On Leadership:
The Memoirs of a Future Global Leader

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Summary

This report is the story of how I was thrown into a leadership position with no guidance and was expected to produce some kind of product while working with a team of students that I had never met before. There were hardships along the way, but our group accomplished every goal that we set.

Through the telling of my experiences from this semester, it is my intent to describe the characteristics of a global leader in the twenty first century. I would like the reader to imbibe a sense of what it takes to become such a global leader, and to learn from my mistakes and successes. Furthermore, I list references to some works in hopes of sparking interest and guiding the reader to more detailed information about leadership.
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Introduction

In this work, the reader will gain a good understanding of the situation that I was put in, and will hopefully benefit from my faults and successes. This whole project was started the first day of my engineering leadership class. I was to sign up for a project of my choosing, and then complete it with whomever else signed up for it. The problem with our project was the clarity of it; there was none. It was to join ELDU (Engineering Leadership Development Unlimited), and become leaders. There were no specific goals or clear steps to take, no guidelines. We had no project description other than “Join ELDU.” We were all a little nervous from the uncertainty that we all felt. Luckily, everyone in the group seemed very nice, and we all clicked from the start. There were six of us. While other groups’ members dropped from six to one, our group stayed strong throughout the semester. Through the many projects that we decided to take on, such as Homecoming, Corporate Affiliates, and Community Involvement, our ENGR 493 group made a name for ourselves in the ELDU organization, and more importantly, we gained team skills that will be of use to us in all of our future endeavors.

The Story of ELDU

ELDU (Engineering Leadership Development Unlimited) is a unique organization in that it is structured after successful Fortune 500 Companies. By this I mean that it has four major departments: Marketing, Human Resources, Communications, and Community Involvement. It also has a projects focus area, where there are a select number of projects that are undertaken for the semester/year. Some big ones that ELDU is known to do every year are EMP (Engineering Mentorship Program), Imagin8, and Homecoming. The organization also has a social aspect, where the members get together and relieve some stress through fun activities. An example of this is midnight bowling. Through these departments, projects, and socials, the organization operates in a structured efficient manner.

The Induction of a Leader(s)

It was the night of the first meeting. Our group met five minutes beforehand so that we could come in as a team and show some professionalism. We walked in and had a seat. While we were waiting for the meeting to begin, we started talking about what we could possibly do to accomplish our main objective: to become leaders. We got up and went over to the president and introduced ourselves, and then took our seats again. The meeting went well, with introductions by the Executive Board, consisting of many different chairs for the projects and departments. In the middle of the introduction, the president told us that we should pick some projects to work on.
After the meeting was done, our group met together and discussed what we wanted to do. It took us only a few minutes, as we were all very open-minded and easy going. Corporate Affiliates and Community Involvement were what we were going to do. Our main project ended up being Corporate Affiliates, where we got a lot accomplished, although we did fairly well with Community Involvement as well.

The Projects

Our group got to shine in Corporate Affiliates. Almost every Monday we would hold meetings with the vice president, Kyle, and we would go over what needed to be done. There were many brainstorming sessions. One project we decided to undertake as team was a resume CD. The previous year was a disaster with this. The idea had been started that a resume CD would be a great way to make corporate friends as well as show off our talented engineers in ELDU. The only problem was that it never really took off, and only one or two CD’s were distributed at the Career Fair. This year, we took it upon us to see this through successfully. Our first leadership role began. Mary Katherine (one of our team-mates) decided to take lead on this project, and delegated some tasks, as well as made sure to listen to the ideas being thrown around. I was in charge of getting the resumes compiled, as well as creating a CD label. Once I got them compiled, Mike from ELDU took them and put them on a Flash program, and handed it over to Kyle, who got them copied. When it was time for the Career Fair, Mary Katherine met Kyle and personally handed them out to fifty employers. That was forty-nine more than the previous year! We were all very excited, especially because Mary Katherine got a call back from GM for a phone interview because of that CD. Our first project was a success.

Our second major project was to start a monthly newsletter which would be sent out to different companies that we had contacts for. It would include the activities that ELDU was currently taking on, such as THON and homecoming. The previous year, they had gotten one newsletter out. The problem was that the workflow wasn’t standardized. I saw this immediately, and decided to offer my technology services. I helped head up the project in co-leadership with Jose, another group member. He compiled and edited the first newsletter, while I helped show him how to use a specific program that simplified the whole process immensely. Through our teamwork and partnership, we got the newsletter out on time, and it looked much more professional than the previous year’s. Also, I wrote a tutorial on how to use the program, so that the project lead for next semester would know how to use it. In this way, we sustained the project through the tutorial, as well as improved it by making it look more professional and making it easier to create. Our second project was also a success.

By the end of the semester, our group would get to the meeting and we would actually take over by writing up the agenda on the board and discussing what needed to be done, all before the vice president even showed up. Our constant communication was key to being a successful team. We felt that through Corporate Affiliates our biggest accomplishments were made.

There was a project that was thrown at us about three weeks before the end of the semester, and it was huge. A previous group started working on spreading THON to other BIG 10 schools, so that more money could be raised for pediatric cancer. They had gotten some information together, but the product looked poorly made and was not presentable. It was up to us to try to re-edit and redesign it so that it would look professional. With the amount of time we had, we could not bring the project to completion. We all made the decision together that we would rather improve it as best
as we could and then work on it next semester rather than rush through to finish it this semester and ruin our chances of actually marketing this successfully. By the end of the semester, a design had been thought up, and some content had been edited. We by no means plan to drop this project, and indeed plan to finish it next semester when we can invest more time into it. Sometimes it is better to wait a bit in order to get better results overall.

**The Hardships**

Along the way through our journey into leadership, we experienced some hardships. The main problem was communication. This included finding a common time to meet. When there are six people that are on a team, all with different schedules, it becomes difficult to all come together at once. The first couple of times we planned random nights that worked for everybody by chance. Then we decided to meet every Monday night after our ENGR 408 class. This worked best for everybody, even though we were all a bit tired and it was late at night. We decided to stick to it, however, for the good of the group.

Another problem of communication was that if there was a change made with something, or someone had an idea, then it was a troubling task trying to reach everyone so they would know. For example, when we were in the final stages of preparation for our ENGR 493 presentation, we were all at home for Thanksgiving break. I had talked with Ben, a team-member, about who was going to say what part. When we agreed on the general roles of everybody, I had to then call Mary Katherine, Nick, Jose, and Brad. Once I called Mary Katherine, I found out that she had talked with Nick and they had their own idea about roles within the group. We found a common ground, and then it was up to us to relay it back to everyone else again. E-mail and phone calls were our solution, but it would have been much easier if we had set up a conference call, or a chat room online where everyone could talk together at once. That is something I wish I had looked into.

Along with communication problems, sometimes we had too many ideas being passed around, and it was hard to narrow it down to what we would adopt. We remedied this problem in the same way every time. Once everyone had their say, we would think about what made the most sense for the goal, and slowly we would start either narrowing it down, or most of the time we would be combining ideas so that no one felt left out. There was definitely a lot of compromising that we had to do, but that is essential when working in multi-person teams. It usually worked very well. In my opinion, being open minded is critical of a leader, especially one in the 21st century where you have to deal with various cultures and, thus, various ideas.

**The Lessons of Leadership**

There is a great book called Global Leadership: The Next Generation. The authors of the book describe some very essential aspects of leadership in the 21st century. Some of the most important ones are sharing leadership, appreciating diversity, and creating a shared vision. Our group tried to follow and apply these principles to our ENGR 493 project. Along the way we also improved on some other important skills, such as time management.
Sharing Leadership

This was a huge concept, and we were very lucky in that we naturally handed over leadership roles to each other on various projects. There were no confrontations with this, and everyone performed very well. Mary Katherine, as mentioned before, took lead on the Resume CD project. Through here motivation, hard work, and our help, we all pulled together and got the job done. Another example was my co-leadership with Jose on the Newsletter project. Together we pulled in the articles, I taught him how to use the editing program, and he edited the content. Another successful project, for this one we really learned how to work together to get something out by a deadline. We both had to compromise with our schedules to meet, but we got it done, and the most important thing was that the quality of the finished product was much higher than the previous year because of our creativity and teamwork.

Diversity

In Global Leadership: The Next Generation, the authors write, “The leader of the future must be flexible enough to adapt to a diverse workforce” (Goldsmith, 28). Diversity is something that was really present in our group, from majors (civil engineering, bioengineering, accounting, etc.) to ages (juniors, seniors, and continuing education) to student involvement (fraternities, Lion Ambassadors, THON, etc.). Because of these differences, we all had different ways of thinking about the same idea. This was great, because it let us have very powerful brainstorming sessions. Because we were all open-minded, no ideas got shut down. As I said before, we had to compromise many times, but every time it led to a better final outcome.

Sustainability

It is very important for an organization to have the ability to sustain itself by whatever means it can. Throughout this project, there were times when our group had some issues with sustenance. Mainly it was time. There were just certain times when we couldn’t all meet together, and ideas were starting to not flow as easily. We all knew that we had to pull it together. Those who couldn’t make our meetings would have critical information relayed back to them through email or telephone conversations. There were only a few times when this happened, so it wasn’t a huge deal.

The other main aspect of sustaining an organization is looking into its future and making sure that whatever is in place now has a way of holding itself together later. After we implemented the new workflow for the newsletter (including choice of program and design), we knew that the next person after us probably wouldn’t know how to work it and thus everything we built up would be destroyed. Thus, I took it into my hands to create a tutorial on how to use the program. The step-by-step instructions are easy to use and were tested by a couple friends, who all said they had success in running the program and designing the template. This ensures that the newsletter will not be put to a halt next year when someone else decides to take the lead.
Time Management

Time management was another big skill that was used for the success of our group. With many projects happening at once, we had to be able to cut up our day schedules and make room for everything, including meetings. In this way we got to practice how well we could really stay organized. Some members, at times, had some trouble finding time for everything, which is totally understandable. It was at those times that the rest of the team pulled through and picked up some of the slack. We are all students and understand that at times work can pile up to the ceiling, so instead of getting angry at the member we said it was ok and that we would take care of it. At a later time, that same member would then help someone else out when they had too much work. Finding time to meet was our biggest issue, but as said before, it was necessary for accomplishment, so we needed to make time. Coming out of this project, I feel as though I have improved upon my time-management skill even more, and it’s something that I will be able to apply to anything in the future.

Technological Savvy

It was technology that helped us with almost every project. For example, we couldn’t have gotten the resumes out without knowledge of Adobe PDF, Macromedia Flash, and Labeling technology. There was no single person that could do it all, so it was a team effort, with different tasks delegated to different people. As for the newsletter, my knowledge of Apple software was the reason I thought of the new workflow. Being able to teach Jose, we implemented it with no problems. Email was another big part of our communication. For our final presentation preparation, we must have written ten emails in a half hour back and forth among the group. Without the knowledge of at least email, we couldn’t have sustained as a group nearly as easily as we did.

Conclusion

Unlike other groups, which had more detailed goals to accomplish by the end of the semester, we had to make our own goals. We started the semester not knowing each other and not knowing our mission. By the end of the semester, we were all friends and had come a long way in terms of leadership and teamwork. Looking back at all that we have accomplished, I feel great knowing that I did it using myself, my teammates, and the principles that we learned in class.

The only thing I would have changed is our use of Skype and conference calls. It would have simplified things so much. Instead of spending an hour calling everyone and recalling again, then sending emails to everyone multiple times with updates from previous calls, we could have just conference called or used multi-person video chat. That is something that I think should be incorporated into every project to demonstrate its importance in the business world.

Knowing how to lead is the main thing that I took away from this semester. I used to think of leaders as bosses and managers, but I have realized that those aren’t what leaders are at all. Managers are not leaders, but leaders can be managers. A leader to me is someone who can point you in the right direction without explicitly showing you. It is someone who can motivate and empower you. A leader does not command, but directs while being on the same level as his
teammates. A leader can make use of many different talents within his organization, and make people feel good about having those talents. A manager, on the other hand, is someone that just tells you to do things. Dwight D. Eisenhower, one of the most famous leaders, said it best when he was describing leadership, “You do not lead by hitting people over the head - that’s assault, not leadership.”
References