

Dear SEOTY Selection Committee,

I am nominating Neil Gilbert for the 2009 Student Employee of the Year. He is the supervisor of the climbing wall at Campus Recreation and he has gone above and beyond at this position. He has shown excellent organizational skills, initiative, and an overall excitement for his job that sets him apart from other workers. Before I go into detail about what he has done, I want to inform you on what the climbing wall was like the six years prior to him becoming supervisor.

The climbing wall used to have a large number of climbers during the first couple of months of each fall semester. Then the numbers would fall dramatically. The climbing wall would only have five to ten climbers on weekdays and often zero on weekends. The climbing wall had a bouldering competition every fall semester and a climbing competition every spring semester. These competitions had very few participants and little or no prizes besides a t-shirt made for the specific competition. Rock climbing is a very unique challenge that few people get to experience in their lives. Unfortunately, not many people were getting that experience at VSU because the climbing wall wasn't drawing in much of a crowd. Neil, who had been working as an employee at the climbing wall for nearly two years before he became supervisor, saw the potential of the climbing wall and made it a goal to turn it into something better by starting new programs to build a climbing community at VSU.

When Neil first started as supervisor of the climbing wall, I had set hours each week for him to come in and work. He had many ambitious, new ideas, but I wanted to make sure he was actually going to put them into action. It was obvious to me in no time that he was very serious about his job. He came in during his scheduled hours plus more and worked on the many different programs and sponsorships to bring more climbers to the wall. He had a very large workload because he wanted to change and add so much to the climbing wall when he became supervisor. Once I realized how reliable he was, I decided to allow him to set his own hours and come and go as he pleased.

For almost a year now, he only meets with me once a week so we can discuss what is going on at the climbing wall. I am very busy with the expanding areas of Outdoor Programs (CORE), and it is incredibly helpful for me to have someone I can depend on to supervise the climbing wall with so little oversight. Neil clearly does not believe in doing the bare minimum at work nor does he believe in keeping the status quo; instead, he chooses to constantly challenge himself and improve his workplace. In doing this, he actually adds to his own workload because he creates new programs on top of the mandatory work he must do as the climbing wall supervisor. His dedication and reliability are beyond most individuals at his age, and he does these things while continuing his work as a facilitator on the ropes course and maintaining an exceptionally high GPA.

Neil's quality of work has been more than I ever could have asked for. He has implemented so many new programs to increase climbing at the wall. Last semester, he used a points system to encourage climbing. He had different ways for climbers to get points throughout the semester and the three participants with the most points would receive prizes from the new sponsors he found for the climbing wall. One way to get points was through the "Climb a Mountain" program that Neil started. This was set up as a personal goal that climbers could strive for by climbing a certain distance that equaled different mountains around the world. Once the "mountain" had been climbed, the climber would receive points for it. A few other ways to get points were by climbing the most in a week, attending climbing wall events, and climbing marked routes. This system that Neil set up was unique because it was designed to allow any level of climber to be a winner. Basically, the more time you dedicated to climbing, the better chance you had to win. He did this because his main goal wasn't to increase the number of climbers at the wall; instead, it was to build a climbing community at VSU. He wanted to encourage new people to try climbing and seasoned climbers to work at becoming a better climber by spending more time on the wall. Of course, in doing this there was an increase in climbing wall participation. The climbing wall participation has increased 121% since Neil started supervising the climbing wall.

The achievement Neil is most proud of is the number of sponsors he found for the climbing wall. The climbing wall had never had sponsors so he was starting from scratch. He spent a lot of time writing letters, sending out e-mails, making phone calls, and personally visiting businesses to secure sponsorships, which resulted in over \$2,000 in giveaways. I know he sent out over 60 letters to some very large companies. In his letter he explained who he was, what his vision was for the climbing wall, and how their contributions would help him achieve his goals. He was very professional throughout this process and has done well to maintain good relationships with the businesses so that they will continue to donate to our climbing wall. A few of the businesses that agreed to donate prizes were Airtran Airways, Prana, Eagles Nest Outfitters, Coca Cola, Mountain Khaki, and many more. To maintain good relations he has sent them all

thank you letters with cd's of pictures from the different competitions held at the climbing wall. He also sent some of them the new climbing wall t-shirt that he designed. He wants to have a new climbing wall shirt made each year. He designed this year's shirt last summer and I am sure he will have his hand in the next t-shirt design this coming up summer.

The majority of these prizes donated are used in competitions at the climbing wall. Neil has done an amazing job with increasing participation at climbing wall competitions. On top of that, we now have three competitions each semester instead of two a year. He is responsible for planning, organizing, and running all of these competitions. This is no easy task. He has changed many of the rules for the competitions to make them more fun for all levels of climbers. He also has to adjust these rules depending on the number of climbers that sign up for the competitions so that they do not run for too long. Neil has to make sure the competitions are marketed all over campus. Marketing competitions has been a problem in the past, but Neil has done an astounding job of utilizing many different marketing channels. He advertises at the wall with a folder that tells climbers everything that is going on and by word of mouth, e-mails everyone in the climbing wall data base, uses the Recreation Center marketing team to put out flyers, and he even put all of the competition dates in the student handbook that goes out at the beginning of each academic year. He then has to schedule enough of his staff to work the competition and assign a number of routes to be set for the competition depending on the number of competitors and their skill levels. Finally, after all is planned and organized, he must supervise the competition, which is often the most exhausting aspect of it all. He has to keep everything going and everyone organized while keeping up with patron's scores and keeping his staff focused.

He starts off each semester with a bouldering competition, then he has the climbing competition, and he also added a team climbing competition as something fun and different for his patrons. The team climbing competition is quite unique and I have never heard of a climbing wall doing this before. He spent a lot of time juggling around different ideas for a slightly less competitive and more fun climbing competition. He came up with having teams of two that compete in a climbing relay, blindfolded climbing, climbing while tied together, and a capture the flag race on the wall. I specifically mentioned this competition because it was completely new, but he has also made improvements to the other competitions that have increased participation. For the most part, we have had over 20 participants at each competition, which is about double what it was in the past. There are also many more people that watch the competitions because they are much more entertaining. We have never before had groups stay around to watch competitions.

Along with competitions, Neil has started climbing gym trips so that patrons can climb bigger indoor walls as well as climbing classes to teach basic skills needed to excel in climbing. These activities give VSU students a chance to branch out and really become involved with climbing. Neil came to me with the idea to take a climbing gym trip once a month last summer. I thought it was a good idea, as long as he was willing to put in the work to make it happen. He has single handedly researched climbing gyms around Georgia and Florida, reserved school vans, found drivers, marketed the trips, taken up money, and organized and led the trips. In leading these trips, Neil is responsible for about 10 participants for an entire day. The climbing classes he has started are excellent opportunities for beginner and experienced climbers. One Saturday out of every month he will teach a belay skills class at noon and a climbing skills class at 2. For the belay class, Neil has organized a specific lesson plan to go over with the participants. After they complete the class, the participants must wait one week before they are able to take the belay test to become certified at the wall. Also, the participants must come to the wall and climb at least twice during that week to get more practice belaying. He has set it up so that you must know how to belay to attend the climbing skills class. This gives climbers the chance to get one on one time with the climbing wall staff so that they can learn more about rock climbing.

Another area where Neil has done very well is with the way he runs his own staff. He has eight employees who work under his supervision. He meets with his staff once a week to keep them informed on what is going on at the climbing wall. Every department at Campus Rec. has an employee of the month which gives the employees an incentive for working hard, but Neil also tries to encourage his employees to work hard by offering prizes to the employee(s) with the most climbers in a semester and by setting goals for the entire staff to reach. Along with offering the rewards, Neil also has to reprimand his employees when they break rules. Neil amended the rules for the climbing wall patrons and staff last year and he has done a great job of enforcing these rules. He always discusses problems with his staff and gives the appropriate punishment when rules are broken. I know this isn't easy because many of his employees are his friends. I believe this shows how professional he is at work.

Neil believes in having a close-knit staff that gets along well and is fun to be around. To encourage this, he has organized staff trips in the past to give everyone the chance to get to know one another better. Last semester, he gave his

staff the opportunity to go on a free climbing trip to Sand Rock, Alabama. Near the end of this semester, he will take his staff on another trip depending on which goal they reach at the climbing wall.

Neil is responsible for training his staff, but this is usually something I would take upon myself to help with. However, he has shown me that he has the skills and the professionalism to train employees without my help. When he hires someone new to work the wall, he will set up a time to train the employee. After his training, he will schedule the new employee to work with an experienced employee until he sees that the new person is ready to work alone.

As I mentioned above, Neil is also responsible for hiring employees. Like I said, I have little input at the climbing wall and I trust him to run it, so, I give him a big voice in deciding who works there. As a student employee, he isn't able to post position openings on our job website. Therefore, when he wants to hire someone he will come to me and explain his need for a new employee. Then, I will make the position available on-line. Other than that, Neil does all the work. He goes through the applicant's resumes and application questions and decides which ones he wants to interview. He contacts the people he wants to interview and schedules a time for them to meet. Then he finds other people that can interview with him (he usually asks me to do this). After he interviews everyone, he makes the decision on whom to hire and runs it by me. Then he will contact that person to tell them they got the job, and contact everyone else to let them know they did not get the job. He is very professional and well spoken at the interviews. He makes it a point to introduce himself, explain how the interview is going to work, and provide quality feedback at the end to tell the interviewee what they did good and bad.

A very unique idea Neil has come up with for his staff this semester is working to raise money for a non-profit organization. He plans on volunteering to clean tables at CiCi's Pizza for tips and then donating the money to Defiant Missions. This organization places specially designed water filters in third world countries to provide clean water for people to drink. Neil is a friend of the founders of this non-profit organization and he hopes that the climbing wall staff will continue to support Defiant Missions through fundraisers even after he is gone. I believe this tells a lot about his character to be willing to organize and work this without any personal gain. Neil is in the process of getting everything together for this fundraiser now.

Neil has put a lot of hard work into the climbing wall and he doesn't want it to go downhill after he leaves. Therefore, he has been very proactive in finding someone to replace him when he leaves. At the end of last semester, Neil talked to a fellow employee about taking over as the supervisor when he leaves. The employee agreed, and Neil made the announcement at the beginning of this semester. Neil plans on starting this employees training throughout the month of April so that he knows everything about the supervisor job. It is obvious that an employee cares about what he is done if he is worried about what becomes of his position after he is gone, and Neil certainly has this quality.

It is obvious that Neil Gilbert is an outstanding student employee that is well deserving of this reward. Neil has shown initiative and reliability by going above and beyond in all he does, excellent quality of work with every one of his responsibilities, professionalism throughout all aspects of his job, and a unique excitement for making his area as good as it can be. He has accomplished so much as the supervisor of the climbing wall while also working as a facilitator on the ropes course. He is one of the most experienced facilitators that work for me and I trust him with any group we have. Even with both of these jobs, he has excelled in school, maintaining a GPA of 3.6, and stayed on a 4-year track. He has definitely raised the bar as a student employee with his innovation, drive and maturity. Neil will be sadly missed when he graduates this spring and starts his new life and I know he will succeed in anything he does.

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