

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us”. –Ralph Waldo Emerson

First and foremost, I would like to thank Angel Lee and Jared Tippets for accepting me into the Emerging Leader Institute. It is an opportunity that I will always be grateful for and encourage others to take advantage of.

My ELI experience has been one to remember, one to benefit from and most importantly, an experience to learn from. Coming into ELI, I had many leadership roles and experiences "under my belt". I had been president of my high school class, director of a couple of committees, a volunteer student, a resident advisor; the list goes on. Yet, I had no clue of what real leadership was. To me, it was good grades and popularity that would get everyone's vote for whatever position you may choose to run for. To me, leadership was a position with a title. I now know, because of my ELI experience, that leadership is more than I thought or imagined; it's part of one's lifestyle.

The first class sessions, Jared and Angel taught us about the historical and modern views of leadership, gender views, organizational, etc. These sessions allowed me to put aspects about leadership into perspective and really examine my purpose in leadership. I cannot put into words the exact definition of it; however, I do know that it has been defined for me through the course of ELI.

What kind of leader am I? Am I a leader? These were a couple of the questions I asked myself after the first class sessions. It is important to understand what type of leader you are before you can determine what leadership is.

Before ELI, I never had any thought about what kind of leader I was. I knew I was kind of quiet, encouraging and determined, but I only thought of those as personality characteristics. Through the DISC exercise, Rhonda Strouse helped me realize what type of leader and person I am. The DISC described me as a steady person, who's "emphasis is on cooperating with others within existing circumstances to carry out the task". Um, okay. That's what I thought when I first read the interpretation my answers lead up to. Then I read further into the interpretation, and I was described as predictable, helpful to others, and a **good listener**, etc. These qualities stood out to me the most. Why? Well, they were true and they were what I wanted to change the most about myself. Being predictable is safe, but boring. Being helpful to others is good and moral, but sometimes it delays my own work. Being a listener, not a speaker, I thought, was my biggest problem, which is why it's in bold.

In ELI, I did not speak up because I felt that my comment would not be meaningful and the other student's thoughts and ideas were so intriguing. I guess you could say I was intimidated. Intimidation is my weakness and it may have been for others, but they did not let it show. The students of ELI were not afraid to speak out and it gave me courage to improve my weakness. It was a refreshing experience just to hear some of their philosophies about leadership and life, in general. Some of the other ELI sessions and projects helped me overcome and challenged me, but there was one in particular I remember.

Good Leader vs. Successful Leader

Dr. Gordon Holbein, one of the guest speakers for ELI, conducted the activity, good leader vs. successful leader. In this exercise, our ELI class was divided into teams and we had to collect as many signatures possible from strangers in a given amount of time. The purpose of Dr. Holbein's exercise was to teach us how we can be a good leader and a successful leader. Not just one or the other. This activity did so much more and helped me overcome being predictable and boring. I hardly ever walk up to a stranger, so it was out of my comfort zone to ask them for their signature. We also had to explain exactly what we were doing and convince the strangers that it was for a worthy cause. I was very uneasy and I was a little frustrated with the activity, but after a few people were willing to provide their signature for my team, I loosened up and began to "attack". I enjoyed this session the most.

Yes, each session and guest speaker was a learning experience, but I believe I gained most, personally, from my mentor group and my fellow ELI class members. In my mentor group, we always began our meeting with "High, Low" stories. It was our chance to get out all of our good times and frustrations and to really be a friend to one another. This allowed me to open up and be accepting to others' opinions and suggestions. In the beginning of ELI, I was very uptight and I sort of kept to myself. I did not think that other's opinions mattered because they did not feel what I was feeling. Now, I'm always willing to share what is going on and expecting constructive criticism or advice. Also, my mentor group was like a support network. We all helped each other

with the individual projects, whether it was advertising them, participating in the projects, or offering help to complete a part of the project. I've learned that I can depend on people and that I do not have to do all the work myself. Trusting and believing in others is a must for any leader because you can't do it all by yourself. It was nice to have others who cared about my goals and the best way to achieve them.

I have learned even more about myself from my ELI class. There were so many different personalities and backgrounds in my ELI class. I thought just because I am an African-American female on a predominantly Caucasian campus that my struggle would be the most difficult. I learned that this is not so. We may be facing different circumstances; we are all actually going through the same struggle together. I learned that we are only a number if we allow ourselves to be a number. Instead, we should use our passion, dedication and motivation for success to turn things we view as major issues around. The class has shown that through our individual projects. We all saw a need and instead of just complaining about it, we organized a plan and solution for it. I saw the need for better preparation for the inner youth of Lexington.

I believe the individual project is the most rewarding component of ELI. I'm good at coming up with ideas, but I was provided with the opportunity to put it into action. I've gained many skills from my project. I've gained organization skills. I've never had to plan things from the beginning to end, step by step AND deal with conflicts that may arise with my plan. I was taught a lot about patience and flexibility. Also with my project, I somewhat found my voice and I felt like I could talk forever and ever when it came to my project. I loved explaining and persuading people that my project is

prolific and realistic. I could only do so because I had a passion for my project. As mentioned in class, I am very passionate about community service, so I began to take charge and do something about the issues affecting the Lexington community. I am not from here, but while I am here, I feel the need to contribute to the community and I have a great start with “PREPARATION is Key”.

As a result of my individual project, I am gaining recognition from those who have the power to expand my vision, my goal. Rev. D. Wayne Rogers and Mr. Aaron Mosley, Sr. are two men who see what I see. Most importantly, they feel the need I am feeling. They are providing me with an opportunity to be a leader with a purpose and a plan, just like ELI. During the summer, I may be given the opportunity to present my project to a community council who may expand it to other areas of Lexington. I’m so excited and I feel like a leader. I know I’ve always had the potential to be one, but now I’m doing it, I’m a community leader! I have changed so much over this course. In January, I was someone with ideas, but no plan or really no courage to act on them. Now, I see that I have really transformed into an emerging leader, one who is improving herself and others along her path. To really sum up all of my thoughts and emotions about ELI, I must say that ELI has been a blessing to me and has allowed me to be a blessing to others. I’m ready to make my mark and ELI has been my catalyst.