shelter.

“Jeren, I want to tell you that you have been selected for the 15th annual dragon boat competition this year along with Aden, Nami, Rias, Ace, Jeff and Amane. Prepare yourselves and do your best. Also, the all-time top champions of Kajio high will be participating in this competition. So be at your best!”

With that, he left. I was pretty shocked. I, a total beginner, was going to compete in a national competition with my seniors? I did not know what to do.

“Ok, based on the votes that we have from everyone, the leader will be…Jeren! Congratulations. You will be the one to decide the outcome of the competition. Good luck to you.”

It was the very next day and everyone stared at me like I was an alien or something. I stood rooted to the ground. I had been chosen as leader? Me? Me?

Aden came over to me and said, “Jeren, so you are our team leader? Well…all I can say is - don’t disappoint me and the other seniors.

So now I had a big responsibility on my shoulders. The competition was in one week and I had to practice hard if we were to get our first win in the nationals. But, the question was, how? The only experience I had was two months ago, which was a rowing practice on land. Land! I had never had an experience with rowing or drumming on a boat before. Lastly, I had no confidence. I was going to lead my seniors! I had a feeling that it would be a pretty tough job.

Luckily, I was drumming. I had no strength for rowing!
“Harder! Faster!” I shouted.

It was the 7th practice of the week. We had been practicing near the venue, which was the Sports Hub. There were buoys that were colored in red and blue floating on the river to guide us where our line was. The scenery of Suntec City, Marina Bay Sands, The Esplanade, Gardens by The Bay and other magnificent buildings stood tall at a distance. Beside us were the OCBC Aquatic Centre and the Kallang Wave Mall, a popular mall in the city area. It was a perfect place for the competition.

On the day of the competition, everyone was raring and ready to go. We did our warm-ups as quickly as we could. Then, we got onto our boat, number 7. Lucky number 7, to be exact. We got into our positions and got ready.

“Positions!” the commentator shouted.

“And…go!” he pulled the trigger and a loud sound filled the air. The competition had begun! Our team passed the preliminaries easily. We moved on to the semi-finals, where 4 teams were participating.

I began to hit my drum in a rhythmic manner as my seniors followed my lead. We were in first place for a while until the team from Nanyang Polytechnic overtook us. Soon, we began to slow down. Every team passed us.

Suddenly, Amane shouted, “It’s definitely your fault, Jeff!”

“No! It was Nami!”

Everyone began to argue.

Our coordination began to fall apart. We were lagging behind the first boat by almost 50 metres! Now what? I quickly hit the drum several times, as loud as I could to attract everyone’s attention. “Stop arguing like a pack of nonsensical irritants!”

This made everyone keep quiet.

“Do you want to win the race or not? If you want to, then cooperate, please!” I shouted. They blushed in embarrassment.

They started to row again. I heaved a sigh of relief and continued hitting the drum.

We went all out as we passed the other teams. Soon, only the team from Kajio High was ahead of us.

I quickly drummed at 16 beats to signal them to row faster. We caught up in just 25 seconds. However, the finish line was 70 meters away!

Who would win? Us? Or Kajio?
We were neck and neck as we crossed the finishing line together. Everyone stopped rowing and cheered.

Later, the organizer showed us a video replay of the competition. When the video reached or neared the end, it showed that we were ahead by just 5cm! I was exhilarated. We had won the nationals!

Everyone went crazy. They cheered and screamed, “We won! We won! Hurray for Jeren!” they began to lift me up into the air. I was thrown up like a bouncy, beach ball. I laughed for a moment until I started to get nauseous.

Then I puked.

Everyone steered clear at once. I guess I have sea sickness after all.

Going through this meaningful experience showed me how I could maintain my responsibility as a leader and work together as a team. It was a lesson I would take with me through life.