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Emerging Leader Institute

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More Than Just a Class

The Emerging Leader Institute is a class unlike any other. I became familiar with so many interesting concepts, beliefs and important information to apply to real life situations. In addition, I loved how we never took any notes. I felt this was an important aspect to the class because I always gave my full attention to the material. I was not bombarded by the pressures of “getting everything down” in preparation for a future test or quiz. Also, I devoted my time and efforts to the development of my individual leadership project. In all, the Emerging Leader Institute was a unique and challenging experience that forced me to leave my comfort zone and stretch my limits. The following are some reflections that have impacted me throughout the semester.

Again, a true learning experience I got out of the class was my individual leadership project. Each month into the semester, I endured both challenging and exciting tasks concerning my project. Also, I feel I matured as a person because I had to undergo many difficulties along the way. In fact, I am a better person due to the hardship I faced. It was during this difficult time where I learned the most. For example, it was frustrating because my project kept changing over the course of the semester. I was overwhelmed by the freedom and leeway at my disposal. Therefore, I had no idea what I wanted to focus on for my individual project. To help me make my decision, I tried to find something personal to me. As my starting point, I wanted to interact with children. I have always enjoyed working with kids. Also, my grandfathers were very important people in my life and I wanted to do something to honor them. With all of this in mind, I decided to volunteer at the University of Kentucky Children’s Hospital. In conjunction, I

wanted to work with a local elementary school. I proposed the idea Elementary students be paired with a patient at University of Kentucky Hospital to visit that child once a week in hopes for a great friendship and bond.

One of the main reasons I chose this objective was because my grandfathers were in a hospital for a long time. I came into contact with much sadness with the many patients they became friends with. I wanted to make a difference by establishing a personal relationship between the elementary students and patients. One of the biggest problems I encountered was jumpstarting the project. On numerous occasions, people would simply not call me back. When the few administrators did return my calls, no one approved my idea.

Unfortunately, I am a person who likes to do things my way and I learned that can not always be the case. With this experience, I learned how to become more flexible and accepting of other people's ideas.

At the mid-point of the semester, my project had manifested into something different. I decided to make Christmas favors for the residents. Most positively, while organizing my plan, I certainly feel I strengthen my personal goals. For example, my sense of patience was tested. This skill had been enhanced because of the challenges I encountered. As I mentioned, it was very frustrating when my phone calls were not returned or I simply got a flat out proposal rejection. I felt as though I was wasting my time with certain people. This was especially true when I was trying to "sell" my idea to people. Sadly, I was not able to work with patients on a one-to-one contact basis. However, my experience working secondhand with Cardinal Hill has been helpful and progressive toward my patience and initiative skills. I quickly learned to have an appreciation for other people's time and needs. Due to my sometimes frustrating instances, I learned how to manage my time more efficiently and productively. Nevertheless, the biggest mistake I feel I had made was being too ambitious with my project. For example, I tried to call volunteer programs who would accept my project ideas while I should have worked around their needs and requirements. I wasted much of time and efforts. I would have liked to have been more productive. At the very end of my project, I was satisfied with the ending results. Looking

back, I not only improved on my leadership abilities, but I made numerous contacts I never thought I could carry out. I talked to numerous hospital administrators, principles and executives to help me work through my ideas. Furthermore, I was happy I accomplished something worthy to positively affect the patients at Cardinal Hill. Although I never got to see through my one-on-one contact basis goal, I feel I made a difference to those 100 individuals who received my gift baskets. Overall, this project was the best learning experience I got out of the class because I improved on many skills I never thought I had. I became more patient, confident, productive and personable, to just name a few. Another aspect to the class I enjoyed was our eclectic group. Everyone in the class was different. Whether it may be their background, race or religion, every person was unique and added a new flavor to our circle. For example, coming from Cleveland, I learned much about different cultures and social class based on different individual's hometowns. Many people came from small areas. I learned not everyone has the opportunity to go to college. It is certainly a privilege to be able to attend. In addition, diversity in the classroom offered for various types of opinions and thoughts. Many times, when someone would make a comment I would discover something new from their responses. The people in our class developed a sense of consideration and reflection for all opinions. I was truly thankful to be meshed with such a unique and interesting group of people. Also, I benefited from the service project we had to perform at Sunbridge Rehabilitation Center. For me, I have had little interaction with older individuals. I have always felt very uncomfortable being around the sickness and despair of hospitals. Therefore, I certainly had to stretch my limits in this uncomfortable situation. When our class was organizing and planning the service project, I was very hesitant and skeptical towards the idea. Yet, I realized I would grow as a person if I involved myself in something I have never done before. When we arrived, I was extremely uncomfortable but soon after, I started to enjoy myself. Most of the residents were welcoming and happy to see some new and fresh faces; it truly made all the difference. In fact, many of the residents indicated they rarely had any visitors. I came to understand I had a purpose with those

individuals. I was made a small impact in their lives. I do not think they will forget the day our class came to give them a party. The Sunbridge project developed my sense of leadership because I became more confident in myself and in my abilities. I was weary about going to help the patients but I learned I was helping them and made a great impression in their day.

Learning about my own personal leadership style has profited my leadership development, too. I was originally skeptical about its accuracy. However, taking the quiz served to teach us about all the differences in leadership styles. After taking the test, I found out I was a high "S" and "C." An "S" which stands for "steadiness" is very true to my personality. Some qualities I can sincerely relate to include, performing in a consistent, predictable manner, demonstrating patience, helping others, showing loyalty, being a good listener and creating a stable work environment. I connect to these qualities considerably. Educating myself with how to efficiently work with these specific qualities, I developed a more productive personality and working ability.

As for my "C" qualities, I am a very conscientious person. I put forth an emphasis on working conscientiously within existing circumstances to ensure quality and accuracy. For example some of my tendencies include, adhering to key directives and standards, concentrating on key details, thinking analytically: weighing pros and cons and using subtle or indirect approaches to conflict. To be more effective as a leader, I need to plan carefully, know exact job descriptions and performance objectives, receive specific feedback and develop tolerance for conflict. One of the most important details I still need to work on is to develop a tolerance for conflict. I am extremely passive-aggressive and avoid all types of conflict in almost every situation. Learning about conflict and how to manage certain decisions and actions has helped me in the long run. Although I still need to strongly enhance these skills, the class has given me information and the opportunity to make situations less stressful. I am more confident in my skills and my abilities to handle a compromising situation.

Overall, the Emerging Leader Institute was a great experience for me. I learned about such interesting information and feel I am a better person because of it.

Due to my newfound leadership skills and traits, I plan to make the following commitments. One, I am planning on being a peer mentor next semester. I hope to help other students develop their projects and ideas the way my mentors helped me. Secondly, I am hoping to take a leadership position within my sorority, Alpha Gamma Delta. I would also like to organize a philanthropy event, joining our sorority with an African-American sorority. I feel racial inter-relations is a grave problem at the University of Kentucky and I would like to propose a change. I am thankful for the opportunities I had available to me and I hope other students will realize the importance leadership plays in our everyday lives. Hence, the Emerging Leader Institute is more than just a three credit class. ELI has changed me for the better.