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Hi, everyone, my name is Elizabeth, and I work on the trading floor. But I'm still pretty new to it. I graduated from college about a year and a half ago, and to be quite honest, I'm still recovering from the recruiting process I had to go through to get here.

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(Laughter)

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Now, I don't know about you, but this is the most ridiculous thing that I still remember about the whole process, was asking insecure college students what their biggest passion was. Like, do you expect me to have an answer for that?

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(Laughter)

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Of course I did. And to be quite honest, I really showed those recruiters just how passionate I was by telling them all about my early interest in the global economy, which, conveniently, stemmed from the conversations that I would overhear my immigrant parents having about money and the fluctuating value of the Mexican peso. They love a good personal story.

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But you know what? I lied.

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(Laughter)

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And not because the things I said weren't true -- I mean, my parents were talking about this stuff. But that's not really why I decided to jump into finance. I just really wanted to pay my rent.

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(Laughter)

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And here's the thing. The reality of having to pay my rent and do real adult things is something that we're rarely willing to admit to employers, to others and even to ourselves. I know I wasn't about to tell my recruiters that I was there for the money. And that's because for the most part, we want to see ourselves as idealists and as people who do what they believe in and pursue the things that they find the most exciting. But the reality is very few of us actually have the privilege to do that.

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Now, I can't speak for everyone, but this is especially true for young immigrant professionals like me. And the reason this is true has something to do with the narratives that society has kept hitting us with in the news, in the workplace and even by those annoyingly self-critical voices in our heads. So what narratives am I referring to? Well, there's two that come to mind when it comes to immigrants. The first is the idea of the immigrant worker. You know, people that come to the US in search of jobs as laborers, or field workers, dish washers. You know, things that we might consider low-wage jobs but the immigrants? That's a good opportunity.

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The news nowadays has convoluted that whole thing quite a bit. You could say that it's made America's relationship with immigrants complicated. And as immigrant expert George Borjas would have put it, it's kind of like America wanted workers, but then, they got confused when we got people instead.

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(Laughter)

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I mean, it's natural that people want to strive to put a roof over their heads and live a normal life, right? So for obvious reasons, this narrative has been driving me a little bit crazy. But it's not the only one.

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The other narrative that I'm going to talk about is the idea of the superimmigrant. In America, we love to idolize superimmigrants as the ideal symbols of American success. I grew up admiring superimmigrants, because their existence fueled my dreams and it gave me hope. The problem with this narrative is that it also seems to cast a shadow on those that don't succeed or that don't make it in that way, as less than. And for years, I got caught up in the ways in which it seemed to celebrate one type of immigrant while villainizing the other. I mean, were my parents' sacrifices not enough? Was the fact that my dad came home from the metal factory covered in corrosive dust, was that not super?

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Don't get me wrong, I've internalized both of these narratives to some degree, and in many ways, seeing my heroes succeed, it has pushed me to do the same. But both of these narratives are flawed in the ways in which they dehumanize people if they don't fit within a certain mold or succeed in a certain way. And this really affected my self-image, because I started to question these ideas for who my parents were and who I was, and I started to wonder, "Am I doing enough to protect my family and my community from the injustices that we felt every day?" So why did I choose to "sell out" while watching tragedies unfold right in front of me?

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Now, it took me a long time to come to terms with my decisions. And I really have to thank the people running the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, or HSF, for validating this process early on. And the way that HSF -- an organization that strives to help students achieve higher education through mentorship and scholarships -- the way that they helped calm my anxiety, it was by telling me something super familiar. Something that you all probably have heard before in the first few minutes after boarding a flight. In case of an emergency, put your oxygen mask on first before helping those around you.

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Now I understand that this means different things to different people. But for me, it meant that immigrants couldn't and would never be able to fit into any one narrative, because most of us are actually just traveling along a spectrum, trying to survive. And although there may be people that are further along in life with their oxygen mask on and secured in place, there are undoubtedly going to be others that are still struggling to put theirs on before they can even think about helping those around them.

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Now, this lesson really hit home for me, because my parents, while they wanted us to be able to take advantage of opportunities in a way that we wouldn't have been able to do so anywhere else -- I mean, we were in America, and so as a child, this made me have these crazy, ambitious and elaborate dreams for what my future could look like.

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But the ways in which the world sees immigrants, it affects more than just the narratives in which they live. It also impacts the ways laws and systems can affect communities, families and individuals. I know this firsthand, because these laws and systems, well, they broke up my family, and they led my parents to return to Mexico. And at 15, my eight-year-old brother and I, we found ourselves alone and without the guidance that our parents had always provided us with. Despite being American citizens, we both felt defeated by what we had always known to be the land of opportunity.

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Now, in the weeks that followed my parents' return to Mexico, when it became clear that they wouldn't be able to come back, I had to watch as my eight-year-old brother was pulled out of school to be with his family. And during this same time, I wondered if going back would be validating my parents' sacrifices. And so I somehow convinced my parents to let me stay, without being able to guarantee them that I'd find somewhere to live or that I'd be OK. But to this day, I will never forget how hard it was having to say goodbye. And I will never forget how hard it was watching my little brother crumble in their arms as I waved goodbye from the other side of steel grates.

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Now, it would be naive to credit grit as the sole reason for why I've been able to take advantage of so many opportunities since that day. I mean, I was really lucky, and I want you to know that. Because statistically speaking, students that are homeless or that have unstable living conditions, well, they rarely complete high school. But I do think that it was because my parents had the trust in letting me go that I somehow found the courage and strength to take on opportunities even when I felt unsure or unqualified.

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Now, there's no denying that there is a cost to living the American dream. You do not have to be an immigrant or the child of immigrants to know that. But I do know that now, today, I am living

something close to what my parents saw as their American dream. Because as soon as I graduated from college, I flew my younger brother to the United States to live with me, so that he, too, could pursue his education. Still, I knew that it would be hard flying my little brother back. I knew that it would be hard having to balance the demands and professionalism required of an entry-level job while being responsible for a child with dreams and ambitions of his own. But you can imagine how fun it is to be 24 years old, at the peak of my youth, living in New York, with an angsty teenage roommate who hates doing the dishes.

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(Laughter)

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The worst.

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(Laughter)

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But when I see my brother learning how to advocate for himself, and when I see him get excited about his classes and school, I do not doubt anything. Because I know that this bizarre, beautiful and privileged life that I now live is the true reason for why I decided to pursue a career that would help me and my family find financial stability.

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I did not know it back then, but during those eight years that I lived without my family, I had my oxygen mask on and I focused on survival. And during those same eight years, I had to watch helplessly the pain and hurt that it caused my family to be apart. What airlines don't tell you is that putting your oxygen mask on first while seeing those around you struggle -- it takes a lot of courage. But being able to have that self-control is sometimes the only way that we are able to help those around us.

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Now I'm super lucky to be in a place where I can be there for my little brother so that he feels confident and prepared to take on whatever he chooses to do next. But I also know that because I am in this position of privilege, I also have the responsibility to make sure that my community finds spaces where they can find guidance, access and support.

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I can't claim to know where each and every one of you are on your journey through life, but I do know that our world is one that flourishes when different voices come together. My hope is that you will find the courage to put your oxygen mask on when you need to, and that you will find the strength to help those around you when you can.

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Thank you.

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(Applause)