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Megan's Leadership Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

My freshman year of college I had little to no clue about the campus around me. All I knew was that beginning in August I was in a place where no one knew my accomplishments from high school or the activities I had been heavily involved in. As a result, I found it extremely difficult to be outwardly passionate about the issues I cared most about. If people did not know who I was, why would they listen? And if people did not know who I was how could I be a leader here?

These questions lingered in my mind nearly all year long. The size of UK immediately intimidated me and I assumed that there were thousands of freshmen already who had their lives in order and who would lead for our class. It was to my surprise then, that I was accepted into the Emerging Leadership Institute right before summer break. I remember being excited to be in the program, because I would finally figure out how to make the transition from an average person to one who possessed leadership qualities.

The term "average person" was one of the first things I realized I had been thinking about the wrong way. I had not taken into consideration the possibility that

everyone already possesses different leadership qualities, they just do not necessarily know it, or know how to effectively use what they have. I have learned that to be successful in one's endeavors one must utilize the qualities they possess and conquer their weaknesses.

1. Don't say it, Do it

Modeling the way is a principle of leadership I also had not thought a lot about. My perception had been that leaders lead, and people are drawn to them. As simple it sounds, I honestly thought that I might not get to the level of greatness I thought "leaders" had to get to before anyone would listen or create a change. In my mind it seemed that somehow a leader just emerged, he or she did not have to work at it, it was given to them. I was able to learn first hand how mistaken I was. Leadership is a way of life and how you choose to use it. Modeling the way is one way to do this. If you can present yourself and do the things you want others to do it will work...eventually. No one wants the person he or she looks to for advice or suggestions to do the opposite of what he or she says they do. This applies to nearly every situation—from peer mentors to basketball coaches, successful ones show their understudies how they expect them to act through their own appearance. They are credible, and trustworthy, doing what they model all day, every day, not just when their selected audience is around.

2. You cannot do it alone

As I mentioned earlier, a leader is not a sole entity no one else can touch. He or she models the way so others will want to follow them. However, there cannot be collaborated ideas and growth if the people around you are not given a chance to help. Establish chances for others to contribute to whatever your mission is to improve. You

cannot do it alone. Sure, you can manage a project by yourself and it can be successful, but how does it grow from there? If you make an opportunity for help, it will come. Sometimes people are just waiting for that opportunity, as I was all of my freshman year of school.

If you love what you do, bring others along for the ride! With the credibility you have established people will trust and believe in you more so than before. Chances are they probably might even want to help or be part of the project or organization you are working on.

3. Help others feel the same

A major goal should be a vision for the future. I have had difficulty in the past thinking only of the present. It is easy to fall into the trap of maintaining traditions and not messing with what works. A few years ago three of my close friends and I decided a Hispanic story-hour would be a great addition to the public library. It was our vision, and we had to convince the Board of Directors and library staff that it would greatly benefit the community. If the deciders had not been able to see the same vision we did our story-hour may have never happened.

It is easy to see a change, but harder to make it happen. When others begin to see the vision you share, they may adopt it, or adapt it to fit them better. While sharing a vision is important, it is equally important to listen to the people around you. I have learned that they might criticize the vision you have you have or even hate it. One of the speakers in our ELI class explained to us how important it is to care about your organization or affiliation, but to also be able to step away from it and look at it objectively. Taking criticism can help strengthen what it is you are working on, possibly

making it better. Dorothy Edwards, the speaker, helped illustrate how a leader must be able to do this, understanding that the criticisms are about what the organization you are affiliated with, not you personally. Then take what you have learned, apply it to your passion, and again share this newly adapted vision with others.

4. “No” is not always the end

Before ELI I was apt to let an idea die if someone told me it was a bad one. For my service project I had several ideas floating around in my head, and I was excited about all of them. I was surprised then, when an individual I respect told me that all four were stupid and would not make a difference in the community. I probably would have abandoned them then, if not for this class. I took the opinion given to me, evaluated it, and decided that I DID have a good idea. Instead of ending with a “no” I asked other people what they thought, and then continued with the project.

I have had to step out of my comfort zone and pursue change more than I wanted to, and I am the better for it. Without the speakers and peers in class I could not have grown, or realized the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness—that was the turning point for me. I do not want to fail in my endeavors, but I am equally worried that I will upset people by trying to make my vision a reality. Understanding that assertive people are capable of working past a “no” and not being pushy was what made this class for me.

5. Encourage the Heart

I tried to think of a unique title for this chapter since we always talk about it in class, but I could not. According to the things I have learned this semester, encouraging the heart is my strength. I feel like that is how the majority of my work gets done, and it

is how everything works out in the end for me. I like to make others feel special, and I like to make progress by encouraging positive feedback along the way. Without some encouragement for the heart, I believe attitudes and results suffer. Support may be lost because while a good idea, there is no emotional attachment. As discussed earlier, people need a chance to act, and I believe those acts should be rewarded. A smile, sticker, “good job” or space on a bulletin board may be all you need to encourage heart of people of people helping you accomplish your goal.

I have learned that I cannot be successful on my own. Without any outside help, whatever I have worked to create will be lost when I leave. If it is not lost, it will never get to the level it could have been with help. I have learned that anyone can be a leader, and that I prefer to be one who leads through action, not through titles or positions. I like to be recognized, but I do not like to be the “leader” in the sense of the final decision maker, totalitarian way. I have grown to have my own ideas and opinions but also **truly** take into account the ideas of others instead of neglecting them or viewing them as what I had to go by.