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I am not entirely sure of where to begin in explaining all that I have learned this semester. I was initially unsure what more I could learn about leaders and the skills they used to influence the world about them. Perhaps I was more afraid of discovering how little I knew about my leadership style and myself. It is an uncomfortable task to quantify and categorize one's abilities and disabilities (especially when you are honest with yourself). But with the help of my peer mentor and classmates, this semester has allowed me the time to accurately assess my leadership skills and improve on them.

I came into the Emerging Leader Institute somewhat aware of my potential as a leader. As I accepted the invitation to join the Spring 2002 class, I was already a sophomore at the University of Kentucky and had garnered high positions in Student Government, my sorority, and other honor societies on campus. And yet, I knew that potential without training was useless. Unless I realized my potential as a leader, including all of my strengths and weaknesses, I was not worth as much as I could be to those who relied upon me.

The first few ELI sessions were dedicated to personal assessment and growth. I discovered my own leadership style through a Myers-Briggs instrument. Once classified, I could look at my 'type' and recognize in what areas I excelled and in what areas I could still improve. As an ENFJ (extrovert, intuitive, feeler, and judge) I found that I could best be described as a "smooth talking persuader" and "a natural when it comes to motivating people". However, I learned that I am prone to take negativity and resistance personally rather than accepting criticism as a means to improve. In the past, I had shrugged this off.

But now, I had to accept this as a part of myself and look for ways to work and improve in places where I fall short.

I worked diligently to apply this first learned concept of self in my personal leadership project. It was easy and natural for me to use my persuasive powers to interest organizations and other leaders initially. But it was much more difficult to understand when the same persons disagreed with my extensive proposal. Despite meeting with objection and, ultimately, rejection from several agencies with which I had hoped to find help, I nonetheless carried on with my project, refusing to take their refusals as a personal affront. This proved to be one of the most invaluable lessons learned from my ELI experience and would be the realizing factor for my project. For by accepting the criticism and complements of others, I was able to better mold and form my project to benefit the most people in the most effective way.

Louise Stone, in her forum, asked the institute, "Are you being an elephant?" By this, she meant, "Is your project centered on what you want to give rather than what others need from you?" A great deal of my initial proposal was 'elephant-like'. I had decided for everyone else involved what he or she would contribute and what he or she would receive without first considering what wonderful gifts individuals might have and be willing to contribute to my project. This is not effective leadership. An effective leader first realizes his or her potential, and then utilizes these in the most effective and appropriate way to realize some goal.