

## **Molly Longenecker**

My name is Molly Longenecker and I am a freshman here at the University of Kentucky. I came to this University with every intention of taking an active role in campus life and I wanted to make a difference. So, naturally, when I heard about the Emerging Leader Institute, I was thrilled. From what I could see, this was the perfect way to broaden my horizons. But, have you ever heard or used the expression, "Blind as a bat"? In a certain sense, that is how I entered the Emerging Leader Institute. It was not the fact that the orientations were not thorough or the descriptions were not clear. It was simply that I would have never guessed that I would have gotten so much out of one class and didn't even see it coming when I walked in on the first day. I knew this class would be different the second I set foot in class the first session after orientation. We were instantly bonded and shared common goals and interests. I felt I knew everyone so well and already we were working together to make a change.

To make this change, as we all were determined to do, we had to learn more about what a leader should be and listen to many speakers. The sessions ranged from evaluating yourself to how to give a great presentation. We learned our personality types and how that could affect our leadership styles and techniques. The evaluation also pin-pointed how these styles could also be the cause of some frustration when working with others in leadership situations. We also defined what it is to be a leader many times. By the end of the sessions, though, we were able to take very general qualities and specify exactly what we felt it takes to be a leader. This was incredible and showed us just how far we had come. The various styles of presentations given by mentors and advisors, is what made me realize that every leader is different, but also effective. There were sessions that were

calm and peaceful, and others that were interactive and exciting. There was some tension whenever we would discuss certain topics, but there were no differences that we, as a group, could not overcome.

One of the obstacles we had to overcome was choosing a group project. It had to be one that reflected our values and goals as a class, and one that helped the community by providing a service to others. We wanted to share with everyone what we had learned and let the community in on just how much we truly wanted to make a difference. We pondered many ideas and came up with a day of service at the Ronald McDonald House. This, for me, was an incredible experience. We helped many families by baking cookies, cleaning, organizing, and even just by talking with them. Walking out of the Ronald McDonald House, I think we all felt satisfied with what we had done and I know that I will continue to volunteer there.

I think that ELI has made me see my true colors. I have had to examine my weaknesses with a fine-toothed comb, which can be very hard to do. But also, I think it has made me see what kind of effect I can have on others just by being myself and using my leadership abilities. By embracing the styles of others, whether it was the other members of the class or the leaders of the sessions, I believe that alone has taught me the most. There is nothing more rewarding than ELI, and the friendships and ideas that were shared are two things I will never forget.

I came into ELI with the idea of helping children with autism. After much procrastination, which is one of my weaknesses, I got in touch with a contact. We had talked about what could be done. She informed me that their annual walk would take place in April and she would love my help. Well, after playing phone tag for about 3

weeks and many tears, I decided that I had to change my project because this was not working out.

I think that the disappointment I felt from the first project falling through gave me the initiative I needed, and the desire to help more people than before. I was thinking about one of the main problems that affect Americans that is often neglected: hunger. People usually only think of this at Thanksgiving and Christmas, but this is not the only time that hunger is a problem. Nearly 21 million people in this country seek emergency food. That fact shocked me and that is what led me to God's Pantry. I wanted to do a food drive and extend it to anyone who wanted to help. I would get my sorority, Alpha Delta Pi involved and I would ask other organizations that were interested in community service to help out also. I made several trips to the God's Pantry facilities and the operation they have going on there is incredible. When I went there, I saw exactly why I picked this project. I would love to make this an annual event and even publicize it more in the years to come.

Although there were many setbacks and moments of complete discouragement, I think that my project was a success and has touched the lives of many families around Kentucky. The ultimate goal that I was headed for was helping people and making a difference to someone. Being a leader requires heart and letting others carry the torch sometimes. Procrastination will throw you off track if you are not careful and so will lack of organization. I think ELI helped me focus on the task at hand and it definitely helped me find better ways to reach an objective. This was an unforgettable experience and one that I would recommend to anyone and everyone!