

Emerging Leader Institute Final Paper-Personal Leadership Philosophy
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As long as I can remember, I've been labeled a pessimist all my life, always picking out the negative aspects of situations and preparing for the worse. But I often think of myself as a realist rather, viewing the world for what it is. In current times, it is especially hard to be an optimist when it appears that everyday there is something on the news about destruction or death of some sort. It seems this world of ours is slowly falling to pieces, only being held together by those few people in this world who care enough to make a difference. Now you may be wondering what I could possibly be getting at, talking of all of this destruction in our world when I'm supposed to be describing my experience in the Emerging Leader Institute. The simple truth is, the Emerging Leader Institute has helped me to become more of an optimist in this dark world, because I've witnessed and experienced the amazing potential our generation has to change it, and I realize we can do something substantial when we work together and hard enough. Often labeled as Generation X, people stereotype us as lazy, unappreciative, spoiled, and dissatisfied with the world around us, however we are anything but that and have the potential to do amazing things with our lives.

When I first received a phone call acknowledging my acceptance into the Emerging Leader Institute, I was elated and felt privileged at the same time, to be one of the select few to be chosen for what I was told was a very rewarding and fulfilling course. Upon walking into the orientation, I found myself in a circle with 23 other "Emerging Leaders" who I knew very little about. Orientation was a very awkward, involving a series of mundane icebreaker activities, with the feeble attempt of helping us get past our shyness to get to know each other. I remember that orientation, where I couldn't wait to

leave because I was so uncomfortable in the new environment and I now look around at all of the friends I've gained in this class. Throughout the progression of the course, our class formed a unique bond and become closer, sometimes too close, as Jared Tippets, our mentor would jokingly tell us, "I like you all individually, but not you all as a group!", referring to our never ending classroom chatter everyday. At UK, I am sure that you will never find a class where you have such a fantastic opportunity to bond with so many people who are as driven and successful as you are, who truly care about you.

I ask you to imagine someone in this outfit for a moment: a helmet, boxing gloves, and a leotard. Quite a unique combination to contemplate, yet something you surely would not forget if you saw someone dressed in. During our Group Leadership Project, I was asked to put this sort of outfit on! A young, autistic gentleman, Vault, charmed me with these words while I jumped around on a trampoline with him. While in E.L.I., the activity that stood out the most to me was the Group Service Project, which was one of the most fun and rewarding experiences I've had at UK so far. As a class, we were told to create a service project which would benefit the community in some way and decided upon doing a "Parent's Day Off" for autistic children and their siblings. Our project involved playing with the children at a local gymnastics center, which seemed a simple task to pull off. However, we soon learned that leaders must possess the ability to adapt and change to accommodate all situations, rather than giving up. Our class project was frustrating and at times we felt it wasn't going to happen. Seven days before our project was supposed to happen, we had only received three R.S.V.P.'s from parents because we had sent out our invitations too late. We wondered what we could have possibly done better and felt ashamed of the low turnout for our project. The burden of

being the worst E.L.I. class to come through the program hung over our heads, as we imagined our project failing to get off the ground. However, the beauty of our class project was the fact that it all fell through somehow and everything worked out wonderfully. We had many children show up and truly had a blast playing with them and interacting with each other as a class. What other class could you enroll in at UK where you get to jump into a gigantic foam pit with kids for credit? I was so proud of my classmates that day as I looked around and realized what we had done, how much we had accomplished, and then I realized the tremendous potential we all have. As a leader, it is imperative to bring people together, with everyone's unique abilities, and blend it into a cohesive unit to accomplish something. Our class was able to do this and have a successful project. I must admit that before I had taken the E.L.I. class, I often had little confidence in those I was expected to lead, believing that I was better off always taking the lion's share of projects and watching those under my eyes meticulously. However, after I saw the results of our class project, I realized we accomplished the most when we had faith in each other. I learned that you have to work with people, believing in their abilities, and if you make that clear to them, than they will work even harder.

E.L.I. will have an impact on me for the rest of my life. As I will never forget that group service project or the friendships I've acquired, yet what I will remember the most is what I've learned through my Individual Leadership Project experience. As I pondered who I wanted to help in my project, I realized that I wanted to help animals, because they are often forgotten. My project involved working with the Lexington Humane Society by volunteering, raising money, and creating publicity for their name. Before I began my project, I never realized just how much I would learn from it. In class

we learned of two forms of leadership: transactional and transformational. Being an animal lover, I knew I wanted to be a transformational leader, meaning my leadership would cause a change in people's lives and affect them emotionally. As I started my project, I had a very clear vision of what I wanted to achieve, but I then found myself faced with numerous obstacles. A self-proclaimed perfectionist, I became frustrated and upset, wondering how I was going to make everything come together for my project, even though I felt like it was crumbling around me. When the Kentucky Kernel refused my idea for a "Pet of the Month" ad to promote animal adoption in the college community, I tried to do as we had been taught in class, and think of an alternative solution, rather than quit. Leaders must be persistent and determined and I decided to instead ask the Kentucky Kernel to write an article on the Humane Society to get their name out. Sure enough, I was persistent with the situation and was delighted when I opened the Kentucky Kernel and discovered an article about the Humane Society. I felt truly gratified, knowing that I had done that, I had influenced someone to do something for the common good. As my project progressed, I volunteered at the animal shelter. Not surprisingly, this component of my project meant the most to me, because I could see the results of my hard work, first hand in the animal's eyes. Playing with the dogs was my favorite part, as the sad reality was they were so happy to have someone to play with at that moment, and then the next they could be euthanized. A truly gratifying experience, I will continue to volunteer at the animal shelter and I hope to practice the leadership component, "Encourage the Heart", by sharing my meaningful story with others to persuade them to volunteer or adopt from the shelter. Finally, I had the most difficulty in my project with having my t-shirts for the Lexington Humane Society made.

Here I learned what I believe the most important aspect of being a leader and that is being strong with others about your goal, to let them clearly know what you intend to do. A leader must be confident in themselves before they can be confident in those around them. When I went to get my t-shirts made, I chose a client who was very busy at the time and unfortunately they decided that my t-shirts weren't as important to them as other more profitable clients. After weeks of waiting and hearing no response, I realized I had to go to the t-shirt maker and make it very clear to them what my project was all about, that it was imperative I receive their help ensure it was a success. I must admit I had to be a bit more vocal and stern, but after that, they took me seriously and had my t-shirts promptly made. I learned that as a leader you sometimes have to step out of your comfort zone, to make things happen. I am a very shy, quiet person and I hate conflict, but in order to ensure my project's success, I had to voice my opinion clearly in a more demanding manner. However, this is how leadership is, it's all about taking risks and doing things the average person wouldn't take the initiative to do.

I am only one person, as clique as it sounds, but I have realized I can truly make a difference in this world someday. Being involved in E.L.I., I felt I learned some very necessary nuts and bolts in being a successful leader, such as rewarding others and delegating duties properly. I am confident this invaluable information will ensure greater success for all future leadership endeavors I decide to undertake. Yet I am most amazed at the capabilities my classmates had in their personal leadership projects, from getting Spanish students to help at the Dental School, to creating a new study room for underprivileged children. I realized we all share a common desire to do something in this world, to make a difference, and we cannot deny the drive we have been blessed with.

When I watch the news and see all of the disturbing information and tragedies that affect so many people everyday, I know that I can someday do something to help them. This class has helped me decide what I want to do with my life; I now know that it is up to us “Emerging Leaders” to save this world. I plan on being a lobbyist for causes which I feel passionate about, in hopes that they can benefit community, causes such as environmental, educational, and human rights interests. As I progress through college, I will continue to seek and apply for leadership positions, knowing that my experience with E.L.I. has given me the extra confidence I need to succeed. I have always been a timid person my whole life, and often unconfident, but I now feel better about myself, because I know what I can do as a person when so many others are around me, encouraging me and hoping for the best, as my E.L.I. class did. Perhaps the most important affect E.L.I. has had on me is, I can now look at people in a more positive manner, realizing what tremendous good we can do, when we all work together and share in our abilities. It is our duty to save this planet, and we simply cannot sit back and wait for others to take action, as I now know I will someday be someone who works for the greater good.