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ELI Final Paper

Making Lemonade Out of Lemons

When I began my Emerging Leader Institute experience, I realized that this was not going to be like any other leadership program that I attended. This class would not be leadership training focused on a model of leadership or some scientific study but instead it would be a study of my own leadership style and how I apply it to my daily life. Over the years, through a variety of leadership positions and programs, I have developed a distinct leadership style that has combined my strengths of communications, conflict resolution, and teamwork skills into helping me solve a variety of problems in both the academic and community settings. However, I realized through ELI that a leader must be willing to change no matter what situation that they are placed in. Therefore, my paper will examine how I have changed and evolved to take the difficulties of situation or lemons and turned them into lemonade.

My first lemon or difficulty during my experience with ELI was adjusting to the different schedules of the other individuals in my mentoring group. After many hours of negotiation and calendar flipping, my group finally decided on a time to meet. Every Sunday night at 10:00 PM we would gather to learn about each others projects and to expand our knowledge on leadership. This was difficult at first because I was always so exhausted at the end of a long weekend of homework and extracurricular activities. At times throughout the semester, I wondered how I kept my eyelids open during our mentoring times. However, I realized over time that no matter how tired I was I looked forward to going to my mentoring group each Sunday at 10:00 PM. Whether it was Lance Brunner's soothing voice reminding me to be mindful of what I was

learning or one of my mentoring group members joking with me about something I said realized that ELI was not about changing the world but more importantly it was about helping people reach their full potential. Through the help of my mentoring group, I was able to understand that being a leader involved helping each individual in the group feel comfortable enough to share their ideas along with pushing them to think outside the box. By gradually being pushed outside of my comfort zone, I was able to improve my skills not only in teamwork building with my mentoring group but also learn the importance of being flexible when working with others.

For those of you who don't know me I have always enjoyed the art of conversation. As long as I can remember, I have always liked to talk and share an opinion or thought on the world around me. However, at times in my leadership career I have realized that listening can be a powerful tool in analyzing a solution to a particular problem or issue. I also noted that at times in group settings I had a tendency to talk too much and by doing so I alienated individuals around me thus creating a lemon. Through the class sessions on conflict mediation and mindfulness, I was able to learn about the importance of listening in order to resolve conflict in group settings and be respectful of others' opinions. By being able to listen first I have found that I have been able to gain valuable insight into a situation and make others feel comfortable sharing their ideas.

The third and final difficulty or lemon that I learned from ELI is learning to make time for my individual leadership project. As ELI went on I began to set time aside for my individual leadership project because I became excited about the impact I was going to make. Through helping educate individuals about the importance of agriculture and disability awareness in our society I was able through ELI to tie two initiatives that I was passionate about together. By being able to work on a program or initiative that I was excited about made the class enjoyable and something I will remember for many years to come.

Through understanding the difficulties or lemons that I faced in ELI I am hopeful that you will be able to understand how I have changed as an individual. However, I feel that I should take this self examination one step further by sharing with you my individual leadership project, and how it made it an impact on how I will handle future leadership projects.

During my time in ELI, I found my individual leadership project to be the most enjoyable. The reason I found this to be the most enjoyable was because I was given the choice to pick a topic that I was interested in and develop a plan of action that fit my personality and challenged my leadership style. For my individual leadership project I focused on working with the Kentucky AgrAbility Program. This program works with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service towards helping farmers make a sustainable living if they have a disability. Not only would this leadership project allow me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of agriculture but it also would allow me the ability to use my skills in helping plan a marketing campaign to help promote this program campus wide.

As a result of working the Kentucky AgrAbility I have been able to expand my network of community and career contacts for the future. I also have begun to create a disability resource file for students with disabilities to learn about different disability initiatives throughout UK along with across the nation. This project has been exciting because I have found that a new energy has developed on campus to increase opportunities for individuals with disabilities. I am hopeful next semester that I will be able to help create a marketing campaign involving all of the community partners that I worked with including a new brochure along with updating the Kentucky AgrAbility website. I also will work with the UK Disability Resource Center to create spreadsheets that are categorized under career development, disability legislation, and mobility

and recreational opportunities. By identifying that each individual can reach their full potential especially those with disabilities I feel that I am making a difference on the world around me.

As I conclude my reflection with ELI I want to share with you one more important lesson that I learned by visiting with Dr. Lee Todd, President of the University of Kentucky when he came to ELI this semester. President Todd discussed with our class the importance of becoming passionate about something in life. He shared with us the importance of each individual to not become complacent in our college careers but instead to become involved in one activity or organization while we are at UK. Additionally, he added that by becoming involved at UK each individual is able to experience the thrill of success but also be able to experience the disappointment of failure.

By being able to experience both success and failure then hopefully all of us will be able to be prepared for the harsh realities of the world after college. President Todd also helped me realize that as a servant leader I must motivate individuals to use their potential and talent not force them to do what I want just because I'm the person in charge. In addition to this important lesson he helped me recognize the importance of continuing to evolve and change and be willing to learn new and different perspectives from my own. Winston Churchill said this about acquiring knowledge and learning "If you have knowledge let others light their candles with it" I challenge you to share your knowledge about life and about leadership with others.

ELI gives you a prime opportunity to bring your talent to the table and to share with others what you have learned thus far as a leader. Robert Williams and Robert Frost through his poem "The Road Not Taken" help me share with you my final thoughts on this program. I wish you the best of success as you continue your career at the University of Kentucky and thank all those that help me throughout this semester through my participation in ELI.

Roger Williams

The greatest crime in the world is not developing your potential. When you do what you do best, you are helping not only yourself, but the world.

Robert Frost: The Road Not Taken (1915)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Quotes taken from the following websites with thanks:

Robert Williams:

<http://www.motivational-inspirational-corner.com/getquote.html?categoryid=94>

Winston Churchill:

<http://www.bestinspirationalquotes.com/success-leaders/winston-churchill.htm>

Robert Frost

http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/frost_road.html
Poem: