

Meredith Jennings

It was an early Saturday morning when I first stepped into the ELI classroom. The room was filled with people; shy, sociable, reserved, smiling, and even scared. We were all put into this room together to experience this extraordinary class. It was obvious we came from different places in our lives; we had different views about our existence; and we were not all going to agree, but we were going to enjoy each others' company and respect each others ideas. I knew that each and every person in my class had something to offer to my leadership development, and later I realized they offered even more. It was utterly amazing to realize how much you can learn from a single experience, and ELI became that experience for me.

I came into ELI to enhance the leadership skills I thought I already possessed, but I later found there were many other skills I still needed to obtain. We had many speakers, many class discussions and activities, but for me, my leadership development all began with the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. It showed me the strengths and weakness of my personality type in a way I had not thought of before. I read all I could on my type and found it was exactly me on a sheet of paper. It described my views, sensitivity and leadership style. I was an ENFJ; extrovert, intuitive, feeling, and judging person. I think, write, speak, and practically live through my heart. I know I am a passionate person because of it, but I was slowly realizing that sometimes I have to learn to make decisions through my head instead. It was the first realization I came to; I still had many things to learn not only about leadership, but also about myself. I had an idea of what my strengths and weakness were, but never wanted to step out of the box to improve upon my weakness and shine through my strengths. It was Elizabeth that always encouraged me to

step out of my comfort zone into an area that was a little gray and cloudy; it was in that spot I would learn the most about myself. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do." It gave me confidence to take on my weaknesses and use my ELI experience, classmates, and mentors to help me do just that.

The ELI program was able to offer a unique learning environment that other classrooms could not. We never sat in a desk; we never sat in lines facing forward. We were in a half circle where each face could be seen, each voice could be heard, and each idea could be voiced. I think this pushed us to interact with each other and learn from one another. The environment was formed by the words "learn what you can with what you have". I believe this was a prime example of how ELI took us out of the traditional educational box and placed us in the gray and cloudy area. The information was presented to us with speakers, activities, and class discussions, but never once were we required to fill out a worksheet or complete problems in a book. It was never about homework, it was finally a class that was truly about learning. We interacted together and fed off each others' comments. It gave even the shyest of the group the chance to convey their thoughts. I have always been talkative and outgoing. I like to voice my opinion, yet I still respect others views. In ELI, the learning experience was all up to me. I had to decide what I wanted to learn and what I wanted to gain from my time in the class. One of my goals was to stop and think a little more before I spoke, because I noticed the class was dominated by the extroverts who spoke whenever a thought came to their mind, just like I did. I learned from Barb that introverts have just as many comments to make, but it

takes more time for them to articulate their ideas. I think this skill is one that will affect my leadership style more than any other. When I can take the time to slow down and reflect on my ideas before I articulate them, I think it will really show that I can be a good leader. A person with creative ideas and the ability to articulate them; a passion to complete projects and the knowledge to know how; a person who has a desire to learn from their mistakes and from others is truly a leader.

I have finally stepped into the gray and cloudy area, faced my fears and did the things I thought I could not do. This experience has been amazing and enlightening. I feel the skills that have been taught and the way I have applied them to my life are going to lead me down a remarkable path to increased leadership development. I want to continue to apply these skills in my sorority, community, school, but most importantly to my personal development. I think by realizing the potential of my personality type, knowing how to communicate effectively, calming my mind, managing stress, accepting diversity, and learning to help others with what they need, not what I think they need, I will then and only then become the leader I want to be. Emerging Leader Institute has been my tool to accomplish all of these things and for that I am ever thankful.