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Emerging Leader Institute

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28 April 2005

Trying to Continue Being “That” Girl

In high school, I was “that girl.” The girl that was involved in everything imaginable including clubs, sports, my church, community service, and was an active participant in class. I was passionate about helping others and absolutely loved my high school. I was a class officer and could not ever be involved in enough activities. I never had a free second of time. Coming to a huge university like the University of Kentucky was exactly the size school I wanted for my college career. The problem I had during my first semester was a lack of involvement within the community and trying to find ways to get involved on such a huge campus. I joined a sorority, loved every minute and poured myself into it, but there was still a void from where I felt a need to be involved in the larger community not just the Greek Community. So, my search began.

While searching for a way to fill the void found in the University and Lexington communities I stumbled upon the Emerging Leader Institute. An older sorority sister was handing out brochures at a new member meeting and I took one just to be nice. I read the brochure, went back and forth over the decision to apply, and eventually, decided that I did not have anything to lose by applying. It seemed interesting enough and like a decently easy class. Well, when I got accepted it shocked me. I began wondering what exactly had I gotten myself into. I thought that ELI would be a breeze and to my

disbelief, I would spend the next semester being challenged, forming new friendships, working hard, and discovering part of who I am.

It all started with a six hour orientation. At the orientation I was introduced to my classmates, instructors, and most importantly, my mentor group. It was within the first week of class that I felt in over my head, not with the class work, but with my classmates. I felt inadequate when I compared myself to them. On a campus as large as Kentucky, I felt unimportant and unproductive as a leader. I felt like no matter what I did, my actions would be insufficient compared to those in my class. It was discouraging, but throughout the semester (and especially later) in the semester my mentor and mentor group opened my eyes to the idea that I am not any less of a leader than my classmates. It was not explicitly stated, but you could find it between the lines. My mentor group helped me to find both friends, encouragement, and acted like a sounding board for project ideas and concerns. While my mentor group helped me more than what was ever imaginable, it was one in-class speaker who is most memorable in my mind.

Throughout the semester many great presenters came and talked with the class all bringing great advice, information, and ways to challenge the class. While every session presented me with a new challenge or idea, it was a session in the beginning of the semester that stuck with me the most. Dr. Gordon Holbein, a professor of leadership, strategy, and International Business, was presenting about The Five Practices of Exemplarily Leadership.

Dr. Holbein expanded on the ideas presented in our book, *The Leadership Challenge*. He differentiated between three types of leaders: a successful leader, a good leader, and an effective leader. One portion of his lecture visit included a group activity.

The class was divided into equal teams. Dr. Holbein told us that he was going to sit outside of Patterson Officer Tower with sheets of paper in which we were supposed to have people sign for our specific teams. It was a competition between teams and whoever's team had the most signatures at the end would win. The winning team would be rewarded. There were no rules, just an objective to fulfill. It can only be expected that without any rules or regulations, that a huge lesson would be taken from this activity.

The activity began and some teams ran out the door without setting up a plan, some took ten minutes to create a plan of action, and others did a little bit of both winging it and planning. The competition was intense and some teams even stole people from other teams to sign their paper. In the end, my team won second place. Even though I did not win, this activity and its "lessons" stayed with me throughout the semester.

The activity established two of the types of leaders that Dr. Holbein taught us about. It showed successful leaders, who are people who get the job done through others. Dr. Holbein described successful leaders as the leader who "gets people to the holy land." Successful leaders accomplish some task and then that's it. In my opinion, some of the successful leaders were the ones who were "cheated" by stealing the people that other groups had recruited. While the successful leaders did other things besides "cheat", that stuck with me the most. The main priority was to accomplish the task before them.

The other type of leader demonstrated was a good leader. According to Dr. Holbein a good leader uplifts, enables, builds people, are humane, positive, role models, and have integrity. Integrity and uplifting were the two adjectives that were most prominent during the activity. The integrity was shown when they did not steal people from the other teams. The good leaders also uplifted the people they were working with

on their team, and the people they recruited. They explained what a good cause they were helping by signing their paper.

After reconvening back in the classroom, Dr. Holbein rewarded the winning team with candy (which they ended up sharing with the class.) Then the homerun came. Different situations required different leaders and styles of leadership. Little did I know that this idea would underlie every message the rest of the semester. Next Dr. Holbein presented the idea of an effective leader. An effective leader is the one who both develops people and delivers the good, making it a combination of both a successful leader and an effective leader.

I decided in that instant that I always wanted to be the effective leader. It seemed like the best type of leader to me. I wanted to be an effective leader. I wanted to be able to develop people and accomplish great tasks. I wanted to change the people on the inside and help them make change in the world. That is by far easier said than done. As the semester passed I realized being an effective leader all the time is difficult. The goal to become one was just one of the goals I set for myself throughout the semester. I also realized that the people I considered to be great and strong leaders were the effective leader type. I used them as role models for myself.

Today, I am still striving to be an effective leader. As my individual project has finally taken off, I came to the realization that being an effective leader in every situation is almost impossible. Dr. Holbein did make another point tying into the idea of types of leaders. He said that all types of leaders have five underlying characteristics. These five characteristics are vision, passion, communication, integrity, and balance. As I was reviewing the notes I took during class, I had a revelation. My problem during my first

semester was not that I was not involved in the community in enough ways, but it was that I had not found my passion in the community yet. In high school, I had a vision for myself and my school and I also had a passion to achieve that vision, but at the university I had yet to establish a vision for my future. I am slowly becoming “that” girl again. Thankfully, the Emerging Leader Institute has helped me find my passion and create a vision for my future and the void is starting to fill up.