

Evan Belt

"The purpose of education is to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed"

I don't really know who that quote is by, but I remember it from the beginning, and it really summarizes what I got out of E.L.I. My initial interest in the Emerging Leaders Institute was not as detailed as it would come to be. I initially felt E.L.I. was a class designed to hone and polish "leadership skills". I was excited to learn more about this subject, as I had never taken anything on this before. The question then arose "what is leadership?" Even though that question was asked in one session, it really sat with me for the whole semester and I found myself using that as a reference point. When that question was asked, many people were noticeably uncomfortable and some answered, "Well, I'm a natural leader, and have always been involved". I've never understood what a natural leader is, and feel that is a cop out just to get resume fodder, to say you were "involved". This question really pushes you to ask yourself what and why you are doing something. I hadn't really delved into that as far as E.L.I. went, and it has taken almost all of the semester for me to answer that question.

My mentor group, starring Randy Gonzalez in the lead role, and Amanda Cook, in a supporting actress role as peer mentor. They really suited the aforementioned question by constantly asking question. This slowed down our group, which was saturated with dominant personalities, as deemed by the disc personality tests taken. Rhonda Strouse completed the exercise the first week of class. I disagreed with much of it, as far as its accuracy towards me, but eventually found some of it true, and the found that highly useful in how I communicated with others in the class. Communication was one aspect of E.L.I. that I utilized. The Derek Lane sessions really heightened as well as enlightened

how to effectively interact with others. Now I understand that you have to listen before you can be heard. This goes back to the big question "what is leadership"?

Listening to others and what is around you, shot out to me in Lance Brunner's session. That was noticeably a difficult session for much of the group. It focused on self-awareness and mindfulness. There were a few exercises that I particularly found beneficial, however, the one that I appreciated most was where we had to close our eyes and focus on the siren off in the distance. We focused on it until it died away, but we knew it was there. That exercise was special because I don't think that I had ever been that conscious or intensely aware of something. This exercise completely relates to those around you and being in tune with what they are about. We had to utilize this skill with the ropes course that we completed at the end of the semester. Each activity had everything to do with a team. There were no individuals. Being in touch with the task at hand and everyone's skill level was necessary in order to complete the task. The application of Lance's session helped me focus and incorporate everyone around me.

I've already known that the university experience is one that is varied and diversified. The more you get out of your opportunities, the better experience you have. E.L.I highlighted that to me. It caused me to be aware of other needs as a leader. To be a leader is not to impose your beliefs or interests onto others, but about sharing those with others and understanding theirs, and guiding along with that. It is a leader's duty to incorporate all the resources of their organization or cause that they can. That is part of what leadership is to me. It is also doing something about what you believe in or have an interest in. The question I kept anchoring on (What is leadership?) guided me through this course. It is still a learning process though. Just because I have completed E.L.I.,

does not mean that I have all the answers to leadership. Being involved in what interests me around campus helps me learn more about leadership, and how it applies to life. It isn't necessarily being involved, but learning about other things and being open to them. By putting yourself in that position on campus and branching out, you provide the basis to grow. The University of Kentucky has all of those opportunities to add to that experience.