

Meredith Madison

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Final Paper

### My Personal Leadership Philosophy

ELI is not the end of my leadership experience. It is the beginning of a lifelong expedition. This Thursday marks the final class session for the Emerging Leadership Institute. I see our ELI graduation as a fork in the road. The fork will split the road to great leadership into two paths, separating the leaders from the followers. Some of us will take the skills we have acquired through ELI and go on to become success stories, creating change in our organizations and on campus. Others will be thrilled that ELI is finally over, and never think another thought about their newly acquired leadership traits. I am one who hopes to prosper as an inspirational leader, picking up others along the way and coaching them on the philosophies I hold about leadership. The road to leadership is clearly the one less traveled so ELI teaches students to challenge the process by stepping outside their comfort zone to advocate for positive change. In addition to continuing my ELI service project, I plan on starting up a new leadership project next semester, as soon as we get back from winter break. I want to implement the skills I have learned in the classroom as soon as possible because I have learned from previous experience that "If you don't use it, you lose it!" I want to apply my leadership philosophy to the real world and to a real project so that I can begin to further blossom as a leader. Through my fall semester project I learned that leadership is a process, not a characteristic that you can acquire overnight.

Many of the characteristics that shape my leadership philosophy came out in my leadership project. I am still developing my definition of leadership. I think that it is an ever changing idea that grows with experiences. Some of the things I have come across thus far in my life as a leader have been open-mindedness and the ability to be flexible. My project did not turn out exactly as I had planned. I had to be flexible allowing change to take its toll. Being open minded helped me accept my project in its evolved version. Another important challenge I had to overcome dealt with being flexible and open minded. While I had to be both of these things, I also had to speak my mind and not let others walk all over my project. I could only be so flexible to a certain extent and then I had to put my foot down when I felt that administrators were taking advantage of my opportunity. My vision was different from the vision that they had for me. I had to be persistent and assertive in my planning or else the project would have turned out to be someone else's. If I would have sat back and kept my mouth shut just to keep the peace then I would have been just another follower. Instead I used the fire in my belly to keep me on the right track. Many times I had to remind myself why I was doing this project and assure myself that it was a worthy cause.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I applied for ELI. I had very little knowledge about what all the ELI Program encompassed but I did hear from others that had been through the program before that it was "good." All they said was that it was a "good" class and that I definitely should apply for it. So without any background information, I applied for ELI. I did not know who I was up against or how challenging

it would be to get accepted. When I received the letter of acceptance in the mail I was stunned. I was excited, but at the same time I was more nervous. “Would I measure up to all the other students who had been accepted?” I thought to myself. The counselor that had recommended me for the program reassured me that I would be fine, that if I wasn’t cut out for it, then they would not have chosen me. “They must have seen some potential in you, or at least you were a very convincing writer,” she joked.

This semester has been extremely challenging for me because I had to step outside of my comfort zone. I found myself struggling more with the mental challenges of this course than I did with any assignments in all other classes I am taking this semester. Stepping outside one’s comfort zone is just another part of being a leader. Sure, you get that rush at first, that sensation that comes over you; giving you butterflies in your stomach and making you jumble up your words when you are trying to communicate your vision. Sooner or later, you get over that adrenaline rush and realize that this too will pass. The final project presentation was one of my biggest challenges. I had a fire in my belly that I knew was worth sharing, but when it came time to articulate my project, I felt nervous and had sweaty palms. I spoke more quickly than I had planned to, causing me to stutter and leave out important aspects of my project because thoughts were racing in my head at a mile a minute. Looking back on my presentation, I wish that I would have practiced it more, because even great leaders don’t always get things right the first time. What makes them leaders is that they kept trying even after they fumbled. Their willingness to learn from their mistakes by evaluating what went wrong in the past sets them apart from leaders who had great potential but gave up or

leaders who continued to do things the same way over and over again simply because that was “how it had always been done.”

Knowing that I have the potential to help change programs and influence policies on UK’s campus is what drives my efforts as a leader. Now that I am aware of the influence I can have on others, I feel that it is my duty to inflict it upon those that I want to get behind my cause. It is my responsibility to create a shared vision, inspiring others to get excited about what I am excited about. I can use others strengths to compliment my own strengths when working in a team. ELI has taught me that not only should I use people’s strengths, but that I should also celebrate them. Recognizing others for their hard work and dedication will keep them motivated to the cause. Working as a team has proven to have its advantages. When several different leadership styles come together, there is little that will go unaccomplished, because everyone has something unique to contribute to the common effort.

When I implemented my personal leadership project “The Getting Involved Series,” I found myself practicing the trade of a servant leader. If I expected other students to get involved I first had to establish my credibility by getting involved myself. I took an active role in seeing to it that others attended activities by accompanying them on several occasions. I think that by doing this I showed my peers that I was serious about my project and that I truly had a passion for getting students involved on campus and in the Lexington community. Before people looked up to me as a leader I had to serve first! I hope that this project will permit me to practice the skills of the

transformational leader. I am currently working with a counselor in the SSS program to make this a never-ending project. She said that she hopes that this project can go on forever because of the immense effect it has had on the students in the program. As a mentor in the SSS program I have strengthened many ties with students and staff through the implementation of the Getting Involved Series. If I cannot continue this project next year then I hope to train someone to carry out the tasks associated with increasing the awareness of opportunities for students to get involved.

I have enjoyed the Emerging Leader Institute. I believe that it is an excellent program for bringing out the leadership potential in students. It was well worth my time to participate in this class because I feel I have gained so much more than three credit hours. I have gained great life skills that I can take with me wherever I go, whether it is in my career, religion, sorority, the mentoring program at SSS, or even within my own family. I think that the guest speakers helped inspire the idea in me that you can be a leader in all walks of life because each presenter had their own personal success story that pertained to their career or life in general. If it weren't for some bright leader, we would not have the ELI program and for that person I am grateful. I had the opportunity to gain all the knowledge and skills of a leader through ELI thanks to this leader who was thinking outside the box. In a way, the creator of ELI was a transformational leader because they passed their philosophy on to others. This passing down of knowledge transformed me from an ordinary student into an extraordinary leader on our campus!