

Christina Ditty

The Emerging Leader Institute

"There never has been one like me before and there never will be one like me again."

-Howard Cosell

It took me the entire semester and 25 ELI sessions to realize that what this man said is true. I would sit in class and wonder why I was one of the lucky ones chosen to participate in this program. Every one had so many diverse interests and I questioned my ability to be a leader among the highly motivated group of individuals in the institute. I stayed quiet throughout most of the classes, listening to the speakers and everyone's ideas on leadership. I wish I had been more involved in the class discussions, but I still feel that just paying attention in class has helped my skills as a leader growing tremendously.

Our first leadership session was conducted by Rhonda Strouse. She discussed our personal leadership profile and how to use our insight about ourselves to become a better leader. I learned to focus on aspects of my personality that I have ignored for 19 years. I was one of the few in the class with a "C" tendency. The "C" stood for cautious. I was hoping that I would be a "D" personality because it stood for dominance. I thought that since I was in a leadership class, the dominant characteristic would be something important. But I learned that even the people with dominant characteristics had aspects of their personality that they needed to work on to be an effective leader.

My personality profile told me I needed to work on my group participation, self-confidence and my ability to tolerate conflict. I have never been able to take constructive criticism well, so I was kind of upset when the results of our personality styles told me

about my strengths and weaknesses. However, I soon realized that an important part of being a leader is being able to assess your weaknesses and work to improve them. So throughout this semester, I have learned to take constructive criticism and use the information to help my leadership skills.

One of my other weaknesses is my tendency to put off my homework and wait until the last minute to work on projects, partly because they did not interest me much. This is one reason that my project is still in the " I am going to do this" stage. I had other ideas for projects, but after making a few calls about projects that I was vaguely interested in, my plans fell through. I had to start over from scratch two weeks before my project was due! I quickly came up with my new project idea for the high school big brother big sister project and ran with it.

I am so excited to begin my program this summer. When I go home for the summer, I will be contacting the counselors in my former high school and elementary schools so I can implement my program. I will place an elementary school child with a high school student mentor and monitor their progress throughout the year. The high school mentor will help the student with their school work, teach them new skills such as playing a musical instrument or playing soccer, and play the role of a big brother or sister in the child's life. According to the national Big Brother/Big Sister agency, children with mentors are less likely to use drugs and alcohol and they have greater self-esteem when they do their homework and interact with their peers.

Trying to develop a plan for this project has made me think a lot about my own family. I realize that having 4 older siblings had greatly affected my growth as an individual, and I know that since I left for school I have not been able to play a big part in

my younger brother's life. This summer I will not only try to positively help the young children in the local schools, but I will try to be a positive role model for my brother and others who see me as a leader.

The Emerging Leader Institute has affected my life in a way that no other program has attempted to do. I have enjoyed every aspect of the leadership institute. My classmates and I have had the opportunity to interact with each other and various professors and staff at the university. We planned and completed a community service project and our own individual projects that we have worked on throughout the semester. We attended class every Tuesday and Thursday for two hours and we had a mentor group meeting per week. However, I think we have gained more from this class than 3 hours of credit. I have made more friends, learned more information about myself and the world around me and enjoyed this class more than any other class I have taken on campus. I would love to have a class like this again, but I think I'm only allowed to participate in the institute once!