

## ELI Reflection

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“Time flies when you are having fun”. Perhaps the saying should be changed to “time flies when you are in ELI”. I cannot recall a class that I actually attended going by as fast as ELI. It seems like only this previous Saturday when I trudged into the Student Center with my satchel of items that described me. Three months later, a Coke bottle, a Playstation controller, and a James Carville book still go a long way toward describing my personality. However, ELI has enhanced and added new dimensions to my personality. These changes, along with a few other topics, will thus be the centerpiece of my reflection.

My favorite activity of the year came at the very beginning. The leadership style presentation was my favorite because it was a self-evaluation and, to be frank, I enjoy thinking about nothing else more than “yours truly”. The purpose of this evaluation was to evaluate our leadership styles. Everyone in the class went through a sheet of adjectives and picked which words most and least described them. Then, using an intricate system involving various shapes, we mapped out charts that illustrated our leadership style.

Leadership styles were broken down into the words Dominant, Conscientious, Stable, and Inspirational. According to the charts, I am *perceived* as being Dominant and Stable. However, the charts also said that I am *actually* Dominant and Conscientious.

I found this extremely interesting because I have always felt that I am not the same person that I am perceived. For instance, I am perceived as being an extrovert, but I know that I really am an introvert. More importantly, I have always felt that I put up a “front” or a false personality even to those who are the closest to me. I do not think anyone knows the real me and these results reflect that.

Another interesting aspect of the results is the fact that they fit in with how I am approached and regarded. People always feel comfortable confiding in me or asking me for advice. I feel as if I am someone folks look to lean on, although I question my own stability. My bluntness is probably confused with honesty, thus leading to a feeling of security. I am not saying that I am not honest (I am), but rather that if I was given five words to describe myself, honest would not be one of them.

The previously described interesting aspects of this exercise do not even scratch the surface of what, to me, was the most interesting. According to the survey, a Dominant and Stable person values achievement; this would include money, awards, titles, etc. A Dominant and Conscientious person values creativity; they attempt to beat their own path, per se. The evening before I had discussed in detail with a friend of mine how I was concerned that, at some point in my life, I would come to a point where I must choose between “success” and happiness. These results reinforced this fear because, although on the outside it may seem I value success, I actually put a higher premium on my independence, which, unfortunately, often contradict. What concerns me does not so much have to do with making a decision, but rather, given my history, that I will make the *wrong* decision.

That day in class led me to reflect for quite amount of time on my life and the direction it was going. Because of this, I believe I have come a long way in how I prioritize the various sects of my life. Although I probably will continue to be perceived as something completely different than what I am and, therefore, approached in ways that might contradict what I really am, I do believe that I am better equipped to handle the question of success versus happiness should they come into direct conflict. Further, by acknowledging and accepting how I am perceived and approached, I can use my position in people’s minds to help me attain those things

that I want in life. All in all, I feel like a captain who has just discovered the weapons that his ship is equipped with, making me better able to navigate the dangerous waters. I believe that not only am I better at using my weapons, but I am also less likely to destroy myself with one of them.

In terms of practicality, probably the most beneficial activity was the conflict resolution activity. This activity involved class discussion about the five basic methods of conflict resolution: Avoidance, Competitive, Compromise, Collaboration, and Retreating. Several examples were implored that put individuals in the class in conflict and then required them to find a solution.

What I found was that I in every situation I tried to use the “competitive” strategy first and foremost. I reasoned that by controlling the conversation and using body language like nodding my head and asking leading questions, I could pull the person into seeing my position. Further, I always sought to frame the discussion in a manner that appeared as if I sought to find a solution that was mutually beneficial, although in reality I could care less about the other person.

This worked in the first situation but failed in the second. So, in the second situation, I then began to use the “compromise” strategy. However, this failed to, so I then used the “retreating” strategy. As with the other two strategies, this did not work and the conflict was never solved.

According to the gentleman who was lecturing, the best strategy to use is the “collaborating” strategy because both sides can get what they want. This was quite interesting because I never used this method in our scenarios and, when we took a test to see which method I preferred, it showed that I used “competitive”, “compromise”, and “retreating”. I am quite proud of my abilities, so it was shocking that I did not use the best strategy.

Needless to say, the fact that I did not use the best strategy resulted in quite a bit of contemplation on my part. I concluded that this was a result of the fact that I am very selfish, something I had never thought of before. By constantly seeking out for myself and not considering others, I sometimes inadvertently prevent myself from achieving maximum results.

As a result of this presentation and my contemplation of it, I now try to approach any conflict with a “collaborating” strategy. I have, in fact, had several conflicts since this presentation and implored this strategy, which does seem to work better.

Finally, the presentation regarding asset based planning was extremely helpful. This presentation focused on planning based on the assets that you have rather than working to attain things you do not. Several examples were cited involving community based projects that began with the simplest of steps. It reminded me of building a house based not on how you would like it to look, but rather on the materials you have on hand. It is, in effect, a much more logical approach to planning and life in general that most people do not consider.

I applied this presentation towards the planning of my own individual project. I looked at many of the assets I have at my disposal, such as my contacts both with university administration and student organizations, and went from there. Knowing that most of my contacts were political in nature, I knew it was in my best interests to plan a project that was thus political in nature.

Although this is not an activity, another part of ELI that was both beneficial and enjoyable was interacting with everyone in the class and in my small group. Through these interactions, I met folks from various backgrounds of campus, the state, and the country. Many fraternities and sororities were represented, as well as Student Government, Student Activities Board, Student Volunteer Center, Agricultural Student Council, etc. I understood my

motivations and ambitions regarding Student Government and my fraternity, but this class granted me an opportunity to find out why other leaders choose what organizations they are involved with.

Not only did I interact with students, but I also worked with folks from faculty and administration. This has provided me with a network of people that I can call upon to help me in future endeavors at the University of Kentucky. If I have learned one thing from ELI, it is that many people working in cohesion can accomplish quite a bit more than an individual.

I believe these networks will help me in the near future when dealing with my individual project. My project, though most of it I can handle myself, will still require some manpower. I am going to need folks who are willing to stand outside in shifts and pass out material. More importantly, I need folks who have that “fire in the belly”; who are natural leaders that care about what they are doing. ELI has provided a pool of people to draw from for this, as well as the administrative and faculty contacts to make this project happen.

As I stated at the beginning, this year in ELI has flown by. I feel as though I have taken quite a bit from the class and, hopefully, gave something back to it. I believe every individual has imprinted some form of influence on the collective group. We all should be better leaders in that we have developed both our strengths and weaknesses through the strengths and weaknesses of others. For instance, I may be best described as Dominant and Conscientious, but I believe through the course I picked up a few things from those who are best described as Stable or Inspirational.