

## What My Closest Friends Taught Me

Life, like surfing, does not always give us the conditions we want. I am a surfer, and my dream is to become a professional. Some days, the waves are small and safe, while on other days, strong winds and huge waves make entering the ocean frightening and intimidating. Competitions are especially stressful because I never know whether I can catch two good waves during a fifteen-minute heat. Through my experiences as a surfer and my friendships with people from different countries, I have learned that true transformation begins when we stop blaming circumstances and take responsibility for our own choices.

A few years ago, I did not think this way. When I could not surf as well as I wanted, I often blamed the waves, the judges, or even bad luck. If I lost a competition, I focused on everything that had gone wrong around me instead of examining my own performance. Blaming circumstances protected me from disappointment and regrets, but it also prevented me from improving. If I believed that other people or uncontrollable conditions were responsible for my failures, I did not have to face my weaknesses. Maybe I was just too proud.

My close friends from Sudan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India gradually changed my perspective. Many of them have important responsibilities at home. They take care of their younger siblings, help with housework, and cook dinner to support their working parents. Although their lives are probably not easy, they do not blame their families or use their responsibilities as excuses. They also remain committed to their studies, and some of them achieved scores above ninety in every subject in their IGCSE examinations. Their discipline made me realize that I had been thinking mainly about myself and my surfing, while they worked hard for both their families and their futures.

Seeing how they lived, I began to change how I approached surfing and my other goals. I realized that blaming other people around me or difficult circumstances for my failures was immature and unfair. I cannot control the waves, the wind, and the judges during the heat at the competition. However, I can control my preparation, attitude, decisions, and response. Now, when I lose a competition or fail to perform well, I examine what I could have done differently and use the experience to improve.

I still feel afraid, disappointed, and frustrated at times. Transformation does not mean eliminating these emotions; it means choosing how to respond to them. My friends did not change the waves or the judges. They changed the way I understand responsibility. Moving from making excuses to taking ownership of my choices has been the greatest transformation within me.