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Emerging Leader Institute

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With newly discovered enthusiasm I directed my web browser towards the Harvard Business School admissions page. I wanted to see for myself what Harvard Business School, one of the best MBA programs in the world, advised their hopeful future students to focus on while they were preparing for this rigorous program. I found three criteria: “Leadership Potential, Strong Academic Ability, and Personal Qualities and Characteristics”. At the point in time that I read these criteria, I had no idea what these words would drive me to do; specifically, “Leadership Potential” inspired me to eventually apply for the Emerging Leader Institute, a program I thought myself not likely to be admitted to. Back then I had no idea what I was trying to sign up for. Now that I have fully participated in this extraordinary opportunity, I see myself as still not having fully realized where this fantastic experience will lead me.

A year ago I found myself undergoing one of the biggest changes in my life. In November 2004, I came to understand the value and impact of knowledge and education. College is an incredible experience that should be soaked up in every capacity possible. This was not my attitude over the previous two semesters during which I carelessly achieved a meager GPA while being minimally involved in campus life. I spent my time doing what I loved, skydiving, kayaking and climbing while at the same time failing a math class and only partially attending the rest of my classes. For an aspiring successful person, my resume seemed almost comically inadequate.

It was during finals week that I realized how much beneficial knowledge there is to be gained in the world and how college is the perfect place to do exactly this. I promised myself that over the next year I would try much harder to improve myself in every way possible. I signed up for more classes and became active in many student organizations. I changed jobs to a more personally developing environment and decided to take advantage of one of the best classes I have had so far, the Emerging Leader Institute.

After a year of growing and progressing through many stages of intellectual and personal development, I have now arrived at a perfect vantage point to analyze my progress. One of the most formative experiences over the last year, in combination with several other factors, has undoubtedly been the Emerging Leader Institute. This class has helped me to move closer to the person I aspire to be, and without this opportunity I would have been left far behind. Through applying what I learned in class directly to the organizations and opportunities I am involved in, I was able to engrave in my experience the leadership tactics, styles and thought patterns that shape a successful leader. The things I learned in this class will stay with me for the rest of my life.

There were many tidbits and little revelations that I will remember for a long time to come such as: “If you don’t ask, they can’t say yes”. Dr. Holbein explained his point very thoroughly through allowing us to learn what he was trying to communicate in a practical way. So did Mr. Nazario-Colon when he emphasized his views on credibility by playing a game of “mafia” with us. Animated and engaged speakers such as Mr. Thuringer expressed himself clearly and engraved his lesson in my mind by using himself as an example of communication styles. These little lessons will inevitably be

remembered throughout the various situations that I will undoubtedly encounter as I pass through life. But the impact of this class will be much more than a few lessons.

Even though I am somewhat suspicious of the results of personality tests, the positive effects of doing these tests in a class full of other college students and then discussing the results openly is not something that can be disputed. One of the biggest and most important lessons that I took from the Emerging Leader Institute was the impact of interacting with different people with different personalities. We all know that leading is not doing something by yourself but rather inspiring others to follow suit. By understanding different personalities and the resultant leadership styles you enable yourself to do a much more effective job as a leader. Connecting this experience with the lesson of the different views of leadership I am now able to be much more aware of the differences that exist in our society in regards to leadership and how to address them.

Being in a very informal class where discussion is the norm allowed for all the students to learn from each other's perspectives. Everyone has a different experience behind them and therefore a unique view on the many topics we discussed. Allowing for everyone to share these viewpoints made for a very open minded environment where enlightenment and increased understanding was the goal. This in itself was a great way to illustrate the situations we will face once we leave college and enter the real world.

Learning through an informal classroom environment is great, but being to apply it practically makes for a much more effective learning experience. Through our discussions in our mentor groups as well as the projects some did and some are planning, we all were able to apply what we learned directly to a real situation. This creates an active learning environment where students will remember what they learned at the same

time as doing something beneficial in their local community. The Individual Leadership projects allows for each student to learn individually and do their own thing, while the group project presented a whole different set of experiences. Students who learned, discussed and interacted together were able to apply, in a team, what they had learned. I can think of no better way to engrave the lessons learned into a student's experience.

Through the variety of topics we covered throughout a semester of classes I learned a lot of definitions in terms of leadership. I came to understand the leadership perspective when we discussed topics like inspiration, motivation, vision, ethics and communication. I would never have had such a thorough idea in my mind of what these terms meant and how they applied to leadership had I not gone through the Emerging Leader Institute.

At the beginning of 2005 I was excited to embark on a personal challenge. I had a goal to work hard for a year, to challenge myself and become a better person. Two weeks away from the end of 2005 I look back over my experience and see many positive learning experiences. In some cases I succeeded, in others I failed horribly. Whether the experience resulted in a success or a failure, my goal was the same. I aimed to overcome, learn and apply. Casting my thoughts back over all the tasks that I attempted and the goals that I aimed for, I realize how much I learned.

College is a perfect place to learn, it is a place where information is abundant and knowledge is everywhere. But we have to remember, and I would argue that every prospective student needs to be told that college is not only place where you get a degree, but much more importantly it is the experience where you receive an education. If you

open up your mind and allow yourself to experience the full breadth of college, you find yourself learning from many sources.

When I looked back at webpage that Harvard presents to aspiring students, I noticed an interesting element that I didn't pay much attention to the first time around. Besides focusing on becoming a better and more effective leader, I also improved my academic scores and knowledge. But Harvard also takes a third element into consideration, an element that I was fortunate enough to develop without direct focus: "Personal Qualities and Characteristics". I realize now, that the first two elements springs forth from the third, and that I have successfully improved myself in all three aspects.

Over the last year, a few words inspired me to become motivated and attempt much more than I would have otherwise. A few opportunities that I was presented with enabled me to experience unparalleled experiences that taught me many things I never would have known otherwise. As a result, a few people crossed my path that influenced me in the right direction and focused my attention on specific factors that allowed me to become a better person. The Emerging Leader Institute, the instructors who presented their topics, the mentor leaders who gave their input and the classmates who argued, expressed and discussed with each other, all allowed me to become a better leader. As a result of the Emerging Leader Institute and its accompanying experiences, I will go on in my college career and beyond as a different person, aiming to improve, change and challenge other's lives wherever I go.