

Before starting the Emerging Leader Institute my idea of a leader was based on people that I had learned about in my other classes. I knew that Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi, and President Bush were all leaders, but I never thought about what made them that way. Now I know that you do not have to be in a position of high status to be a leader. A leader to me is person who has a vision and uses their own skills to guide and motivate others towards change. You do not have to be the President of the United States to be a leader. I believe that I am a leader and I am just a 20 year old sophomore at the University of Kentucky who attempted to improve campus accessibility.

Coming into ELI, I had no idea what to expect from the class. I will admit now that looking back on it I was horrified when I walked in on the first day and saw a lot of people I did not know. Then, I quickly realized that I was expected to immediately stand up in front of them and tell them about myself. It might not have been the most comfortable first impression of the class, but I know now that to be a good leader you have to embrace awkward situations and make the most of them.

When I finally got passed that first awkward day I began to realize just how interesting the people in my class were. When I look back on all of the classes where we discussed leadership, I realize that as a leader one thing you must always have is support. A supportive group of followers keeps you motivated and helps you get through obstacles when you need them. That is exactly what the class represented to me. In particular, my small group was the most helpful. Besides making the class more entertaining with their

unique and individual personalities, my small group really did help me. During my project they listened to the problems I was facing and helped me overcome them. For example, when I told them I was having trouble getting in contact with newspaper editors on campus to do a story on campus accessibility they offered their own connections to assist me. McKenzie offered to place me in the Women's Place Newsletter, which really helped to spread the word about my goals for the project. Ben also gave me a lot of contacts that were useful, and went as far as to send me accessibility maps from other campuses he found during his project's research. Even though my group may have believed they only did a small favor for me they actually helped me carry out my project and I really appreciated their support. It affirmed my beliefs that you can't take big ideas on by yourself. You have to reach out for other people to get the job done more efficiently because most likely people will have the resources to help you reach your goal as a leader.

When I started this class in the fall I was not totally oblivious to the ideas of leadership. I had held many leadership positions in high school because of my involvement in Girl Scouts and the school newspaper. During my senior year of high school I completed my Girl Scout Gold Award, was Features Editor of the newspaper, and Vice President of FCCLA. I enjoyed taking charge of these projects during high school with the help of friends and teachers. Having their assistance was so helpful to me, but it also hurt me as well. When I got to campus I quickly realized that I was not going to have my best friends and teachers to support me all the time. I was going to have to step out of the box and build new connections with others on my own. I must admit that it was not the easiest transition for me, but it did help me to become a better leader. As a

result of my stepping outside the box I completed a leadership project to improve campus accessibility. I can't take all the credit because I did have the help of others, but I do get the satisfaction of knowing that I took the initiative to get out there and build those connections.

This project made me feel a lot more connected to the campus as a whole because I had to go out on my own and find the resources to complete my project. If I am honest with myself then I would admit that I would have never gone to the Disability Resource Center if it was not for this project. I also would have never tried to get in touch with someone from the Kentucky Kernel. I originally thought that it was going to be disastrous trying to plan a leadership project from scratch, but it ended up being successful. I believe that people were not going to be receptive to my ideas when in reality many of them were very enthusiastic and willing to help. It made me realize that if you are passionate in your vision then other people will be passionate as well.

The core principle that influences my efforts as a leader is the desire to help others. When I see people that are in need of something my heart goes out to them and I want to help them in any way possible. In the case of my leadership project, my heart went out to Tiffany Witt because I saw her struggles to get around campus in her wheelchair. I felt that it was very unjust that the leaders of this campus pride themselves on making UK a Top 20 school and some of their students can not even get to class on time because the campus is not accessible. This thought motivated my desire to help others even more because I believe that each person on this campus should have an equal chance to learn. If you pay the money and have the heart then you should not be robbed of the opportunity for a higher education.

This class also helped me to identify who I was as a leader. I know now that I do not like to force people to invest in my ideas. I feel that if you force someone to do something then it is not what they truly believe in. They will not be dependable or reliable unless you make your vision important to them. I prefer the challenge of persuading people and selling them my ideas. If you have the skills to get them engaged then they will stick by you and your vision. This is an important idea to me because as a leader I enjoy working with a group of people rather than taking on all the responsibilities by myself. Having a team that is on the same page as you is the key to success. With team of leaders I feel you can accomplish so much more in a shorter period of time. It also allows for improvement of an idea because of the variety of different viewpoints. A concept that we touched on many times during this class is the idea that just because something has always been done a certain way does not necessarily mean it's the best way. I feel that a group of leaders would be more likely to challenge the process to create that positive change. Now, looking back on my project I realize that I should have used more people to challenge the process. Instead of just me going to the Disability Resource Center to pitch my ideas I should have had other students express their opinions as well. People would most likely be more receptive to the ideas of many versus the ideas of one person.

With all the improvements I have made as a leader this semester there are still some improvements that still need to be made. I feel that one of my prominent weaknesses as a leader is taking risks. Taking on a project from scratch in a city that you are not familiar with can be very stressful. You have to put yourself and your ideas out there for others to evaluate, but you can not be afraid about the outcome. If you want

your vision to be successful then you do have to get out there and do things you would not normally do. You will probably feel intimidated and scared, but most of the time if you take risk then there will be a reward. That reward might not be immediately apparent, but at the very least you stepped out of the box and took a risk and that is already an accomplishment.

Wayne Gretzky is famous for his quote that says, “You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take.” This is relevant to my personal leadership belief because all good actions start with taking a risk. In my eyes it is what leadership is all about. Without risk there can be no change and no change means that the world will become a very boring place. Many people feel that they might not have the skills to be a leader. They might trick themselves into thinking that a leader is someone with great power, only people that are elected into a position by the majority can be leaders, or that it is necessarily to have a long list of credentials to lead. Sure, there are some skills that could improve your credibility as a leader, but for the most part if you have the heart and initiative then anyone can be a leader.