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The Emerging Leader Institute

I am sure that as you have been visiting the ELI home page a million questions have probably been surfacing in your mind. What can I do to become involved? What, exactly, is involved in the class? How hard is it, really? I know exactly where you are coming from. When I first read about it I was genuinely intrigued. Hopefully, by reading my account of the ELI program you will be better able to understand what the Institute can do for you.

Class Time

As far as the in-class participation and presentations, there would be no way for me to choose one as my favorite or to tell you what appealed to me the most. However, what I enjoyed the most about our time together was the conversation. Our class was so non-confrontational and friendly that it really made us comfortable and open to each other. This also made us very receptive to each other's suggestions. The in-class presentations were what I looked forward to most each week. I would always be so stressed out about something, but I knew that I could come into the group and be engaged and relaxed in a comfortable situation. I think it really helped with my other classes as well because I took a much more positive attitude and interested approach to learning the subject.

My Project Begins

I started out knowing that I had this huge individual project that lay before me. I was horrified. *What would I do? I only have one semester to do this! Why are there no guidelines?* It was killing me. Being the 'dominant' person I found myself to be

(according to our Personal Profiles), I instantly wanted my project to be the biggest and the best - something that would make Elizabeth see me as the one true 'Emerging Leader' of the class. I soon realized what a burden I was putting on myself.

I knew I wanted to do something with animals, or maybe the elderly in Lexington. So, my plan was hatched. I would bring animals from the Humane Society to retirement homes and bring a little joy into the lives of the residents and animals alike. I tried and tried to contact someone who might be interested in my idea from the Humane Society and several senior citizen organizations. However, I soon grew tired of unanswered questions and phone tag, so I decide to stop for a while. I had lots of time, an entire semester. Let me speak from experience when I say, NEVER approach this or any other project this way. It comes back to haunt you!

One night I came to our mentor group meeting exhausted and distraught. Lauren, my mentor, realized my plight and suggested that we meet individually. I was a little worried. *Why? What would she tell me? I am sure she thinks I am doing nothing. I bet I am in trouble.* This was not the case at all. Lauren and Elizabeth had talked and were concerned that my project was too broad for me to get anywhere. That is when I decided to start a new project. With new information and contacts from Lauren, I came up with the Kappa Sigma Clothing Drive for the Salvation Army of Lexington. I left that meeting with a renewed sensed of hope and a feeling that I could accomplish anything.

Becoming Sidetracked

With the introduction of our planning for the big group project, I again put my project on hold. Our mentor group was really excited about presenting our proposal for the group service project. We had made some good contacts and prepared an excellent

presentation about the Bob Brown House. This service project idea was close to us all (my mentor group) and we had become so caught up in making it the one the class chose to do that I lost sight of my individual project. The Bob Brown House idea won the class over in the end because of all the fun work and activities that would be involved. We all spent several weeks planning and organizing to make sure all the donations and supplies we needed would be ready for the big day of April 2nd. This day was a success for all of us. We worked hard and came together as a group and brought a sense of joy and accomplishment to both the community and to us. The completion of this project, in my opinion, was the shining moment of all the work we had done to meet our goals.

Finally On Track

Much of my individual project came together starting the week before our group project. I began making contacts with my fraternity president and our community service chair. They approved of my project and agreed to let me put the Kappa Sigma name behind it. Our president's only concern was that, if I was trying to involve all fraternities and sororities, I might have to go through the InterGreek Programming Assembly. This started a whole new problem in trying to find out if their approval was needed. I talked with Elizabeth and secured the number of the IGPA president, called his home, and was distressed to find that he was not there and did not have an answering machine. In fact, he was often not there. When I finally made contact with him I found out that I didn't need to go through IGPA. This was aggravating but at least I was now ready to go.

In the end, I made a mission statement that I personally presented to each fraternity and sorority on campus. My clothing drive project went into effect April 17-24 of 2000. Each

year I hope to increase the number of organizations involved in this clothing drive in order to create more of a commitment to the community.

What I Have Learned

What I have gained most from ELI is:

- the understanding of how much work goes into becoming an effective leader;
- that procrastination is never a positive influence on your project;
- and that time management is one of the most important issues you deal with while in ELI.

My project has helped me locate many of my weaknesses in leadership and now I feel that I am a much wiser and confident leader. I have and will continue to use my experiences from this class to benefit me in future situations. I cannot express in words how much this class has opened my eyes to the opportunities in front of me.