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### Leading the Way

A leader is an example of so many different things and encompasses the characteristics of so many different people. However, it is easy to see who leaders are and to be able to select them out of our workplaces, school settings and groups that we participate in. Leaders can be so easily recognized because they are the individuals that influence what we are apart of and actively participate to unite the individuals of the group together. Yet, there is no “right” way to be a leader because each individual has their own traits and leading abilities that influence how they perform tasks and the way that they lead others. Whether leadership is a trait that you are born with, a skill that is created by circumstance or gained by intelligence we will never know. However, I strongly believe that an individual can learn to be a better leader and can positively change themselves.

We all know who leaders are but what is a leader and what makes a good leader? My definition of a leader is someone who possesses outstanding qualities and is capable of making change while having control of the situation. It is also someone who can guide or encourage others to participate. A good leader would be someone who uses these qualities for positive change and influence and empowers their “followers” to want and participate in the positive change. You are not necessarily a good leader based upon the office or position that you hold. There are positive leaders in both organizations large and small from the director of the school Christmas play to the President of the United States. Sadly, just because people hold leadership positions doesn't make them effective leaders.

I said that a good leader is someone who has outstanding qualities but there isn't a set list of qualities that defines what makes a good leader. Each individual leader has their own unique qualities that set them apart and allow them to represent a whole scheme of different tasks. This is important because in this world we need a variety of different leaders so each can be innovative in their own field and bring new perspectives and ideas to the concept of leadership. However, there is a list of a few virtues that I deem important qualities of a leader. The first of these is honesty; however in today's society I feel like this is a dying concept and one that is thrown out in the quest for more power and money. Yet, this value to me is still above all one of the greatest qualities to value in a friend as well as in a leader. This quality may also be one of the hardest to uphold as an individual and is a virtue that we all have struggled with at some point. Honesty is important because it stabilizes a foundation of trust and strengthens the relationship between people when they don't have to question your opinions and claims. I also believe that if you are honest you earn a sense of respect. The truth is a powerful tool and even though at times it can be the difficult route to take I believe that it is the right route and that in the end it will lead to the best outcome from the situation.

Another important trait of a leader is confidence. I myself can be a shy person at times but if you don't have confidence in who you are as a person and the cause that you're fighting for than people will not respect you and you cannot pass on the passion that you feel. It is very ineffective if you do not have confidence because it could allow others to walk all over you or you are not able to convey your message in a clear and direct way that will be remembered by others. Confidence is something that you wear and whether you possess this trait can be seen by others that are around, so it is important to stand strong at

all times. A key factor in being confident is that you are educated about your topic and are aware of what is going on around you. Learning is an important key that is a gateway to so many opportunities; it can both mold you into a better leader but allow you to teach others about your cause. Apart of making a difference is educating yourself not only on the current situation but on the future outcomes. I believe that educating yourself and being organized in your plans and the time frame for which you plan to execute your ambitions and actions is also important. Planning can be a tedious task that is behind the scenes but it is just as important as the loud vocal actions that must be taken.

All these traits are very important but they do not mean anything unless the person is willing and takes the initiative to put plans into action and bring about change. If you are not willing to live up to your word than people will not pay attention to you or join your side. This example is similar to model the way or walk the walk to be a positive and honest example of who you are. You must also live up to these expectations in your outside life even when you think that no one is around. Others will look to you as an example and you must represent yourself and your cause well at all times to hold respect for yourself and to guide others.

Lastly, I think it is important asset of a leader if they have a general concern for others and for making positive change around them. This intrinsic force will be motivation enough to inspire them to do more and to invest themselves as leaders into service for the world around them. Also, hopefully through these actions they can also gain the genuine support from their peers. These are qualities that I feel are important for all leaders to hold and are goals that everyone should strive to be more like.

I myself as a leader am just really finding out the best ways that I lead and the ways that I want to direct my forces in both the present and the future. Even though I am a sophomore I am just getting really involved on the campus here at UK. It has taken me awhile to get adjusted to and learn about the different organizations that I want to be involved with. This was also the case for me at my high school, where I wasn't really as active my freshmen year and developed over time to become more and more involved as time went on. For me I feel that my best services as a leader are in volunteer work. This may also be because this is an area that I have always been apart of my whole life. My mother is my role model for a servant leader, she was a stay at home mom but her schedule was always packed with activities that she did for the community, school, and for our church. She was highly active in all causes that she was involved in and truly participated to help others and continually did work behind the scenes that received little recognition. I have always assisted her with her volunteer work but I am now stepping out on my own and finding causes that I value and want to join. Now that I have also declared my major and finally decided what I want to do with the rest of my life I want to get involved with this area and with the College of Health Sciences. I feel that these experiences would enrich my knowledge of my future career and offer me important experiences that would better me as a person.

There are many new concepts that I have learned from my experiences in ELI that will influence my future decisions as an incoming leader and will also help me to become a better person. The first of these is enlisting others, many times, I am guilty of thinking that I can do all things by myself and I need to realize the advantages of having a team and working together towards a common goal. Looking back it is logic that two heads are

better than one but I need to remember to find others that are willing to join my cause. I also need to step outside of my comfort zone and not just ask my friends for help but to ask people that I don't know yet but believe that their skills are important to better completing the task. But then to come together as a team and collaborate between those that you enlist and to sit down together as a team and create a game plan. With more people involved you open up for the exchange of ideas and also gain the resources and skills that your team has to offer. As a team you can accomplish so much more than just what you alone are capable of completing. With this new team it is also important that you celebrate them. I guess that I have been raised with southern manners but since I was a child I have always written a thank you note to anyone or everything and always sent letters of sympathy or get well cards to those that are in need. Yet, I have never been one to praise people for accomplishments by letters or little gifts that let them know that I appreciate what they do. It is just as important to be their in times of joy as well as in times of sorrow. We all know that we enjoy to be rewarded for our hard work and for our accomplishments and others around us are no different. It is important for me to pay attention to others around me and to celebrate them. These are leadership issues that I need to work on and plan to improve on in my next leadership roles or projects.

I have both learned and changed a lot as a leader over the last few months. I still don't know what the "perfect" leader is or how to obtain this status but I do know that leadership is something that you must constantly work at to better yourself. I have many goals for myself in the future; both new things to try and experiences to be had. But through all this it is important for me to remember to be true to the qualities I listed that

build a strong leader and a better person and they may also guide you and lead you into many new directions and opportunities in your life.