

Final Report –Personal Leadership Philosophy for ELI *Danielle Rose*

Is there one universal definition for leadership? Can you pinpoint what exactly leadership means to all people? These were the questions I thought I could have answered before I took Emerging Leader Institute. Yet I found there is not one definition for leadership, nor does everyone have the same views on it either. I always thought that being a leader was so simple. It “seemed” so black and white to me. Looking back though, I never really paid attention to my leadership skills and what being a leader really meant to me. This is exactly why I chose to take ELI; to enhance my understanding of leadership.

The *Emerging* Leader Institute is not your ordinary class. It is far beyond sitting behind a desk and having to take notes. Having different speakers come into class and talk about their views on leadership, to actually putting our leadership skills to the test by performing our individual and class projects, I feel I have a good idea of what it takes to be a good leader. During this process I have found what type of leader I am and what it takes to be an effective leader. Many definitions of leadership are ambiguous. Furthermore, the distinction between leadership and other social-influence processes is often blurred. Yet, what leadership means to me is having a vision and being passionate about it, while at the same time motivating others to achieve certain goals. Therefore, my definition of leadership has found its meaning through personal experience of being a leader, and can change throughout time.

I have found that as I get older and wiser my perspective of leadership changes. This is not necessarily a bad thing because you learn from your mistakes. As a leader I

know it is okay to fail and to make mistakes. I cannot tell you how many times I have failed as a leader and have been corrected by others or by myself along the way.

Surprisingly enough, I am thankful for these times and try to look on the bright side when I fail. I am encouraged and am more than willing to hear other people's opinions about my style of leadership, and will adjust my style if necessary.

I have also learned through this process that if you are going to be a great leader with high expectations, you need to inherit a few skills or habits, one being that leaders should be willing to be flexible. Flexibility is the key word because without it you could find yourself going nowhere with your goals. For example, during my individual project I had to be very flexible because my project changed so many times at the beginning. I had one idea in mind, but I found that it was not going to work in the amount of time we had to get it done. So in this case I had to be flexible and change my project around a little to where I was able to get it done in time. It was slightly hard coming up with a new idea and making those changes, but I had to and was willing to make the switch fast. If I did not I would have gotten nowhere and probably would not have even got my project completed because it was not reasonable.

Another skill I find helpful if you want to succeed as a leader is to stay focused and persistent. I find myself at times not focusing necessarily on the project or other people's needs as much as I should. Yet I should do so in order to be persistent on whatever task I may be doing involving other people. Being persistent is what I mainly learned more than anything this semester because going back to my individual project, I have found that you should have a plan and to keep up on it. As I mentioned before, having a time constraint made me work a little harder and pace myself better knowing I had to get my project

done within a few weeks. I had a planner and made sure I followed up with every little step I took to make sure everything would fall right into place. I did not want to be behind or scrambling at the last minute to throw something together and not put my all into it. Therefore, staying focus on what you are doing causes you to be persistent which in the end puts you in control of your project.

I found out a lot about myself as a leader after taking the D-I-S-C test. As a high “I”, my behavioral tendencies (according to the test) include being optimistic, people oriented, I am motivated by social recognition, emotionally attacked by others and their ideas, very open, and disorganized. I can agree with almost all of these traits except being disorganized. I know for a fact this is not true because I am very organized and feel I need to be, especially if I am a leader and am responsible for myself and other people. Being an “I” does not surprise me that much because I already know I inherited many of these traits and was born with them as well. Yet the test helped me discover how I could apply these traits in order to become a better leader and also showed me how to use them to my advantage. For example, being very open gives me a great opportunity to connect with people I may be working with and express my thoughts and feelings to them, hoping in return they do the same to me. This is good because I could build better relationships with these people making the working environment more comfortable and enjoyable.

People are born with certain traits, yet whether or not they choose to act upon them is a different question. For example, if someone is a high “D” and is naturally strong-willed, that person may or may not show this trait. As much as the person is born strong-willed, he/she may not show it to others. He/she in turn may choose to “pick-up” other traits that they have learned from other people and may express these traits instead.

This is possible because I can personally relate to this. As a leader I must comply myself more by being more tolerant with others. This does not come easy to me because I naturally am more of an attacker, but I know it is important to “pick-up” certain traits (one being more complied), and to act upon it. I have taught myself to sacrifice and to get out of my comfort zone here and there because I want to grow as a person and improve my leadership skills as well.

Transformative Civic Engagement is the process of an individual who works with others to make a positive change and raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. This was the challenge I set for myself this semester in improving my leadership skills. Here are the stages or phases associated with this process;

- 1) Awakening: Become aware of a range of issues.
- 2) Educating: Gain a more in-depth knowledge about particular issues that interest you.
- 3) Collaborating: Identify and bring all stakeholders to the table.
- 4) Planning: Creating a method and assign tasks.
- 5) Mobilizing: Get out and do the work! Take action!
- 6) Assessing: Evaluate the process and the impact.
- 7) Strengthening: Transition, sustain, and grow your efforts (Pass the torch).
- 8) Thinking and Reflecting: Pause to consider and process everything.

I found this to be a wonderful personal leadership philosophy because it basically defines how I can improve my leadership skills. Being young I know I have the rest of my life to be a leader. I cannot help though wanting to be the best leader I can be today. Let's put it this way, I never want my age to get in the way of whatever I do. As a young adult I do not want to underestimate myself, but at the same time I do not want to set too

high of standards either. So the question is where do I draw the line between having a vision and knowing when that vision is too far out of your reach? I still sometimes struggle with this, but as I mentioned before with my individual project, you have to be willing to be flexible and make adjustments along the way. As a leader I always have goals set for myself, and feel I have to accomplish every single one of them. Basically this semester in ELI, I have learned that if you try to do your best and do not necessarily accomplish everything every step of the way, it is okay. Sometimes I feel I am too hard on myself and need to step back and take a breather, or let other people help me out. This is where I need to work on my transformative civic engagement process. I think if I can respectfully rely on others to help me and in return encourage them, our motivation and morality will be positive and we can work well together. Dr. Suzanne Morse says it best; “Transformative civic engagement is not a set of actions...it is a way of thinking.”

Working in a nice, friendly environment is a plus in my book. I think it is vital to praise one another for a job well done. I could see this happening just within our class. We respected one another and were there to help each other out. It was nice knowing that so many people were willing to become effective leaders for the future. With great mentors, speakers, instructors, and classmates, I honestly feel I have learned from the best. As leaders of the future we should have followers, be visible, responsible, and set examples for others to see. We should do the right thing, and show results. Also, a few new tasks of leadership I have recently learned were to communicate an inspiring vision and values. Be sure individuals or groups understand organizational goals, are committed, and competent to pursue them responsibly. Listen to followers, build trust and lead by personal example.

I have learned almost too much in this class if that makes sense. I just now need to go out in the community and perform all this material that I have learned. I cannot emphasize how grateful and honored I am to be in such a unique institution. I know it is one of, if not the best class ever to come through ELI; but on a more serious note I will miss it. I am very thankful for the experience and will use my leadership skills in not only my job in the future but in other areas of my life. Thanks again for this great experience in ELI and all it had to offer. I can honestly say I am a changed person and have learned more in this class than any other class. I just wished this class was year-round!!