

ELI – Final Paper

My leadership philosophy has continued to grow and change throughout the past semester. I have come to recognize the importance many different aspects of leadership which I truly never considered all that important. I have adopted new ideas and styles from participation in E.L.I, student organizations, as well as other programs I am involved in. Moreover, I have discovered that the only way to develop your philosophy is experience.

I came to college with very little leadership background under my belt. I had participated in many athletic teams and experienced leadership on the playing field, but never in any other type of way. In college I felt a much stronger need for involvement and participation in activities. I knew that in order to better prepare myself in the game of life, I needed to really challenge myself. My path of activities which started with joining a Fraternity in the Spring of 2003, eventually led me to admissions into the Emerging Leader Institute. Words can not describe what I have achieved this semester. Although quite often in my classes I feel that the course material has little or no purpose and use later down the road, I know that everyday in E.L.I. I would be able to take something with me to benefit me later in life.

Before I applied for E.L.I., I had a little idea of what it was about through friends who had taken it, as well as from faculty members who spoke highly of it. I honestly had

no idea what my participation in E.L.I. would be all about. Starting with orientation on the first day I really got to know my classmates. The class was much smaller than most I had taken and everyone was eager to talk and share things with one another. We then met our small group mentors who met with us throughout the semester once a week giving us encouragement, support, and insight. We also set a date for our group service project as well as went over the expectations of the class. One of the ground rules that really stood out to me was respect yourself and others ideas and perspectives as well as agreeing to disagree. This meant that there was no such thing as a bad idea nor a right or wrong opinion. This ensured that me that it was okay to step out of my comfort zone and express my thoughts without worrying about what others thought. This was essential since my E.L.I. experience would not have been what it is without the participation of each individual. One of the activities which really stood out to me was low ropes course. It was an activity we did early on in the semester and it was hard to say what would come of it. With the human knot, we were forced to work together with people we hardly knew and get un-tied without letting go of each others hands.. We also played a game of dodge ball in partners where one was blindfolded and the other acted as a guide. There were not many rules for each activity but the learning experience that came along with each had a purpose and relevance to leadership. Deciding on our group service project was an on going process. First, we were asked to research in the community for a need in a specific field. Each small group was assigned a field to research. My group researched children disabilities as well as needs of poor working class which included organizations like the Hope Center, Salvation Army, and God's Pantry. The each small group decided on a project to propose. There were many good ideas, and the decision was very difficult in

the end. Some of the ideas included a blood drive, high school – college expectations video, senior prom (retirement home), and Food Bank. The debate was very heated and since we could not decide on one, we did two. We decided to work at a Food Bank in the mourning, and then host a prom at Garden Ridge retirement home. I thought it was the best choice since who can really complain about serving our community that much more. Seems overwhelming, but it was amazing seeing the group collaborate and work together as a team, as well as getting hands on experience refining our leadership skills.

So what impact did E.L.I have on me? To sum it up, it was a truly remarkable experience in which I learned more about myself and my philosophy of leadership as well as the styles of others. I was able to identify my weaknesses as well as my strengths. I may have read the book over the summer in preparation for my National Fraternities Institute, but the material was covered for only 4 days. Can you imagine my gain from an entire semester? What was even more astounding is although the chapters and topics were the same to my previous conference, there was more time to discuss, reflect, and most importantly retain. Each class we would discuss the previous classes and echo the lessons so that we would actually have something to hold on to after the end of the semester. We discussed many topics from dealing with ethical issues, identifying what our values were, and encouraging others. I learned the importance of ethical decision making in one of our classes when speakers came in and presented us with a couple of different scenarios. One issue discussed whether or not MP3 sharing should be made legal in the United States. Although I have mixed opinions, hearing other sides of the issue from my classmates forced me to think outside the box. Another lesson which really struck me hard was enabling others to act. One weakness I was able to identify

was my problem with putting pressure on my self to execute goals. I was stuck in a mind set where the only person I would trust was myself. This made me realize that its okay to take risks and to allow others to take on tasks. You may not be successful, but you must always remember to reflect and ask yourself “what can we learn from this.” I could relate this to my position in my Fraternity as social chairman. I put pressure on myself to put together date parties, and formal, etc. Because a lot of older members had a history of dropping the ball I was afraid to delegate. I was also afraid to give new and younger members very much responsibility. I realized that it was about time I took a risk and not stressed out so much. As a result, I delegated an event 100% to one of my brothers. He took on the responsibility and succeeded! It felt good to see others succeed as well as take some weight off my shoulders. This reminded me how just because you have a position of title, doesn't mean that others can't be leaders in themselves. Throughout the semester I can't even begin to talk about all the different areas and topics I have learned and touched upon. What enhanced my experience was the class was not simply limited to our book, but also included frequent speakers and discussion on current issue and the many leadership observations we noticed. Even with the election this semester there was a lot to say about what styles each candidate portrayed and what some of their strengths and weaknesses were.

Because of my experience I now have a close group of friends who shared the same experience with me, but also feel the same passion about leadership as I do. I notice that people often fail to recognize how much the people around you can influence your decisions and actions. Because of this experience I have been able to take in many different perspectives and styles from others in my class which now makes up my own. I

can now set goals and plans for my future development as a leader in everything I do. I know am able to manage plan the many processes of what my different goals may be. In many ways, along the same terms as setting a vision. I now have a better idea of how to asses many different decisions and road blocks that face me day to day, whether it's a small decision reflecting my own outcome, or the outcome of a large group such as my Fraternity. Overall, I am now much more aware of the impact of my choices and decisions I make as a leader. I will take all of this with me through the rest of college as well as life. Currently I hold a Chair position within my Fraternity as well as serve as Vice President of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Chapter at the University of Kentucky. My application of leadership however is not limited to the various organizations I am involved in. Because anyone can be a leader, I will use my skills as a husband, an employee, as well as a father.

I know my leadership philosophy will continue to change, because that is the way the world works today. Without change, we are limited, and with limits we will never be able to achieve greater things. Because I can only become a better person and learn from experience, I will continue to challenge myself to take on new things and strive for nothing less than my best.