

## **Kelly Burke**

When I first heard about the Emerging Leader Institute, I was not sure at all if I wanted to apply. The more I thought about it though, the more I realized the great opportunities this class would offer me. I decided to accept the challenges the class would present to me and join, and it has been an incredible experience.

When I first started this class I was not sure what I was supposed to get out of it. I quickly learned that the major priority is to allow students to learn about themselves as leaders. I was asked questions that really made me think about my priorities, how I handle conflict, and how I interact with other people. The class had me constantly evaluating myself, identifying weaknesses, and challenging me to find ways to improve my skills. I learned about my personality type and how that affects the way I interact with other people and how I perceive different situations. As well, I gained an understanding of other people's personality types and the best ways to communicate with them. I was forced to see things from many different perspectives in order to be able to identify problems and come to a solution. During this class, I grew not only as a leader, but also as a person because I was required to work outside of my comfort zone. Through the class I opened up to new experiences and challenges and gained an understanding of the diversity in leadership styles that are present in the world.

Outside of classes, the students are responsible for a group project and an individual project. For our group project we went to the Salvation Army and helped with different tasks such as sorting clothes, cleaning, and feeding the hungry. It was an immensely positive experience because we were helping those in need while we learned

how to work together in groups. We also learned about each other as more than just classmates.

My individual project tested me multiple times. This was the hardest part of the class for me because there were no guidelines or stipulations attached to this project. Each student had to come up with his or her own idea and go about their project in their own ways. I was very apprehensive about this because, as I learned in class, I am a person that likes to have procedures spelled out for me so that I know I am doing the job correctly. I kept thinking, what if I can't come up with any ideas? Or when I do, what if they aren't good enough? I soon understood that it did not matter whether or not I succeeded or if I had the best idea. The purpose was to allow me to learn about myself and the different problems and situations that would be presented to me.

With no limits I had no idea where to start, so I thought about the things I enjoy. I have always loved animals a great deal so I decided that my project should revolve around them in some way. As I continued analyzing my interests, I decided that I would like to help improve the quality of life for dogs that live in shelters. I started by working with a shelter in Cincinnati, OH, that already had such a program. I gathered information and learned as much as possible about how this program worked until I felt confident that I could successfully present this idea to the Lexington Humane Society. When I did bring the information to the Lexington society, it was received with great enthusiasm and the program will be implemented soon.

Through working on this project I was able to apply the skills that I learned about in class. I had a great sense of accomplishment, not only because the Lexington Humane Society received my idea, but also because I was able to work through the difficulties that

this project entailed. I realized how much work goes into a project like this and I was able to tackle it and come out victorious. I worked through the frustration of not having any set rules from the instructors and I saw first hand just what one person is able to do.

Overall ELI was an amazing experience. I was not always happy with the way things went because the sessions made me realize my flaws and bad habits. However, I was not left knowing what was wrong without knowing how to fix it. I gained the skills and knowledge to be able to improve myself. The lessons learned are invaluable and will be with me throughout my life. I was very apprehensive before entering this class, but I have come out with the confidence to take on leadership roles that I would have never considered before.