

The Philosophy of a Leader: A Personal Look at the
Emerging Leader Institute

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Reflections of the Emerging Leader Institute

Robert Francis Kennedy once said, “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.” These wise words were the idea that I struggled most to understand in my experience in the Emerging Leader Institute. First, however, I think it best to explain to my audience where the root of my struggles with this idea lies. My name is Aryn Lee, and I am the most cautious person you will ever meet. From an early age, I have always thought it best to leave zero room for error. As long as I can remember, I have done things the right way because that is how it always was and how it always seemed to work. Even with my new point of view I still find myself wanting to stick with the tried and true, but as a member of the Emerging Leader Institute I was challenged to be innovative and step outside my comfort zone.

My most trying time with the Emerging Leader Institute was when our class collectively chose a nursing home as our group service project. I believe I started losing sleep the day we made that decision. To explain most simply, working with the elderly is something I avoid at all costs. It is not because I find these people to be frightening; it is simply the fact that my eyes immediately fill with tears every time I enter such a place. My comfort zone would have been to choose another group to target with our service project such as the homeless or underprivileged children. It has always been my belief that there are people in this world that are wonderful at working with people in nursing homes and that there is a special place in Heaven for them. I am not one of these people. However, I worked up my nerve and held back my tears and entered Hamburg Healthcare with a smile on my face. I didn't just step outside my comfort zone, I leaped!

Initially, being there was very hard. All I wanted to do was leave and cry, but I didn't. I vowed to myself that I would get through it, and enjoy it. I did exactly that. I was paired with a man that could not speak. I at first wasn't even sure if he could understand what I was saying. Regardless, I did his crafts for him, covered his Bingo card with chips, and let him pick out his prizes when his Bingo card was a winner. At the end of the day, the nurse walked up to him and told him to show me where his room was. He stood up and waited for me to follow. It was at that moment that I realized he had understood everything I talked to him about all day; he just couldn't show me. In a matter of seconds, my time there was made worthwhile.

I still can't say that I have a future in volunteering in nursing homes, but I can say beyond a shadow of a doubt that I experienced first hand the wonderful rewards that can come along with stepping outside one's comfort zone. As scary as it was at first, my experience with the Emerging Leader Institute has taught me, most importantly, that if you never take the risk, you may never see the reward.

My Personal Definition of Leadership

My time with the Emerging Leader Institute gave me the opportunity to learn about the evolution of various leadership approaches and where we find ourselves today when it comes to the idea of what leadership truly is. Our class looked at the benefits and disadvantages that each time period of leadership had to offer. From the "Great Man" approach to the ideas of "influential" leadership, leaders have made great strides in changing the ideas of leadership for the better.

We now find ourselves in the era of “Reciprocal” leadership. This philosophy defines itself as being a relational and shared process. It places great emphasis on “followership”. These ideas had great influence on developing my own personal definition of leadership. I believe that excellent leadership is creating positive change in the world around you and inspiring others to follow and advocate your ideas as well.

In greater detail, I believe leadership is all about the change you create, more specifically, the positive change you create. In my opinion, one not creating positive change does not deserve the title of “leader.” It is also important to remember that leadership does not happen alone. It is key to inspire and motivate others to see your vision and make them want to act and implement the same positive change as you. One must present his or her ideas in an enticing sort of way, so as to encourage others to be proactive as well.

The Core Principles That Influence A Leader

Now that I have found my true purpose as a leader, there are a few core principles that I vow to adhere to in all good works that I do. If I stick to these ideas, I know I will be successful in all of my endeavors. Principles important to me are to encourage others, be an example, and help those that can’t help themselves.

If you find a way to encourage others, you will never have to worry about acting alone. Though it may be difficult at times to share your vision with others, it is one of the most fundamental principles of leadership. Behind all successful leaders are an army of loyal supporters. When your goals aren’t always reached, it is important to have a group

to fall back on that will always be on your side. If you encourage and convince others to act, you will always find some level of support for all of your ideas.

I honestly vow to always set an example. After all, if I am not displaying my ideas of leadership at all times, why should I expect anyone else to take me seriously? From a survey taken with the Emerging Leader Institute, I found that I choose to lead by modeling the way. I believe that hits the nail on the head. I am “image conscious” at all times. I know the importance of always showing yourself in a favorable light. While no one is perfect, a person that is always viewed as having the best intentions will almost always be perceived favorably. I will always lead by example in my words and actions. While I might not always make the right choice or say exactly the right thing, I know others will find trust in me because I will create positive change through leading by example.

Helping those that are unable to help themselves is a core leadership principle that I will abide by the rest of my days. I have always believed that it is the responsibility of the fortunate to help those that are not. I exemplified my strong belief in this in my personal leadership project. I targeted a group that is truly helpless, animals. I then constructed a fundraiser to benefit animals in my community. I collaborated with the Lexington Humane Society, a non-profit service based organization that serves over 12,000 animals per year. I could not think of a better way to help the helpless than by giving to helpless animals.

I didn't just hold the fundraiser either, I found ways to model the way and encourage others to act as well. By working with the humane society I was given the opportunity to participate in their largest fundraising event of the year. It was a James

Bond themed gala ball called, “The Spay Who Loved Me”. I was lucky enough to be asked to participate in the event as a “Bond Girl”. I was given retro-hair and 60’s themed clothing and was able to help auction off different donated items to benefit Lexington’s Humane Society. Not only did I have a good time, I was able to benefit a cause that is very close to my heart as well.

I was given the opportunity to encourage others in my public speaking course to act as well. I decided to give my persuasive speech over the benefits of spaying and neutering. I was given the floor to encourage others to act and I was very well received. Passion breeds passion. I will continue to help the helpless as long as I am able to volunteer.

I Am a Leader: A Look Within

I am a leader. It isn’t something that happened overnight or something that I woke up one morning and decided to become. As a leader I am proactive, interactive, decisive, exemplary, and a newly found innovator. It is the result of years of cultivation, trials, errors, and decisions. But I can now say confidently that I have found the leader within myself.

Becoming proactive and interactive was simple. I felt the desire to create positive change around me and I felt that I could interact with others and encourage them to do the same. I began being proactive by simply setting a good example and have been able to advance that into creating service projects and holding positions of leadership at my school. I interact with my peers and encourage them to do the same.

Above all I am an exemplary leader. I understand the importance of creating a positive image for oneself, but more importantly, I understand how important it is to

actually practice what you preach. I try at all times to act like the leader I know myself to be. Having strong credibility is key and one false move could cost you everything. I keep that simple fact in mind in all that I do and so far it has worked wonderfully. If you can remember to think before you act, your decisions will more likely be appropriate and well grounded.

As I mentioned before, innovation was never high on my list of things to implement in my career as a leader. Fortunately, I took the risk, tried something new, and reaped the rewards. That positive experience has set my future as an innovative leader into motion. I no longer fear trying something new, but look forward to what the experience can do for me as a leader.

In the end, I wouldn't do anything differently. I believe every experience I have had as a leader has influenced me becoming the successful leader I am today. Without these experiences, I may have never had the opportunity to learn so much. I look forward to sharing my knowledge and skill as a leader with the world.