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Personal Leadership Philosophy

The Emerging Leaders Institute has truly been a sensational experience for me. It has broadened my horizons and fine tuned my leadership skills. I have also met some of UK's most intelligent and driven people on campus. The Emerging Leaders Institute has opened many doors for me, both on and off campus. ELI has also increased my knowledge of leaders and leadership immensely. I have learned how to work in a team and how to network. Throughout this essay I will elaborate on my experience in ELI and what I have learned from it.

Before ELI I had no real definition of leadership. I also wasn't really sure what made a leader. I was convinced that leadership skills were mainly innate. I believed that great leaders were born, not made. ELI opened my eyes and helped me realize that leaders are not just born. While individuals can be born with traits such as charisma, a majority of leadership skills can be learned. This was the first thing that ELI taught me, but not the last.

When ELI first started, I didn't know what exactly to expect. I didn't know how much "work" would be involved and what exactly we would be doing. I didn't know if I would become close to the other 24 students chosen. I didn't know if I would hate it or love it. But I took a chance and decided to try it anyway. I'm so thankful that I was given an opportunity to be a part of this exceptional program. My advisor told me when I got in that I would "learn more from this class than any other class at UK," and I couldn't agree with her more. ELI teaches you more than any textbook ever could. It gives you life

experience and gives you a chance to branch out into the community. It gives you a chance to take part in something that you have never done before. It opens up your eyes to a completely new way of learning.

I have also learned a great deal from my personal project for ELI. By starting my tutoring program at Lexington Traditional Magnet School I have learned that you must have passion for what you do. ELI has made me realize that there is a difference between doing work and being passionate about something. When you are passionate about something such as how I am about my tutoring program, it no longer is classified as work. I have learned that it is vital to view things that are important to you as adventures instead of work to be accomplished. Not only does this affect your project or task positively, it makes your life more meaningful. What a fabulous combination!

I've also learned that if you sense a problem in your community, you have the power to fix it. I never knew that I could make such a difference in any community, let alone Lexington since I am still fairly new to this city. But if you have the drive and feel passionately about something you can accomplish almost anything. While I had noticed that some children struggle in our school systems around the country, I had never done anything about it. ELI gave me the confidence to go out into the Lexington community and make a difference. ELI empowers you and supports you throughout your project should you ever falter. They give you a reason to go out on a limb and try new things, which I would have never done otherwise. This is also a skill that I will take with me from this class. Wherever I end up I will have the confidence that I can inflict change and be successful.

I have also learned how important teamwork is to accomplish a task. By nature I prefer to do things on my own without help from others. However, I knew that this would not be possible if I was starting a tutoring program. I would have to enlist and collaborate with at least ten other volunteers. I would also have to work with faculty members of the Fayette county school system, and LTMS's parents. ELI enabled me to work on this area and expand my leadership skills. By the end of my project I was very comfortable in my position and had no problem working with and leading my ten volunteers, parents, and associated teachers. Again, ELI made me branch out to others which is something that I didn't do much of before this class. This is an extremely important skill to take with me in the future and even here on campus, in the workforce, in my family, sorority and where ever else I may venture.

Most importantly from working on my project I learned something about myself. I have learned that I cannot take everything so seriously and that mistakes are going to happen. I've been a perfectionist since I was about seven. While perfection is great, it isn't always plausible. ELI has taught me that a project, or anything you do for that matter, does not have to be perfect to be successful. This lesson was liberating for me and I will hopefully carry this lesson with me for the rest of my life. When you expect perfection and don't attain it, it is extremely frustrating. If you focus on doing the best that you can, remember the success that you do encounter, and learn from your mistakes, and that is just as good if not better than perfection.

Throughout the course of this semester I have been faced with many definitions of leadership. While I believe it is important to make note of definitions that are presented to you, I also believe that it was more beneficial to me to have my own leadership mantra. I

think that I can best describe leadership as something that emerges from opportunities for an individual to lead a group or team of individuals together towards a common goal. It is simple and easy to understand. These are two things that I strive for when I am in a leadership position. I like to clearly describe my vision and goals to keep them simple and clear for everyone to understand. My mantra is written to reflect this.

There are many principles that influence my efforts as a leader. I believe that a leader should be driven, intelligent, compassionate, hard working, broad minded, honest and competent. However I believe that the three most important values I strive to have are courage, endurance and to be forward looking. A leader must establish a clear vision so everyone knows where they are headed and what it might take to get there. Courage and endurance are also essential since many hardships can happen along the way and that is when a team or group will look to the leader as a role model.

Courage is a very important characteristic to have as a leader. I needed courage to step out into the Lexington Community. While I am a sophomore I am still not very familiar with Lexington and I did not have any contacts outside of the University of Kentucky. I also needed it to recruit my tutors, and to explain to them why they should want to be a part of this great program. I needed courage to work with LTMS's children that were falling horribly behind in their studies. I believe that a leader cannot be successful unless they are courageous. How can a leader get anywhere if they are unsure of themselves or what they are capable of? That's not how leaders are born, that is how followers are born.

Secondly, I believe that leaders must have endurance. They must have endurance to make it through the hardships that they will face when trying to reach their goals. I was

faced with several hardships during my project, especially when my volunteers had to wait out the long process of being background checked. It took several weeks and many of them became restless and kept asking me when we were going to start tutoring. I also was not sure if this program would even work, and if we would be able to successfully help the students. A leader must have endurance to make it to the goal that they have set for themselves and their followers. If the leader cannot show how the goal they are striving for is worth enduring through the hardships, how will those who follow the leader deal with them? A leader must be there to follow through all the way and encourage their followers to do so as well.

Finally, I believe that a leader must be forward looking and capable of describing their vision to their team. A leader must always have their eyes on the horizon. In my project I knew that I wanted to improve as many children's grades by the end of the semester as possible. I had a vision that I was moving towards. A leader cannot progress toward their goal unless they describe where they are going, because their followers will have no idea what they are striving to achieve. By looking forward you can create and forge a path for your followers to take. You also make your journey much easier, because you know where you are trying to go.

Throughout this semester I continued to grow both as a leader and as an individual. I know that this is due to the Emerging Leaders Institute. While my leadership philosophy continues to grow and change, I will always be able to trace its roots back to ELI. I am looking forward to taking what I have learned from ELI and applying it to many aspects of my life. During spring break in my hometown of Washington D.C., I used my newly developed networking skills to search for summer internships at several

social events that were held for charities. I felt that this class gave me an edge over many of the other possible applicants at these same events. Many prospective employers were very impressed and interested in what ELI was and what we have accomplished. I was proud to say that not only have I read *The Leadership Challenge*, and heard lectures from some of UK's most prestigious faculty members, but I also developed my own leadership project, and participated in our group project of renovating UK's Hospital Hospitality House. Not to mention I met some of the most passionate people in Lexington.

ELI has opened many doors for me here on UK's campus and around the country. I am eager to see what the future holds for me, and what obstacles I will face in the future. I am confident that ELI has helped further develop my leadership skills and for that I will be forever appreciative. While my time in ELI is coming to a close, I will never forget the extraordinary people that I have met and the important lessons that I have learned.