

## **Stacy Martin**

When I first heard of the Emerging Leader Institute, I was sitting in my UK 101 class, a freshman orientation course. My student teacher, who was supposed to keep us updated on campus activities and opportunities, wrote an announcement about this unique class on the board. I glanced at it once and never really thought about it. I did not believe it was the kind of class that was oriented toward a person like me. Later on in the semester, my teacher passed out a pamphlet that described the leadership class in greater detail. Even with more explanation, I was still uncertain as to whether or not I really wanted to apply for membership. Our student teacher tried to convince me by saying how good a course like this would look on a resume. It was then that I made the choice to try. As bad as that sounds, I did decide to take the class on the basis that it would improve the look of my resume. I never realized that it would end up being so much more important than that.

Emerging Leader Institute. After hearing the name, I basically closed my mind to it, having never thought of myself as any kind of exceptional leader. I guess this was because I had never actually had the chance to show other people or myself what I might have been capable of doing. I had always preferred taking the back seat, letting other people run the show, for there always seemed to be a plethora of people perfectly willing to take charge and be the boss. I had no idea that just one semester-long class would be able to change my view on this subject.

After I finally applied, I pretty much just forgot about it, what with the pressures of homework, tests, and scheduling taking up most of my time. But, when I got the phone call telling me that I was one of the selected members of the class, it came back to the

forefront of my mind and suddenly I was looking at the experience with a whole new feeling: excitement. While I never saw myself as a leader, obviously those selecting people for the class saw something in me that I never did. It made me feel good to know that another person had somehow recognized me as a potential leader.

As the day for the Emerging Leader Institute Orientation grew closer, a certain sense of nervousness prevailed over my excitement. I admit that I still wasn't sure if I would fit into a class like this, that I wouldn't size up with the exemplary leaders that I knew would be involved. I was intimidated and this feeling only increased after the Orientation and the first couple of classes. After Rhonda Strouse's session on the personal profile, I learned that the majority of the class had the dominant leadership personality and I, being one of the few with the cautiousness/steadiness profiles, was a little in awe of these go-getters. I wanted to know how I could get these dominant tendencies, because I too wanted to be a leader. So, I set out to learn how to become a leader, a dominant.

After several unsuccessful attempts, I was starting to believe that I was never going to become a leader. With our individual leadership projects looming over us, everyone knew that we had to get started early on if we wanted to accomplish anything. I was a little panicked; I had no idea how to be a leader, so how could I create an individual leadership project?! It took me awhile, but what I eventually learned was that anyone at all could be a leader. A person doesn't have to be a certain personality type to accomplish things. I didn't have to be the person in the spotlight, the person recognized as the boss. I finally realized that I could get things done in my own, unique way.

After coming to these realizations, I went back to one of the questions that was asked on the Emerging Leader Institute application. It asked me to describe my vision of what

constitutes leading or leadership. I had answered it by saying leadership was leading people in acts of kindness for the benefit of the rest of the world. In my own opinion, leadership is just trying to help others, and making the world a better place for everyone. I knew I could do this; I could be a leader, no matter what my personality type was. I decided to do a project with the residents of a nursing home, to brighten a normally depressing, monotonous place. With the help of my wonderful mentors and group members, I was able to set up a gardening project with one of the local nursing homes. Right now, I am actually in the process of completing the project. I don't think I can even describe the satisfaction that I feel seeing the happy faces of the residents and knowing that I helped to make them that way.

If someone had told me a semester ago that one class could change my life, I would have laughed at how corny that sounded. I really never knew that something like this could change me so much. I had to overcome my natural shyness and intimidation before I could accomplish anything. The Emerging Leader Institute is so much more than just a resume builder. It not only gave me the opportunities but also the self-confidence to prove to myself that I too could be a leader.