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April 23, 2006
ELI Final Paper

My Leadership Experience

Leadership is different for every person. That was evident when it took over an hour and a half for our ELI class to come up with an agreeable class definition of leadership. Each leader has their own leadership style, and each follower reacts to a certain style of leadership. That is where the leadership challenge comes in. To be an effective leader, you must be able to decide what style of leadership works best for you, but you must also be able to recognize what style of leadership your followers react best to. This is a constant process, much like leadership itself, which changes with people and situation, but it is essential to recognize this process during the journey of becoming a better leader.

Since leadership is different for every person, I would like to see what leadership is for some people. I will first start with the ELI class definition. Leadership is “a process by which an organized group or individual motivates others to step up and achieve a vision and/or goal.” According to our book, “a leader is one who: challenges the process, inspires a shared vision, enables others to act, models the way and encourages the heart.”

How do I view these definitions? I think our class definition is good, but I have some problems with it. One, I don't think it has to be an organized group. One can be a leader within a group of friends, and that is not a very organized group. I also don't like the phrase “motivates others to step up.” I don't necessarily disagree about a leader having to be able to motivate, but making others step up isn't a set part of leadership.

The other thing I don't agree with is the word achieve. Sometimes leaders fail. It's a part of life. Everything cannot be accomplished. Just because you don't achieve something doesn't mean you aren't a leader or any less of a leader. I don't really like the book definition of leadership at all. I disagree with inspiring a shared vision and encouraging the heart. I don't think you have to do these to be a leader. It all goes back to every person has their own style of leadership, and I don't think these two aspects have to be in every one's style. These two aspects may work well for some people in their style, but I know they are not that effective for me.

So what is my definition of leadership? I don't have one. Like I said earlier, leadership is different for everyone, so how can I compress everyone's style into one definition. I have aspects of leadership that I agree with, but I cannot come up with a definition of leadership that spans every person. I can however, tell you my leadership style and what makes me an effective leader. The most important thing I can tell anyone about leadership is that the title doesn't make the leader. As Donald H. McGannon says, "leadership is action, not position." This means you don't have to be some high ranking official to make change. Go out there and do it yourself. If you have an opinion, say it. If you have a problem, do something about it. If you want to make a difference, you can. A truly effective leader is a doer.

Another aspect of leadership I think is important is that you shouldn't be a leader to make yourself look good. You should be a leader to help those around you. George Van Valkenburg says, "Leadership is doing what is right when no one is watching." A leader leads all the time. It shows the true character of a leader if they continue to do good even when there is no one to recognize their good actions. This also goes along

with idea of leading by example. When people are around to see you do good, it makes them want to do good. Leading by example and by actions is in my opinion much better than leading by words. If you lead by example, you are able to get things done because you are actually doing something. You are also able to motivate others to do things because they see you doing them. That is why leading by example is my most important leadership technique, and it is one that I try to do at all times, even when no one is looking.

I think one thing about good leaders is that they think critically. They ask “why?” This goes along with the book’s challenging the process. Nothing can be accomplished the question “why?” isn’t asked first. Why are things the way they are? Why can’t we make a difference? Why can’t we change? Asking “why?” is the most important piece to bringing about change. It is also the first step necessary in bringing about change. Along with thinking critically, a leader has to be able to see other people’s viewpoints about the situation. This is something I learned from Ricardo Nazario-Colón and his speech on diversity. To be truly effective, you have to see everybody’s viewpoints and respect everybody’s opinion, even if you disagree with it. You cannot let somebody else help you if you do not give them the opportunity to help you.

I have said what I think makes a good leader, but I haven’t said what my individual leadership style is. Going by all the activities we did in class, I am an agentic, dominant leader that follows the developer pattern. Seems simple enough, but this is how I view myself as a leader. I am a problem solver. That is one of my greatest strengths as a leader. I see the problem, analyze it, and come up with solutions. I am also a critical thinker in coming up with the problem itself. I do believe I am agentic, but I also think I

have a good balance between the agentic and communal. Balanced leader would be a good way to describe my leadership style. I am direct when I need to be (which is most of the time), but I can work well in groups and communicate my ideas in a more relaxed way.

Do I think I am a good leader? I think I am, but I also know for a fact that I can still improve. I need to work on gaining a better overall balance of my leadership skills. I need the gap in my agentic and communal styles to become smaller. I need to constantly work on my communication and networking skills. These are two skills that leaders must have in order to excel. Along with communication, I need to be able to express my feelings better. This doesn't necessarily mean letting out my emotions, but being able to better convey my opinions and thoughts. I think I also need to be more open to other people's opinions and feelings. I tend to be pretty stubborn and think my way is usually the right way, but I need to realize that other people can help me if I let them.

One of the biggest things I learned during my ELI experience came from the talk by Dorothy Edwards. Everyone remembers her fire in the belly speech, but I took more out of her Dr. Pepper explanation (one that I think most people in the class misinterpreted). She took the Dr. Pepper out from under her shirt and put it on the floor in front of her. This may not have much significance in itself, but it has a much deeper meaning. Having passion for something is good. It is a great way to get involved and make change. The thing is, you cannot let that passion get in your way and blind you from the end. You must take the passion out from under your shirt, place it on the ground, and step back to realize what is truly going on. You should let your passion

guide you, not control you. Continuing on with the idea of passion, I believe that in order to be a leader, you have to want to be a leader. I know I want to be a leader, and I strive to be a good leader in all I do. One thing that I am looking forward to in my leadership journey is finding my true passion. I especially want to do this while I am still in college so I can make a difference on campus. I am involved in several things, but I still don't think they are my true calling to make a difference, one thing I am set on doing during my college years.

Overall, my leadership experience has been amazing. I have learned a lot of things that will help me in my future leadership endeavors. Most importantly though, I have met people that are like myself and want to make a difference. These are the people I will be working with the next few years to create change in we think is wrong. I could not ask for better people to have taken ELI with, and I am truly glad I was able to meet all of them. I know I will take with me a better outlook on leadership and will hopefully be able to incorporate aspects of leadership that were talked about into my own leadership philosophy and style.