

Eric Stoner

The Emerging Leader Institute Experience

When I first learned that participants of the Emerging Leader Institute would have to take on a project that would create change not only in the world around them, but in themselves, I have to admit I was a little frightened. Questions whizzed through my head. *What can I do? I'm just a student. Is there anything important that I can actually do? Can I do it in one semester? What am I going to do!?!*

Each person is assigned a peer mentor. This is a student who was in the program before and has been through what you are going through now. I listened to my peer mentors and what they had done before me and I thought *How the heck am I going to do that? How can I live up to that?* Well, it wasn't as hard as I originally thought it was going to be. Big tasks always seem impossible at first. But what you learn, as a leader, is that most anything is possible if you decide to take action to complete those tasks. This is something that I am still learning. A technique that helped in this process is crystallization. Crystallization is when you break down a huge task into portions. Each task combines to form the whole. You concentrate on each small portion until the whole task is done. It might take a while, but as long as you have a specified goal the process will work.

This leads to the question of what I was going to do. I started my brainstorming process by asking myself where I wanted this project to take place. Well, I wanted to see the results of my labor, so UK seemed like an ideal place. Next I asked myself, what do I think needs work here at UK? Having just completed a math course taught by a teaching

assistant, I decided this was the answer. I would work with the teaching assistant program here at UK. My ideas on how this would happen would evolve throughout the semester. First I had to find information on the current system. To do this I went to the president of the Student Government Association. He did not have the information I wanted, but he knew people who did. Some of these people relayed me to others. This process was like a giant puzzle. I had to find pieces of information and fit them together. The key was networking. I had to call a lot of people. Some of those people did not have what I was looking for, but knew others who did. This meant I had to be persistent. I also had to be willing to devote time to my project, especially because the university basically shuts down earlier than students do.

I would imagine that a lot of my peers were going through the same pressures, but this program brought me benefits. One advantage of this program is that one meets important people at UK. You get your name out. I ended up meeting the president of the university. I ended up meeting influential members of the Student Government Association. I ended up meeting many department heads. Those people are now familiar with my face and name.

ELI also opened up new possibilities to me. As I was working on my project I started to realize what I was capable of. I learned I was both physically and mentally stronger than I gave myself credit for. As a result of being in the Emerging Leader Institute I decided to run for a senator position on the Student Government Senate. I don't think I would have done so if I hadn't been exposed to the organization during my time at ELI. The point I want to leave you with is that my experience with the Emerging Leader Institute has reinforced the confidence that I have in myself. Being in the presence of

other people who are intelligent and ambitious is magical. I am not only referring to my peers who participated in the program, but also the variety of gifted speakers that did presentations on leadership at those sessions. Attending the Emerging Leader Institute with my peers and being able to learn from these presenters made me think,

Look at these people, Just how much am I capable of?