This lecture discusses the concept of taking ownership of your problems.

By now, you should be clearly aware of the differences between classroom learning and research. Let me introduce another new concept: taking ownership of your problems.

Let me start by telling a story. I read this story on the Internet and I am sharing it with you here. I think the story clearly contrasts the differences between student thinking and researcher thinking.

Imagine that you are a manager M.

You ask a person, let's call this person S, "We will have some visitors next week. Please ask when they arrive."

Two days later

S tells you, "They will arrive at 4PM next Wednesday."

You ask, "What else?"

S says, "Nothing else. I have done the assignment you gave me, completely and perfectly."

Next, imagine that you also aske R the same question. What is R's answer?

R says, "They will arrive at 4PM next Wednesday.”

R continues, “Four people from the company will visit and they will arrive by flight. I have already arranged a taxi to pick them up from the airport.”

R keeps talking, “They will visit for Thursday and Friday. I have already reserved hotel rooms.”

In fact, R is telling you even more, “Among the visitors, one is a sales manager and three are engineers. I have already informed our sales manager and engineering manager to meet them.”

Can you see what R has done? R thinks much more beyond what you have asked. In fact, R has not finished yet.

R keeps talking, “The visitors will take a 6PM flight on Friday. I have already arranged a minivan to the airport. "

R continues, "The sales manager and the engineering manager will go to the airport with them, just in case they want to talk about more things. The minivan will take the two managers home. The two managers have already agreed.”

Can you see the differences between S and R? S is the student thinking. R is the researcher thinking.

For S,

the question is "fill in the blank".  
  
For R,

it is the starting point of many more questions.

S wants to "submit an assignment".  
  
R wants to "solve a problem". What is the problem? The problem is to host the visitors and make sure they can accomplish what they want to do for this visit. The solutions include meeting the right people as well as having a comfortable trip.

Now, ask yourself. Which one do you want to be?

S or R?  
  
Which one would be more successful? Since you are the manager, which one would you promote?

If you want to be successful, you need to think. You need to think beyond what is given to you.

Take the ownership of the problem. It is your problem, not your manager's, not your adviser's, not your team leader's. It is yours. Take responsibility.

Why am I saying this? Many people do not understand the importance of taking ownership of problems.

They think

"I can drop this course and there is no record."

"My team leader will cover me. Nobody else will know."

Too many people think, "It is not my problem."

"I am a student. Professors should always forgive me if I cannot do it."

"I will get B. So what? I can still graduate. Why do I care?"

You need to care because your team does.

I know what some of you will say. Some of you will say, "Wait! My supervisor does not want me to think!" "My supervisor wants me to do what I am told."

My answer to that is very simple.  
  
Leave the group.  
  
The group is not worth your time and effort. Join a group where you are respected.

Some of you may say, "My manager would not pay!"

The answer is simple: Make reservations that can be cancelled.

Some of you may say, "But that would cost more!"

Sometimes, money is not the only important thing. In fact, money is rarely important. Many things are much more important than money.

Many people keep saying, "But ... But ... But". These people will not succeed.

Successful people do not waste time finding excuses. They focus on solving problems.

Remember. Find solutions. Not Excuses.

Take ownership of the problems. Do more than what you are asked to do, if you want to be successful.