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ELI Final Paper

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ELI: A Last Look

At the beginning of the semester everyone was asked to write down their definition of leadership. The definition I wrote was, "Leadership is a chameleon. It has the ability to adapt to its surroundings. It pulls everyone together and helps achieve common goals. Leadership is a chance to put together everyone's skills like a puzzle to create a bigger picture." Before I participated in the Emerging Leader Institute, this is what I accepted as the definition of a leader; someone who can fit in with any crowd, pleasing everyone and working as a team to reach a goal. Although I still agree with my definition, ELI allowed me to take a step back from my preconceived notions of what it was to be a leader and look at it from different angles.

ELI was a unique class. Unlike all my other classes this semester, ELI was a nice change of pace. Instead of the normal everyone sit in rows, with notepads out and taking notes, ELI offered a more, relaxed, easy-going atmosphere that encouraged class discussion and involvement. It allowed us to explore our creative side. The most enjoyable classes were the ones where arguments and hypothetical situations were discussed. I thought it was very interesting hearing all the different point of views and various solutions to the problems.

ELI also gave me the opportunity to hear and learn from leaders who are already part of the University of Kentucky family. Most of the speakers throughout the year were

from different colleges that I would not have had the opportunity hear if not for the ELI class. Some of the more memorable speakers included Dr. Bill Maloney's lessons on rewards and the challenges he presented to us about taking a stand for what we want to see happen with Kentucky. Dr. Steven Voss' presentation will forever remain in my mind. He was the first person I felt actually challenged the system we learned about through the reading of Kouzes and Posner's book, "Leadership the Challenge." His lesson was about the traits followers want in their leader, but instead of just following what the chapter said, he looked at it and realized that it was not right, that he did not agree with it. The main thing I learned from his lesson, the golden nugget, was that people want to follow a predictable leader. Being predictable was a trait that I never associated with a leader, and it is a trait I have been working on developing. Another lesson that I learned was that there are three main types of leaders; good leaders, who build up the morale of the followers through encouragement and support, successful leaders, who get the job done and reach the goal, and then effective leaders, the combination of both a good and successful leader. Dr. Gordon Holbein taught this lesson through a very interesting activity. To help us understand the different kinds of leaders; we split into five different groups. Each group came up with a team name, ours was Tippets, and then we were told the rules of the game. The object was to see which group could get the most signatures under their name. The only catch was that the papers had to stay with Dr. Holbein. It was fun to be able to collaborate with a group of my peers on a strategy of how to win, and through winning we proved to be, in our minds, effective leaders, while the rest of the class called us successful leaders.

Although we fought and argued a lot in ELI, each one of us formed a special bond to one another. Our bond is not like a “best friends forever” bond, but it is more of a companionship. I know that if I am trying to get something done, or produce a change, I have twenty students that I can call on for help, productive criticism, and guidance. I also know that if any of my fellow ELI students needs anything, I would be glad to help them. The ropes course was the class when these bonds first started to form. The title was a little misleading, but I still enjoyed the day. We played name games and a trust run. Out of all the activities of the ropes course, I would have to say that the trust run was the most fun. The whole class lined up in two lines across from one another, while the two at the end held hands. One person in line went to the front and was blindfolded and then tried to sprint full speed to the two people at the end who were holding hands. The trust run really brought many of the classmates together.

ELI tested my ability to be a leader. One of the requirements for the course was to set up an individual leadership project that would better the community. The individual project was the most time consuming and effort related task I had to complete my whole first year here at Kentucky, but it helped me evaluate my leadership ability, and showed me where I need to improve. For my individual project, I worked with the University of Kentucky school of Dentistry and their Saturday morning clinics. My goal is to become a dentist and so I decided to find a way I could help the UK school of Dentistry. I noticed that many of the families that participated in this program were of Spanish decent and could not speak English very well or not at all. I took it upon myself to find a way to fix this problem. I contacted the Spanish Department here on campus and working with the Dental School and Spanish Department set up for four student

translators to attend the clinics. This provided an excellent opportunity for the language students to obtain hands on experience. If it were not for ELI, I would not have thought of suggesting the interpreter program. To accomplish my project, I learned that I had to be organized, have a vision, and have connections. In addition, I learned that I needed to become more comfortable talking to adults. All through high school, I never had any problems talking to adults, but that is because they all knew me through my brother or family. Here at UK, no one knows of me, yet.

Another way ELI challenged me was through our class project. As well as individual projects, as a class we had to create, plan and carryout a class service project. The process of planning and creating were a very different experience for me. The process first started in our individual mentor groups where we were assigned a certain category and some businesses around town to call. After each mentor group picked one organization to help out, they presented their ideas in front of the class. The class as a whole picked what project we wanted to do. We decided to help the Bluegrass Autism Society and hold a play day for kids with autism. Up to this point, everything went smoothly, but during the planning period, it got a little crazy. Since this was a leadership class, everyone tried to take control and this just caused mayhem. This mayhem led to a lot of blame being tossed around and no work being done. Fortunately, we all realized that the only way to have a successful class project was to work as a team. We still faced our hurdles along the way; no one was RSVP-ing, we had to share the gym, and Lexington schools were on spring break, but we over came the obstacles and had a successful project. The project itself will be one of my many memories I take away from Kentucky. About fourteen kids with autism ended up coming to our event and it was a

blast. We ran around, jumped on the trampoline, climbed on the bars, laughed, and smiled.

Through all the challenges and activities, I have learned many valuable lessons. The most important thing I learned was that in order to be a great leader you have to have the passion, and desire to reach the your goal. As I look back on all my previous leadership roles, I realize I often did it because I thought it would look good on a resume. I mean, I really wish I could not say that, but in some cases, it is true. I also realized that when I look back, the leadership positions that I felt more passionate about where the ones that were more memorable, more fun, and more successful. By being forced to pick a topic I was passionate about for my personal project, it made me realize how important having a passion is when it comes to leading. If you are not passionate about the change, then your followers are not going to be either. I also learned that great leaders are not in competition. A lot of talk about how life is all a competition was brought up during our classes, and the more I thought about it, the world may be in competition, but the great leaders were not. Gandhi or Mother Teresa were not competing against one another, they had a passion to make a change, to save people, to make life better. I am not saying that the cause for the leadership is not a competition, but as leaders, you should not be competing against other leaders, rather striving to reach your goal. I also learned how important it was to reward your followers. They have put just as much hard work and effort into the project as you do and as a leader you should find a way to say “thank you.” In relation to that, I realized that great leaders do not strive to get recognition. This goes back to the fact that the greatest leaders are compassionate about their projects, they are not in it to get their name on a plaque or award, they simply want a change.

ELI has been a great experience for me, and I know it would not have been as memorable if it were not for my mentor, Ricardo Nazario-Calon, and my peer mentor, Danielle Jarvis, as well as my classmates and most importantly, Jared and Angel. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for helping me make it through this class and grow stronger as a leader.

My original definition of leadership was great, but now that I have all my new knowledge and insight about leadership, I can broaden and better my definition. Leadership is not a position and not a title, it is not an action and it is not a task; rather leadership is an opening up of the heart, the mind, and soul and placing yourself in harms way to create a change and to help others. It will lead to a lifeline of people holding hands eventually creating a society not of followers following one leader, but a leader leading leaders. I have started already taking steps toward building that lifeline. I have become more active and involved around campus, but not just by joining a bunch of organizations. I am getting involved in the organizations that interest me. I will be a UK FUSION leader next fall and I hope to continue my leadership growth and practice my skills during the University Leadership Summit this fall. A leader is commonly thought of as the person who takes that first step, but ELI has taught me that it is much more than that. Anyone can take the first step, but what sets a leader apart from others is that when a leader takes that step, he brings his heart, soul, and mind with him and he knows which direction he is heading.