

Chris Paul

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The Emerging Leader Institute has been an amazing thing for me. I would have never thought this would have made such an impact. There are so many things that I have done during this course that have really made me a better leader.

When I first began this course I really did not know what I was going to get out of it. I was honestly nervous for no reason and I was not sure what this course would entail. I can still remember the first day we all met with everyone; our orientation. Everyone was asked to stand up and say something about themselves that might be weird or important to them. I remember just telling everyone that I was obsessed with pirates. I automatically played my role as being myself. I am the one kid who has always been the weirdest out of my friends and always likes to please the crowd. I definitely made that apparent that day and it was just great to see that everyone was different yet we all had a common purpose.

I was then placed into my small group. My whole group was outgoing and I did not feel that I had to take control of the situation. In most of my classes or group work I always believe that I need to take control because I feel that other people are inadequate and won't do the best job possible. But for this course it was just a great feeling to know that I was not the only one striving for success, 23 other people were in the mood to get it done and that was a relief.

One little instance that sticks out in my mind is when one of our teachers, Dr. Holbein came to speak to us. He told us that we were to go outside and see how many random people we could get to sign our paper. This was the first time that I went up to people I did not know and spoke to them. I have never done anything like that. I have always been very extroverted with people I have met but I am never really out going with new people. For the first time I was put to the test and I did it! I met my expectations and talked to people without being scared. I did not mind, I had a job to do and I was sure that I would get it accomplished. This situation was also odd because I hate competition. I have never really been involved with sports or anything competitive and for the first time I wanted to win. I wanted to come out the best and this session brought out a part of me that I would like to use more.

For months we have planned our group leadership project. Weeks went on and on. Many ideas were brought up; each group was given a specific topic. Some had there elderly, others had children, and another topic involved hospitals. Every leader called a place they picked from their topic and got as much information as possible. Our group was real confident in our pick which was the Lexington Children's Theatre. But when we presented the topic to the class it was shot down pretty fast. The main reason why our subject was declined was that many people thought it was not that personal and I am so glad they made that decision.

We as a class finally decided on the Bluegrass Autism Society. This was not my first pick but I am very glad I got out voted. As a class we decided April 16th would be the day that we would get up early and travel to a gymnastics course where we would

complete our whole day of service. We also had assistants come in and teach us about children with autism and it was very intriguing.

I finally figured out I was really going to enjoy this because slowly but surely this was a topic that was growing very dear to me. I was learning things about people that are not as fortunate as me and it made me realize that I was going to help some children out that never seem to get the proper attention.

Waking up early on April 16th was not that hard for me. I believed it would have been a lot worse but everyone met at the correct time and it seemed that even though it was the break of dawn, we were all wide awake and ready to work. This is when I started to notice this was the most important part of the class for me. Everyone was in the mood to do their job and you could tell this was not for a grade anymore. We had to do a job because we wanted to; I wanted to prove to myself that I can do anything I put my heart to.

When we arrived, a group meeting was put into place and we all were assigned into different groups. The best part about this though was that the gymnastics place was empty and we did not have to work for another hour and a half so we all just played. I knew right then that I really had made friends in this class. It was an amazing feeling. It was the first time we all hung out and had fun but I never noticed that when we were in class we had already built those friendships. This taught me that it is always good to have a helping hand with someone you trust and know will get the job done because it can be fun as well as productive.

It was a blast when the kids arrived. It has been a while since I have seen the happiness of a child (and I miss it). The group that I was placed in was to watch the foam

pit while the kids jumped in and also to make sure that they stayed safe. I honestly was worried before hand because I am not that strong and to know that someone could get hurt or scared was my problem and that I had to be sure everything was in control.

This is when our project made an impact on me. I was responsible for every kid that jumped in that pit. Yes, it was a small job but someone had to do it and I was ready to take control. I do not like to know that I have responsibilities because I like to know that I am not being depended on and there are no consequences to my actions. But that is how this class has helped me. I needed to step out of my comfort zone. Nothing is easy, not everything can be handed to me and I can not be perfect. I had to show myself most of all that I could do what I wanted.

I came into this course with low confidence and this class has definitely made a huge improvement on my self. I now believe I can do anything I put mind to. In the past I had always had wonderful ideas (at least I thought they were good) and I always started to propose a way to get that idea to be a reality. But that is usually as far as I went with the project. I made plans to do something but never went all the way to complete it. I thought I was a leader but honestly I was not. I was just an "Average Joe" that did not pursue his intentions. I did not help the community, I was a waste and it was more disrespectful to the actual people that had done the same as me but followed through with it.

This class taught me that the first step is always the hardest. All I have to do is just push a little more then I had been and eventually it will all fall into place. It is not a big deal unless you make it a big deal and if you keep calm and use proper tactics by

being a leader you will have an accomplishment in your hands and it will be completely successful.

I could not thank Jared, Angel or the other special speakers that came into our course to teach me. A lot of it was common sense but the fact of the matter was I wouldn't have known how to use these simple ideas. I already knew what everything was but I learned the best way to apply the concepts and get the job done fast and efficient.

I can definitely say that I will be going places. With everything I have learned, I have already planned a few projects over the summer. But most of all, I have to accomplish my own leadership project. Soon I will have my car wash and will do other little things to fund raise for Hawthorne Elementary (a local school in Louisville, KY). Second, my mother's music school in Louisville always seems to have a music room that is always trashed and dirty. I plan to get a few friends to go in there this summer and refurbish one of the rooms. Also, they have many instruments but honestly you can never have enough. I am going to try to contact all of the local music stores and also pawn shops in Louisville and see if they are able to donate used or even new instruments.

I know I am different because I would have never done this before. I really care for my family, friends and all of the problems they face. I just want them to know that I want them to come to me. If there is a conflict they are facing I want to be sure that I can tackle it down and solve it. This is not about me, this is not about the person I am helping, it is about making things right and if I can do just a little to make it better then, I really think I made a difference.