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Plain Vanilla

University of Illinois professor Brian Wansink once said in a personality study, “You are not only what you eat, you also are what you slurp.” In an essay, he linked different soup preferences to personality types. According to Wansink, if you take a liking to chicken noodle soup, you are a church goer, fond of pets, and stubborn. Minestrone delegated you in a physically fit group, family spirited, no pet, and nutritionally conscience. If you like vegetable, you’re a homebody, and if you prefer tomato soup, like me, you “stomach” adventure, are more likely to be social, and like books and pets.....rightfully so.

If Professor Wansink can compare your personality to your soup preference, then I’ll have to compare ice cream to Leadership, and just like I *know* I’m more of a leader than I was yesterday, I’m pretty sure I wasn’t born liking plain Vanilla.

That’s how I’ve perceived Leadership, and the progressing theory that I have developed in the last semester. My leadership abilities have evolved, improved, shifted, and changed in the last year, to the final point of realizing those abilities, and the form that they take through me. The first ice cream I tried was plain vanilla, the original and traditional flavor, king of all ice creams. Eventually though, out of curiosity, or what some people may consider boredom, I tried strawberry. Probably its pink color. It is then that I realized I might just enjoy something with nuts, or cookie dough, or maybe

even a peanut butter flavor. Out of every kind of ice cream I've tried, and after 21 years of trying, searching, inventing (mixing flavors of course) I've discovered that I like chocolate. Not only that, I am convicted enough to tell you that I'm a double-chocolate swirl type of girl. If you don't like it, I'll convince you. Tom Peters once said, "Leaders don't create more followers, they create more leaders." I'll convince you when you know what ice cream you like, you'll run with it. A person who is running never lacks followers.

If you try to define what a leader is, go ahead and try. Just don't try to *agree* on what a leader is. Some may say that what makes a leader is their ability to influence people. Some may say it's those with action and not position. Even others will agree that having leadership says that you are one that is born not made—and you will be quickly disputed by those who believe they are made not born. You have seen quiet people, loud people, funny people, and busy people be exceptional leaders. According to Dwight Eisenhower, "Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." Napoleon Bonaparte said that "A leader is a dealer in hope." Even Theodore M. Hesburgh has his own opinion, "The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision, you can't blow an uncertain trumpet." But how do you define something that is so vast, and so *undefined*? What I've found is that every leader has one thing in common and it isn't a personality trait and it isn't a certain accomplishment or action, the one thing in common simply defines a leader: all leaders have followers.

It was probably a trip to Sea World in Indiana when I first tried plain vanilla. Mom bought me a cone at a concession stand. At age three, you can probably imagine

what kind of fun ice cream is. There's a very nice candid photo of me taking that cone and proceeding to get it all over my face. Well, mom, mission accomplished I like ice cream. It probably wasn't until elementary school that I developed a leadership skill or two. It happened at the spelling bee, done in front of the whole school. I won, after spelling the highly difficult m-u-s-i-c, and with all of my other friends that I competed against started a Spelling Club. We competed at every school bee, locally and in the district, and also took our skills to the local 4-H competition. Just plain vanilla.

Leaders are made not born. This is my philosophy. The only reason that I stand strong by this statement is the fact that I have become more of leader in the past two years than I was for the rest of my life, just because I know my strengths and I've begun to use them. President John F. Kennedy even said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable towards each other." In Emerging Leader institute I've discovered that I respond to praise, I like to lead by example, and that I place social acceptance at high importance. I've discovered I *influence* people by optimism, positive attitude, and enthusiasm. Before ELI, this was an underlying notion that I had. It wasn't something that I *knew*. I've been in charge of group projects and tried to delegate jobs authoritatively, I've tried to do things all by myself, and I've had the belief that your position is your power—only to discover that these simply aren't true. My leadership abilities lie directly under my enthusiasm and passion for something. Its action that makes leaders, not position, or ability to boss, or how organized and multi tasking you are. Peter F. Drucker, a writer, management consultant and university professor from Vienna Austria has written over 35 novels. He was awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom by George W. Bush in 2002, and is considered by experts in business and

academia as the founding father of management. From his great accomplishments and findings, he very simply defines leadership: “Effective leadership is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results, not attributes.” It directly corresponds with my views: there are many things you can be known *as*, but there are fewer things that you can be known for *doing*. Those are what make me a leader.

For a significant period of time in middle school I thoroughly enjoyed cookies and cream. I had tried it awhile back and it was surprisingly better than my favorite coffee or strawberry flavors. Lots of sugar, and the more little bits of dough, the better. Anytime you asked what I wanted while on trips to Grater’s, don’t worry, and don’t ask. That’s what I liked. In middle school I remember being in charge of a History project on Spain. My two group members were unfortunately lackluster in work ethic. I delegated and bossed and was stern the whole time. Surprising to me, not much was accomplished and the night before I finished it, *my way*. The boys might’ve worked if they had experienced an ounce of fun. They didn’t want to work for me and it was obvious. I spent 8th grade year not being voted to any leadership positions but being the second hand helper to my best friend who was president....of everything. Needless to say, I’m not up for cookie dough so much anymore.

The last two summers have played important roles in my definition of leadership. I know what kind of leader I am, however it’s not my general definition. Every leader isn’t going to be an influencer, a salesman. My first summer, I followed. My student managers modeled the way, working hard with a great attitude. It motivated me and I responded well. During my role as a student manager summer two, I found that honesty and attitude would take me far. I started out the summer with just attitude. I was doing

one of the hardest sales jobs you can think of for a college student, but I pretended like it was the most exciting thing in the world. I bounced out of bed, muttered positive self talk every morning at breakfast, was kind to everyone I met, and went to bed with a smile on my face. My less than super excited roommate, a first year, portrayed the opposite attitude. Disgusted, discouraged, annoyed, and wanting to quit. I found that to be a good leader for her, I would have to be honest with her—she liked brutal honesty. I then showed that even if selling books wasn't my favorite thing in the world, if I joked about it and was still positive even though I agreed—it's not fun—she responded wonderfully. Her summer sales increased rapidly because she realized I was someone who modeled the way, but was still in her shoes: I get frustrated and tired, and I push on. In all of this fight, I realized that being able to adapt to different people was an amazing breakthrough in my leadership abilities. If I can be a leader by adapting what I know best to people who respond differently I've proved a GREAT thing! I can *listen* to people! I can pay attention to their successes, and not my own! An unknown person, (and for that reason decidedly humble) once said, "A good leader inspires others with confidence in him; a great leader inspires them with confidence in themselves." This quote illustrates my belief of what leadership is: great leadership is one who seeks the best for those he serves.

Once in college, I quickly became known as the girl who always smiled. I can get a room excited about green beans for dessert with the right attitude. I have motivated my best friend to get better grades, I've been elected different leadership positions, which are unprecedented experiences. They are all small steps, but I know how to make followers,

and I think that I can create leaders. Whoever said anything about plain vanilla? I'm a double chocolate swirl kind of girl.