

John Foster

In order to lead others, a leader must first know themselves. My goal heading into the ELI was to learn how to lead others in a more effective manner. I accomplished that in an indirect manner. The main thing I accomplished through the whole process was somewhat of a better understanding of myself as a leader. This was accomplished through introspection, but also through practice.

As an introspective thinker, I believe I had a pretty strong grasp of who I was as a leader from the onset. Even so, I was able to explore my strengths and weaknesses to learn the areas that needed improvement.

We took a personality inventory the first week of class. Although it offered no earth-shattering insights into my inner psyche, it offered valuable new perspectives into my leadership style. In the same way, leadership is not built in landmark moments, but in the constant process of self-evaluation and self-improvement.

Looking through the perspective of my learning type, I have been able to better evaluate what is important to me as a leader. For instance I have a desire for self-expression and for others to be able to express themselves through the task they perform. Personality is one of the most important elements of life. Without it, life becomes little more than an automation.

As part of my leadership style, I desire to bring others along as part of my vision. This can be a positive when they buy into my plan, but when they do not, I often can take it as an attack on my person.

Another potential weakness of my personality is my tendency to leave all my options open, to never commit and nail down what I am going to do. With knowledge of

this tendency, I am able to keep guard for it and compensate. Because I know this tendency, I am aware of the need to find a workable solution and commit to it when the situation calls for action. Again these and other aspects I explored are not things that are totally original ideas to me, yet by contemplating them further I have been able to better reform who I am as a leader.

Continuing the emphasis on what sort of leadership goals each of us had, we began focusing on what values are paramount in our lives. My paramount personal value is integrity, which is acting in a manner of accord with what I truly believe, encompassing such ideals as honesty, obedience to God's will, and concern for others. Among others, some prominent values of mine include love for family and friends as well as all mankind, and self-expression.

It is easy to become so wrapped up in my or anyone's role as a leader, that we forget what truly matters to us. Keeping these values at the forefront of my mind and basing my decisions on them will ensure that I accomplish things in life that I am passionate about and are things of true lasting value. My major decisions will be based on these guideposts, certainly not on such things as power or wealth. If the leaders of the world kept these things in mind, we would not see the corruption or disregard for those trampled on the way to the top. Leaders who stand by the principles they believe in are people we can trust and are glad to follow. I am determined to be a man like that.

Learning leadership theory is useful, but knowledge is fruitless unless it is applied. The most effective way to become a strong leader is through practice. The true value of the course came from applying what we had learned to solve real issues in the real world. Each ELI participant chose a project that they were passionate about.

I have a heart for people who are trying to make ends meet but struggle. People who are working hard and making a good faith effort should not have to pay the majority of their monthly earnings in order to afford substandard housing.

I also have an intense desire to motivate people to help others. Even better if helping others becomes part of their lifestyle.

These were my considerations when I decided to use my fraternity brothers and get them to build a Habitat for Humanity house.

In the process, I did not come to any earth-shattering epiphanies or overcome monumental odds to accomplish my goal, but I did gain practice in being a leader. There are some things that just cannot be taught in a classroom, only through experience. Many aspects of leadership can only be taught by actually leading.

Through my project, I practiced seeing the needs in the world around me and devising a plan to help with those needs. I also practiced bringing together the logistics to make it happen and most of all motivating others to buy into my vision. All these are essential elements of leadership and all things I gained confidence in doing through practice.

In a class of fascinating, passionate, highly motivated individuals, I felt held to a standard that I must make a difference and I must become a strong leader. These are things I feel I have accomplished in part and intend to develop throughout my life.