Introduction

The Gwynedd Mercy University Griffin Student Leadership Institute (GSLI) is committed to the development of graduates who will be effective leaders who are compassionate toward those in need, and who are compelled to act within the spirit of social responsibility.

The Exceptional Leaders program is intended to bring one’s University leadership experience into the context of one’s career and the needs of society. Exceptional Leaders explore issues connected to both Service and Social Responsibility as they meet with a professional leader in their chosen field.

In the fall of 2015, the second cohort of Exceptional Leaders was matched with a mentor in their chosen field who also had a connection to the Mercy Mission. Each student leader met with his or her mentor to share conversations about leadership as it related to one’s professional and personal life. Their stories have been captured within these pages. We thank them for sharing their experience, their wisdom and their own leadership journeys. We hope that you, the reader both enjoy and learn from the words of our GSLI Exceptional Leaders.

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Educational Leadership:
My Development as a Leader and Journey Implementing Teaching Leadership
By: Marena Bondi

“The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.”
--- Pablo Picasso
Introduction

Each and every day, I wake up with several goals in mind which I immediately write down. Regardless of what my endless checklists and to-do lists say, one thing that I strive to accomplish is to make a positive impact in some way in myself or the world around me, whether it is something small or large. Teachers have the potential to impact the lives of others from the moment they wake up. For some students, a greeting as simple as, “Good morning! How are you?” at the door could impact a student’s day positively after a hectic morning at home.

Although I strive to make a difference in the lives of children each and every day as a teacher, I know that sometimes this difference and impact can be something so little, yet mean so much to another person.

What Leadership Means to Me

“Leadership does not have a one-size-fits-all definition” (Helmrich 2015) because everyone has their own experiences that each contribute to their definition. Although I have my own definition of leadership, I think Mindy Gibbons Klein, founder of REAL Thought Leaders, is able to define leadership is one sentence that is truly powerful: “Leadership is having a vision, sharing that vision and inspiring others to support your vision while creating their own” (Helmrich 2015). For me, leadership includes a similar idea as Gibbons Klein, but also extends to taking action in order to make a change in the best interest of an organization or group of people. Leaders are those who ignite change, motivate others to be the best version of themselves and help guide them to the next step in order to be successful. As I continue to grow and learn as a person and an educator, I strive to maintain these qualities of leadership so I can help those around me succeed—my students, colleagues, family, friends, and school community. Just as the goals I set each day are important to me, it is important that I encourage and impact those around me positively and help them achieve their goals, which in my eyes is an important quality of a successful leader.

Teachers as Change Agents

Change agent, facilitator, resource provider, motivator, and collaborator are all important titles, but what do these titles have in common? These are all roles that a leader takes on in his or her everyday life. Just as a teacher takes on many different roles such as “nurse,” “caregiver,” “psychiatrist,” or “social worker,” a teacher also implements change, facilitates learning, provides resources to colleagues and students, motivates students to learn, and collaborates with colleagues through lesson planning and teaching strategies designed to be most successful with their students. Teachers are leaders or can become leaders over time with experience and guidance. The different roles of educational leadership are outlined by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), a national educational leadership organization. In the article, “Ten Roles for Teacher Leaders,” authors Cindy Harrison and Joellen Killion discuss how the presence of teachers is essential to student success and growth in various aspects of life—academically, socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and psychologically. This presence of leadership does not stop at the classroom door. A true teacher leader extends this attitude and actions in the community, at home, and anywhere that needs effective planning and guidance (Harrison and Killion 2007). Leaders are those who take responsibility in order to make a change and an impact, which is why I believe teacher leadership is so valuable to the field of education.

Teachers ignite change in their schools, communities, and lives of their students. They strive to make a positive change and lead others to success. In Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, authors S. Allen and M. Shankman describe a leader as a change agent “who must possess certain skills, such as creative problem-solving” (Allen and Shankman 2007). A change agent also considers the importance of “the timing of a change effort” (Allen and Shankman 2007). Personally, I relate these two qualities to the role of a teacher and educational leadership. Each day, teachers make decisions that require them to use creative problem-solving; these decisions are related to their teaching, lesson planning, and the overall well-being of their students. The role of teacher as change agent demonstrates the progression required to make change. Teachers demonstrate two qualities of a change agent—one who must act quickly on his/her feet to make a decision regarding current situations pertinent to the classroom and someone who understands that some changes take time and recognizes that some goals in life take longer to reach, which are a classroom’s long-term and yearly goals.

Teachers facilitate learning, whether it is intentional or unintentional. Often times, teachers find
themselves teaching others even when they are unintentionally doing so because it is a natural role. Another role teachers undergo is the role of a resource provider. This role takes place between colleagues, parents, and students. In order to help students succeed, teachers need to share their abundance of strategies and tools that have helped them be most effective with their students; these are resources that are transferrable to the classroom, home, and community. Teachers motivate their students to learn. Whether it involves dressing up like a character from a story or taking on the role of gym teacher in order to get the students active and awake on a rainy day, teachers find ways to target their students’ interests to motivate students, while following curriculum guidelines. Finally, teachers are collaborators. They are constantly thinking out loud and collaborating with grade partners, colleagues, parents, and even their students. In order to help others reach their goals and implement successful practices, teachers must collaborate and communicate with other teachers, parents, and students to make an executive decision that will benefit each unique situation (Harrison and Killion 2007).

A Shared Role

Leadership and teacher leadership share a strong and obvious connection. Without teachers, there would be fewer leaders in the world because those who teach, train the mind, and help form leaders into the people they would like to become as they grow older. Leaders, in general, are those who guide others, but also collaborate with others to create other independent and competent leaders. This responsibility is explained in Heroic Leadership; in the chapter titled “Self-Awareness as the Foundation of Leadership,” Chris Lowney discusses that “ongoing success depends on turning recruits into leaders” (Lowney 2003). Leaders must think of ways they can give others a greater role and more responsibility. There will always be several tasks to take care of in order to achieve a goal. Leaders can establish trust and credibility with their colleagues and peers as they delegate roles and responsibilities; this also shows others that they value and appreciate help, which is often a difficult task for anyone.

Each day leaders face new challenges, which is why it is essential that leaders mentor and teach their mentees and colleagues effective and efficient strategies to be successful with the tasks they are assigned. An effective quality that alleviates some challenges is when leaders establish trust and credibility among a group of people. No matter the circumstances and setting of the situation, leaders should be trusted by others because they have established their credibility and reliability over time. A true leader invites help from others, especially when a task is challenging or when it is a specialization of another person. The ability to seek help shows how much they care about the situation (Allen and Shankman 2007).

My Development as a Leader

As I reflect on various research articles on leadership, conversations with my mentors, and both my past and present experiences, I am truly grateful to say that I have had the opportunity to experience and implement both leadership and educational leadership in several roles. Gwynedd Mercy University has inspired me to learn more, grow more, and become more involved in my community. The professors I have been fortunate to have at Gwynedd Mercy University have encouraged me to take on several leadership roles on campus and in the classroom. I do not think I would be as involved on campus if my professors and peers had not motivated me to do more and use my love of teaching to guide others.

One major leadership experience that has helped shape my understanding of leadership is my Co-Presidency of Gwynedd Mercy’s Association for the Education of Young Children (GMAEYC). The mission of GMAEYC focuses on spending time to learn effective teaching strategies and ways to become more involved in early childhood education. Taking on this role was much different from what I have experienced in the past. As a Lead Teacher of an after school program, I have had many encounters with teacher leadership each day as I teach my students using differentiated instruction, implement classroom roles, responsibilities and rules, and through my role as a positive role model. Although my role as a Lead Teacher is a role of educational leadership, my role as GMAEYC President encompasses a different, yet just as important, role of leadership.

The role of GMAEYC President is led by a group of board members and advisors to make effective decisions regarding organizations to which we donate, our budget, planning professional development events, planning events with our school partnerships, and most importantly, making decisions that will benefit the most
amount of people for the best cause. These tasks are part of the description of being a president of a club or organization on a college campus, yet I think that until someone is able to hold this position for him or herself, there is no way to know how much responsibility is expected of the chapter presidents.

From the beginning of my co-presidency, I have learned that there are three important factors that are imperative with this type of leadership. The first is to always “get the job done.” I was chosen to be in this role along with my co-president. We were chosen to get the job done and make the best decisions based on the interest of our club and its members. Another factor related to this is to never take things personally. Everyone is entitled to have an opinion, which can be voiced. As a leader, it is important to take into consideration the opinions and ideas that members have, but also remember that if others have ideas that differ from your own or think something needs to be changed, do not take these comments personally. Decisions need to be made based on the best interests of the club or organization and its mission.

The second major lesson I have learned through experience is that in order for someone to truly know what it is like to be president or hold a major role of leadership, he or she needs to “take a walk” in the leader’s shoes. When I was the Secretary of GMAEYC prior to being President, I always respected the leaders above me and the effort they put into this club, but now that I have had the chance to take a walk in the past presidents’ shoes, I now have even more respect and gratitude for their hard work and dedication to our club and our mission devoted to early childhood education.

My leadership role in GMAEYC has exposed me to both positive experiences and also some challenging aspects of holding a leadership position. As I have experienced, all areas in life bring a variety of challenges. I think one of the most important things to reflect on is how we react or respond to the challenges that arise. Throughout each discussion I have had with my external mentor, we have focused on the “biggest human hurdle” to leadership. There is no doubt that each person will encounter various hurdles each day as a leader, but some hurdles are out of a leader’s control, which is why it is so important to reflect on how we react to these challenges. For me, the biggest human hurdle of leadership is my gender as a female. Today’s society is more accepting of women and more women are beginning to hold positions of power, but there are stereotypes regarding women that still stand in society. This will be a challenge, but I think the more confident and qualified I am, others will look past gender stereotypes and respect my hard work and devotion to being the most qualified and effective leader.

Gender stereotypes are just one hurdle that I feel I will encounter and have to overcome. Several others include establishing credibility, not seeing immediate success, negativity from others, deciding what to say and when to say it, and trying to solve problems out of my expertise. I think these hurdles are common experiences of most leaders, regardless of the field and position of leadership. In order for leaders to be effective, they need to balance their expectations and communicate with others for help and guidance throughout the process. Unfortunately, there will be times when negativity arises and power becomes overwhelming. The important thing is how you can learn from criticism and improve from mistakes or challenges to put even more effective plans into motion.

Benefits of the Exceptional Leaders Program

Although there will always be a hurdle to overcome or a challenge to face, I feel that with the preparation and guide of my mentors and my overall experience with the Gwynedd Mercy University Exceptional Leaders Program, I am ready for my future leadership positions and any obstacles that come with these positions. I value my relationship with both of my mentors, especially since I have two exceptional mentors who have a wealth of knowledge and experience regarding their fields and also their previous and current leadership roles and positions. From the conversations I have had with my mentors, I have learned different strategies to use to approach obstacles that I face in both my field of education, the leadership roles I obtain currently, and also the leadership positions I will hold in my future.

Exceptional Leaders is a part of my journey that I am so very grateful to have, especially considering the timing in my educational career. As I continue on to student teach in the fall, I will be more aware of my role as an educational leader in the classroom for my students. Growing up, I always thought of a teacher as a leader
because teachers guide their students in their learning and help them succeed. Although teachers do these each day, educational leadership is truly so much more than this, which is one of the reasons I have always wanted to teach others, whether I realized it or not. Educational leaders go above and beyond for their students, colleagues, and community. As I come closer to graduation and my future career, I cannot help but think about where I will be and what types of opportunities I will have, which is very exciting! Regardless of where I am, I know I will be confident in myself and my skills, and continue to demonstrate positive leadership with others to achieve something that can impact others positively in more than one way!

The Exceptional Leaders Program encourages young leaders to be conscious of oneself, understand one’s own beliefs, commit to leadership, collaborate with and empower others, work toward a common purpose, recognize and respect differences, actively engage in leadership experiences, and set goals to impact society positively as a better and more desirable place to live. These concepts are based on the Social Change Model of Leadership. As I reflect on my journey this year and my journey through the Exceptional Leaders Program, I can confidently say that I have implemented and encountered these concepts of the Social Change Model. Although I have witnessed the process of social change, I think that as time goes on I will continue to grow and learn more about each concept in further detail, and because of my experiences with Exceptional Leaders I will be prepared to implement each concept. I will implement these practices in my future experiences with leadership, whether in the workplace, my everyday life, or in my community. In order to ignite change, a leader needs to be a model for social change, and I will confidently take on this role.

Conclusion

As my journey with the Exceptional Leaders Program comes to an end, I reflect on my experiences, both positive and challenging, and think about how much I have learned and grown as a person and a leader in such a short period of time. Although I enjoy making checklists and to-do lists so I can prioritize and accomplish tasks, I think the most important goal I set for myself each day is not mentioned on the checklist or to-list. This goal is to make a positive change and improve the world in some small way. Motivating others, teaching others, lending a hand, and guiding others in the right direction are all tasks that are not planned; these are also tasks that leaders do willingly. The smallest tasks are often those that mean more than some of the grandest gestures. Change and positive impact do not happen overnight. Leaders know that some of the biggest challenges are a work in progress, but the important thing I will always remember is to never give up on myself or those around me. Leaders know that with perseverance almost anything is possible, and with an open mind the opportunities are endless. This is something I have learned on my journey, and will always remember through both my challenges and successes.

Works Cited


My Journey through the Seven C’s  
By: Justin DeLuzio

“The man who says he can and the man who says he cannot are both correct.”
---Confucius
What makes a great leader? Is it the result of experiences in life that we overcome? Is it attributed to a natural born charisma? Or perhaps it is a predetermined trait of the supernatural which we cannot explain. While all seem like reasonable theories as to what determines leadership, I personally feel that an exceptional leader is determined through the realization of one’s own self. My philosophy of Mercy leadership is simply the ability of one to understand, realize, and incorporate change within his or her own life. To me, the ultimate goal of leadership is to instill change. Whether it be individually, in a group, or within a society, change is essentially the reason as to why leaders even exist. Thus I feel in order to best evaluate how I personally have developed as a leader, it seems appropriate to look towards a model of change as a rubric. The Griffin Student Leadership Institute’s Exceptional Leadership Program offers an excellent model for doing so through the Social Change Model of Leadership. This foundation of the program incorporates values of consciousness, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship, all in effort to achieve change. By using these seven values to evaluate how I have realized and incorporated change over my life because of my experience in GSLI, I can best define how I have lived by my definition of Mercy leadership.

A consciousness of one’s self incorporates a full awareness of beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that provokes his or her motivation to take action. For me personally, developing this consciousness was never too difficult to muster up. I was fortunate enough to be blessed with great opportunities, support, and guidance in life from the start. This did not mean, however, that I could not improve my self-consciousness. Before my experience in the GSLI Exceptional Leaders Program, I had always understood my own strengths. I knew what I was good at, but never really embraced these fortes. Instead, I focused primarily on my weaknesses in an effort to refine them. For example, I have always been strong in regards to my determination, consideration for others, and arithmetic way of thinking, but always struggled with being concise, creating opportunities for myself, and being satisfied with my efforts. Improving my limitations was my main focus, and while this may seem like a logical approach to leadership, it does not help instill a healthy self-consciousness. In fact, it did the very opposite. During my Experience in GSLI, I was able to recognize the importance of balance in emotionally intelligent leadership. I learned that, as much as we should focus to develop our limitations into strengths, it is also very important to celebrate our strengths as leaders. A constant dwelling on what has not been accomplished undermines the confidence of one’s self and limits the opportunities as a leader. Without the appreciation and recognition for things we are good at, there is no environment to promote self-consciousness, develop relationships, and learn from our mistakes. One particular piece of literature in the GSLI curriculum has helped me best understand this very concept. The fifth chapter of M. Shankman and S. Allen’s “Emotionally Intelligent Leadership,” emphasizes the idea of using history as a method of developing an honest sense of self. The article quotes, “we often miss these moments. We’re too busy. We’re not thinking about how we can learn from these experiences. We don't think that reflecting on the past is as important as moving ahead.” To me, this means that, every once in a while, we should look back and focus on things we have done successfully and goals we have accomplished. Doing so will only allow us to apply the same mindset we had during these successes to future endeavors and develop a confident mindset to take action moving ahead. It is because of reminders like this that I now celebrate my strengths and continue to maintain them. I still recognize my limitations and do not focus on them, but still make a conscientious effort to improve them for the sake of Mercy leadership.

In any situation, success is the goal for all leaders. Once it is achieved, the feeling is like no other. It is this very feeling that makes people set more and more goals in life, in hopes that accomplishing those goals will create the same feeling. Many do achieve goals they have set, but it is doing so continuously and consistently that makes a great leader. Approaching each obstacle and goal in life with a similar mindset and determination emphasizes the idea of congruence. Thinking, feeling, and behaving with congruence is what, in my opinion, truly defines success and allows one to maintain this feeling of achievement. From a personal standpoint, before my GSLI experience, I approached situations from a perspective of individuality. I looked at challenges in my life as independent events where a different mind-set must be applied to succeed in that manner. I learned however, that while every situation in life is a different in some aspects, approaching any situation with a mindset of genuineness and confidence will not only help realize the accomplishment of a goal, but also make the journey in doing so, much more worthwhile. When speaking with my internal mentor, Ms. Pierantozzi, she asked me, “What does it mean to live a life that is authentic?” After contemplating a bit, I realized that a life that is authentic is one that emphasizes how one does things as opposed to the result itself. A life that is authentic incorporates a sense of honesty in intention and determination that defines congruence. This idea of an authentic life allows me to
question myself when looking to overcome a challenge in life. I often ask myself, “Did I honestly do everything in my power to abide by the morals in achieving this goal?” and “Did I truthfully work as hard as a I could have to deserve this result?” If I can say yes to both of those questions, I know that I have achieved my goal with a sense of congruence, a sense of authenticity, I know that I have achieved my goal, and can have that honest feeling of achievement because I earned so not only through hard work, but also the right way. Thus, it is because of my GSLI experience that I now recognize that each situation is different but strive for goals within each issue I encounter with a mindset and approach of success through proper consideration for myself and others, reason, prioritization and consistent operation with key goals/objectives.

Part of being congruent and consistent in leadership is dedicating the same amount of effort and energy towards any goal that one sets. This motivational energy that serves and drives the collective effort of an individual or group is called commitment and it is essential for all leaders to have. With commitment often comes passion, intensity, and a significant duration. For me, I never necessarily struggled with committing myself. I have always had the mindset to do something to the fullest extent if I was going to do it at all. What I needed to improve, however, was choosing exactly what was worth committing to. Before my GSLI experience, I did not focus enough on what I loved. I would commit myself to things that I felt I needed to get done, but did not necessarily enjoy. I realized that, if I wanted to do something and wanted to gain every ounce of potential benefit from it, I should probably do so for something that I truly care about and in which I find joy. One particular piece of literature in the GSLI curriculum has helped me best understand this very concept. While it is a brief piece in regards to words, Father Pedro Arrupe’s poem, “Fall in Love,” really says a lot to me. The final line of the poem reads, “fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.” In my opinion this offers a very satisfying principle of certainty. It simplifies life for me; find what you love to do, do it to the best of your ability, and then let it carry you to happiness. It is because of excerpts like this that I now have come to understand that commitment entails insight and self-awareness, for one must know his or her own values and ideals in order to commit to them. Are there really any leaders who are both conscientious and truly unhappy in what they are working towards? Commitment is difficult if you don't know what's most important to you, which is why it demands persistence but also an ability to observe self and make conscious decisions.

As important as it is to come to terms individually as a leader, a leader cannot exist at all without those who follow. Thus, Mercy leadership is constituted through group, or collective, values just as much as individual values. At the forefront of those group values is collaboration. Working with others in a common effort sounds so simple and expected that it seems that it is not even worth mentioning. However, It is due to its simplicity that it is often overlooked and taken for granted. Collaboration instills the cornerstone value of the group leadership effort because it empowers self and others through trust. Growing up, I often wanted to accomplish things on my own. Whether it was school projects, games, sports, or club activities, it always seemed easier to focus on a task individually. The truth was, honestly, that it was easier. Not having to worry about managing or depending on the effectiveness and morale of others seemed like one less thing I had to worry about. What I did not realize however, is the growth of potential and sense of achievement that could be garnered by working collaboratively with others. Not only can greater and more diverse results come about, but the priceless development of relationships can be established through collaboration towards a specific effort. Both of my mentors, Mary Jo Pierantozzi and Dick Target, are prime examples of how to utilize and create collaboration effectively. Both Ms. Pierantozzi and Mr. Target generously donate their efforts and time to many different organizations associated with service. For example, as a member of the local Parks and Recreation Board, Mr. Target collaborates with other members to create solutions and develop innovative ideas to better suit the community needs. He also works with Face to Face, a non-profit organization, in which individuals collaborate to help meet basic human needs and reduce suffering for struggling families and those who are homeless. Both are true heroes when it comes to creating and taking advantage of opportunities to collaborate with others and for others. In my own future, I will make a conscientious effort to mirror their efforts of Mercy in order to better understand how to collaborate as a leader, successfully help others beyond what I could accomplish on my own, and gain great friends in the process.

In close relation with collaboration comes the concept of common purpose. In order to best collaborate as a group, it is important to maintain shared intentions and values. Without a common purpose, the group will lack an ability to honestly engage in collective analysis of the issues at hand and the task to be undertaken. Personally I would take this for granted in the past. When working in groups in my life, I realize now that I did not put enough
effort into making sure I had the right people to help best accomplish the goal that had been set forth. Instead, I looked at it from somewhat of a utilitarian standpoint; the more people I had, the more could get done. It was Mr. Target who helped me best understand the responsibility of a leader to make sure the individuals who are part of a group effort are all on the same page in regards to values and intention. As an expert in the business world, Mr. Target has told me about numerous encounters in which he or others with whom he has associated, took charge to help make sure that the people involved in each operation were true experts and had the right amount of passion to help accomplish a goal set collectively. Sometimes it took some tough decisions that did not make all employees happy and also emphasized the importance of human resources in any organization. I now realize that in order to achieve something to the fullest extent, it not only requires a quantitative effort, but a genuine qualitative effort. In other words, sometimes less people with a common purpose will achieve results better than a larger group who do not share the same exact aims and values. As a leader I hold this aspect of common purpose dear to my heart and will certainly exemplify it in my own experiences in the future.

Leading a group that collaborates and is driven by a common purpose certainly is ideal and seems like a flawless model of accomplishing a goal. Unfortunately, however, even when given these two preceding values, there is not always agreement. Just because everyone has the same values and intentions, it does not mean that they will agree on how exactly to go about fulfilling these intentions. Thus, it is important to recognize the potential for controversy, but to handle it with civility. In any creative group effort, differences in viewpoint are inevitable, but making sure that these differences are settled with consideration, respect, and comity towards all viewpoints is what demonstrates great group leadership. My GSLI experience has helped me better understand the concept of empathy, which I feel is extremely important when looking at this value of controversy with leadership. Specifically, Ms. Pierantozzi has been the best example of helping me see situations from multiple perspectives. For example, when watching a TED Talk focused on how to find and do what you love, I certainly understood and embraced the idea of congruence in working and doing what you truly enjoy. Ms. Pierantozzi however, took it from the perspective of looking at role models and leaders who are authentic. She asked me who my role model was, and how it was that I believed they resembled this congruence. In this she showed empathy from my perspective, but also perspectives of those whom I look up to in my life. It ultimately made me consider lifestyle approaches of those whom I look up to and how I should interpret them reasonably. I also felt that Sarah Green’s “Difficult Conversations: Nine Common Mistakes,” which is included in the GSLI curriculum, was beneficial in handling controversy in a civil manner. It really allowed me to fully embrace that, when in any disagreement, it is important for the leader to not allow a combat mentality to develop and most of all, to not let the group lose sight of the goal. Due to my GSLI experience, I will forever hold the importance of civility with controversy as a key value in life. I will now never lose sight of my personal and collective goals, despite any unexpected bumps in the journey to achieving them.

Thus far, we have talked about individual values and values among those within a group. However, how is it that we account for leadership values among different groups within an entire community? According to the Social Model of Change, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of leadership, leaders must invoke the societal value of citizenship. This key value requires an individual or group to become responsibly connected to the community through leadership experience. Before GSLI, I’m not very sure that I really knew what citizenship meant. It was a value I took for granted and never really gave myself an opportunity to see it come to fruition in life. What made me appreciate citizenship was not necessarily anything within the GSLI curriculum itself, but more so the program itself. The Exceptional Leadership Program is one built on the foundation of connecting individuals within a community to help better society for the future by developing leaders that are appropriately exceptional. Citizenship is about being an informed, responsible, and caring participant in your community. It means doing your share to make your school and community better. The formation of this program has allowed me to realize how fortunate I am to be a part of a community of individuals who care so much about others and for the longevity and quality of the society they have helped create. Its very presence has set a precedent of honor and excellence in citizenship, a precedent too great to go unrecognized. Even if I were not fortunate enough to be part of this wonderful program, I would certainly still use it as a model I would hope to instill in communities in which I will engage both presently as well as in the future.

All in all, through this Social Change Model of Leadership, I feel that I have developed my philosophy of Mercy leadership. My philosophy is predicated on achieving change for the good of the future and society as
whole; Mercy leadership is a trait I will hold in the highest regard throughout the rest of my life. Due to my experience in GSLI, I have made a conscientious effort to fully understand myself and how best to invoke change in my own life in relation to the seven values of consciousness, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship. I will forever ensure that anything I do in life will constitute an effort to achieve a goal or objective set forth in order to improve or better the world for others just as the Exceptional Leaders Program has done for me. I am extremely grateful for having been enlightened by both of my mentors and members of this incredible organization. I promise to myself, those who have guided me in the program, and the Gwynedd Mercy community to utilize this knowledge and these tools of leadership to help better the world for future generations.
Discovering Role Models to Becoming One
By: Chelsea Gadecki

“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: it goes on.”
---Robert Frost
Who do you look up to and why, was a question I had gotten many times over the years and always found it hard to answer. As I was growing up, I did not think I had anyone to look up to besides myself. I knew I had role models of what not to do with a mother who got pregnant at eighteen and had to drop out of nursing school to a father who died of a heroin overdose when I was eight. I specifically joined Exceptional Leaders in hopes of finding role models to call my own. I always thought that role models had to be someone historical or someone who discovered or invented something life changing as a child. That is not necessarily a requirement for someone to be a role model. Since I have started college, I have found many people to admire, but there is someone who I have looked up to since I was a child without knowing it. Professor Monica Walsh was able to peel back my layers and discover my roots; what made me the person I am today. Apparently it all comes down to my grandmother, Susan. All I have ever strived for is stability; financially and emotionally. My grandmother has always been an example of stability for me. Everyone she has ever met loves her, she commits to serving others in the community and is respected by all. In my eyes, she is a compassionate leader, and a lot of her traits have rubbed off on me. As Walter Lippman said, “the final test of a leader is someone who leaves behind themselves—in others—the conviction and will to carry on” (Chittister, 2012, pg. 1). While discovering who made me the leader I am today, I gained two more leaders to admire. Both my mentors, Professor Monica Walsh and Lisa Tyler from Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, have made a significant impact on my leadership style over the past year.

During my first meeting with Professor Monica Walsh, we were able to discover how much we had in common. Professor Walsh is an assistant professor of the education program at Gwynedd Mercy University. Before coming to Gwynedd, she had taught PreK to 4th Grade for twenty-five years and received a master’s in Educational Leadership. I had previously met Professor Walsh through my alternative spring break to Cincinnati, Ohio the year before. Although we are not in the same career field, we both chose our fields to help others and make an impact in their lives. To accomplish this, we need to be strong and effective leaders. She has exemplified her effective leadership by committing to educating others both in life and leadership. Professor Walsh managed to teach me so much in such a short amount of time.

Through the discussions, I had with Professor Walsh I was able to gain a consciousness of self which is a critical value of leadership according to the “Social Change Model of Leadership” (Astin, 1996, pg. 1). The model emphasizes that leadership is a process starting with the consciousness of self. How can I be an effective leader if I do not understand what made me want to be a leader in the first place? Understanding the origin of my drive to lead made understanding my commitment to serve easier. My source of wanting to lead is my grandmother and how she instilled compassion into every aspect of my life. I wanted to make a difference in other people’s lives as well as my own. That is why I chose to go into a medical profession, to help those in need. As stated by Sheila Carney (2011) in Leading from a Merciful Space, “The most compelling leaders are not those who follow a list of rules devised by a consultant, but those who move from somewhere within and the most important determinant of one’s style of leadership is motivation” (pg. 1).

When I think about leaders who lead with compassion, I think of Catherine McAuley. Both Professor Walsh and I share an admiration for the original Sister of Mercy. She started an organization that has made an impact on countless lives and her efforts are still recognized today through the Sisters of Mercy. The fact that the Sisters of Mercy have existed since 1831 and are still successful in achieving their purpose is proof alone of how effective of a leader Catherine was and how well she influenced new leaders. Throughout the article “Leading from a Merciful Space” many examples of Catherine’s leadership style were discussed.

Carney (2011) stated that from these examples we discovered Catherine is a leader: who enabled her companions and fostered an awareness of the importance of the contribution made by each; who delegated authority and responsibility but who was always ready to lend a wise ear and a supportive presence; who was patient and encouraging with the unfolding of a new leader’s skills, who didn’t give up on them; who knew when to be playful and when to be serious; who respected the decisions and talents of others even when she didn’t understand them (pg. 10-11).

I aspire to lead with mercy like Catherine McAuley, and I believe both my mentors have exhibited a lot of the same characteristics in their leadership styles. A lot of McAuley’s traits come down to having a high emotional intelligence. My external mentor, Lisa Tyler, and I discussed the importance of having emotional
When I first found out Lisa Tyler was going to be my external mentor, I was slightly intimidated by the idea since she was already my boss for my internship at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. I was afraid of making a fool of myself in front of her, but I ended up learning so much from her. Lisa is the director of the respiratory department of Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, which is a huge responsibility because of how large the department is. Lisa faces new challenges on a daily basis and having to deal with such a diverse group of people makes them even more complex. She deals with a variety of religions and ethnically different people, as well as communicating with a diverse group of nurses, physicians, etc. To face these daily challenges she has to incorporate a vast array of leadership qualities to resolve all of the issues. One of the model’s critical values is collaboration (Astin, 1996, pg. 1). Lisa has to collaborate with hundreds of people to keep everything running smoothly. She has to lead a group of people to fulfill their common purpose and deal with controversy with civility, two more values of the model (Astin, 1996, pg. 1). To accomplish this communication is a vital component. When approaching conversations, you have to be able to understand where the other party is coming from, and that involves emotional intelligence. The ability to recognize how someone else feels and how to approach them can vastly affect the outcome of the conversation. One of the readings, “Difficult Conversations: Nine Common Mistakes” by Sarah Green (2010), discussed how to communicate with others. Green (2010) mentioned how we can go into a combat mentality and become defensive during conversations (pg. 1). Lisa has experienced this many times when confronting others in the field. She can recognize when they’re becoming defensive and how to make them understand that she is not attacking them and can phrase her points in a way that resonates with the person. She knows to come to the table with an open mind, respect, and how to keep the conversation on the right track to achieve their goals. During our discussions, Lisa gave numerous accounts of exemplifying these skills as a leader. Being able to talk with someone and hear their personal accounts of dealing with the challenges of being a leader has allowed me to prepare for similar situations. Learning from others’ experiences can assist with making future decisions by taking all the different advice and molding it with your personal view to applying it to the unique situation at hand. Lisa emphasized that she has to work on her leadership skills on a daily basis, that no leader is perfect, and our skills are ever evolving. It was beneficial to witness her abilities first hand since she is my boss. I get to see her at work and observe how she works with her team. I have even gotten to hear how she speaks to her staff when issues have come up and how she works with them to find a resolution. The respect she has for her staff’s feedback is refreshing to see in a boss, and it allows for everyone to feel like part of a community.

One of my favorite readings was the poem Traffic Light by Shel Silverstein. The poem talks about a group of people waiting for the light to change green for months, but who didn’t do anything to cause a change to occur (Silverstein). A leader makes change happen. I did not want to be a bystander waiting for someone else to initiate change. I joined as many organizations on campus as possible to spark a change in society. As a Griffin Ambassador I give tours of the school and by doing so, I get to represent the school and its mission. I can recruit like-minded people who want to serve our community and make a difference in the world. Every year I have participated in Alternative Spring Break with campus ministry. I receive the opportunity to go and help impoverished communities within the United States in hopes of just providing some relief for a week, but more importantly, I can become an advocate for these places. I come back with new perspectives and the ability to change others’ perspectives with accounts of my experiences. I recently went to an Apache reservation in Arizona, and I am now able to tell their story to enlighten others on the true state of Native Americans. I also served as a Mercy Advocate in Service throughout this year. I volunteered with an adult special needs organization called Palooza. That population has enriched my life, and I am now also equipped to advocate for their population as well. In each of these organizations I am a leader, and being a part of the Griffin Student Leadership Institute has helped me be a more effective advocate for these various communities.

There is not one specific definition of leadership because there is not just one type of leader. Leaders exist in various forms as learned from the Emerging Leaders tier of the Institute. I can only hope to make my own definition of leadership in the way that I decide to lead others. I also do not want only to have one specific style of leadership. I want to be ever evolving and able to cater my skills to the needs of the group I am leading. Being open minded, gaining new perspectives, and continually studying leadership is how I plan to be an effective leader in society. I only hope that I can be half the leader that Catherine McAuley, Professor Walsh, and Lisa
Tyler are. I have been incredibly blessed to have had this opportunity to continually improve my character.

Works Cited


Silverstein, S. Traffic light. Where the sidewalk ends.
“Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”
---John Wooden

“It’s okay to follow in someone’s footstep; just make sure that you leave your own behind.”
---Kiersten Godzieba
If someone told me at eight years old that this is where I would be at age twenty-one, I would doubt if they were really talking about me. Being as introverted and shy as I am, confidence and speaking to others always came as a struggle. I had never thought of myself as a leader of any sorts or someone who was capable of generating much change. This is not to say that I had low expectations for myself, only that I never thought I would excel in those areas. But, at age twenty-one, I can confidently say I have surpassed those expectations and I have proven to myself that I can do so much more than I ever thought. Leadership was not something I ever shied away from, but it never seemed to call to me as something that I should take on. As I have worked my way through college, especially, I have seen my confidence and leadership bloom in areas I could not have foreseen. A lot of that has to do with finding the career that sets my soul ablaze and fills me with such purpose. Now, as a soon-to-be graduate of Gwynedd Mercy University, I can say that I have found my calling in life, and I have big plans to grow confidently in my leadership and faith, with the help of the Social Change Model.

When I was younger, I had always thought that progress looked like leaps and bounds and that success only came with praise and acknowledgement. I thought that in order to step out of your comfort zone, you needed to take large, purposeful, fearless steps. As I have gotten older, I see now that stepping out of your comfort zone doesn’t need to be an event, it need only be bettering yourself from the day before and trying to do one thing differently. Success isn’t determined by the amount of accolades, but by your own heart telling you that you accomplished a goal. Progress isn’t entirely measured by the grand moments in one’s life, but by the small, often unnoticed moments as well. I have also learned that everyone’s success looks differently, and discovering that has been life-changing.

Once while attending a college graduation ceremony, I heard the speaker say, “We cannot connect the dots looking forward, only by looking back.” Ever since then, that quote has stuck with me and has reminded me to trust in God’s plan, because only He knows where our time now will take us. We won’t know until we look back just how our past choices and actions have compiled to make us who we are today. As I approach the end of my time as an undergraduate, I have taken time to reflect on the past four years and what lead me to where I am now, much like I did as a senior in high school. The more I delve into my past actions and choices, I see how my career seemed to be calling to me rather than me finding it, and it would eventually help me develop my personal philosophy as a distinctive Mercy leader.

Studying Education has made such a monumental impact on my life, but it wasn’t my initial career plan. I am someone who always likes to be prepared and have an action plan. From a young age, I tried seeking out careers that I could one day claim as my own, based on my interests at the time. At first, my natural creativity seemed to be the direction I should go, so I decided that I wanted to be an artist, like my father. Then, I narrowed my focus on the specific branch of art leading to interior design. Art was always a strong suit of mine and was something I thought my talents were best geared towards. But then, during my sophomore year of high school, my classmates and I took a career placement test to start to point us in the direction of the major we should be choosing in two short years. I expected art and creativity to be my highest scores, because in the past tests like this always produced that outcome. However, when I received my results, I scored the highest in childcare, with art as a close second. I had always known I was good with children, being that I am the oldest of three in my nuclear family, and the third oldest of fifteen grandchildren. Babysitting has been my responsibility for as long as I can remember and I love being around children, but I never considered working with children as a career path. After receiving those results, it seems, I had taken the first steps in my journey that would ultimately lead me to my career as a teacher.

As a child, leadership, to me, looked like words more than actions, even though I heard that both were important. As a young leader, I thought that my actions would be doing most of the talking for me, because speaking to people, on any matter, did not come very easily. Since coming to college, however, I have found my words, and have redefined what leadership looks like to me. Leadership, from my perspective, is a culmination of qualities and is achieved in various ways. Leadership to me means being able to give and receive feedback, being able to empathize and use emotions to motivate change, being aware that a group’s differences are also its strengths, taking action instead of just speaking about it, and empowering others to be leaders themselves. Leadership also means having a strong set of guiding morals and not caving to the opinions of others if they contradict your morals. These views of mine, which I have been defining on my own after years of experience and observation have been reflected by values of the Social Change Model.
Most of my definition of leadership has come from my time as the captain of my soccer team. That role was not one that I was ever elected for, nor was it one that was simply handed to me. It was one that I assumed and earned after years of being the voice of a team. During my time as captain, I learned how to give criticism kindly, to find what unites us all and use it as a motivator, to use each players’ differences to better us as a whole, and to lead by example. Those six years as captain gave me a majority of my foundation in leadership, and I have taken those skills with me into every leadership role I have assumed since then.

When I think of leadership and the Social Change Model, the first thing that comes to mind is a building, because each value plays off of one another and builds on the previous. In order to understand and empathize with others, you must first be in touch with yourself and your own abilities. In order to unite others for a common purpose, you need to understand others and work collaboratively with them. And, in order to initiate change, you need to understand yourself, know how to work collaboratively with others, and rally others together for a common purpose. Each value builds upon the one before it and they all work together to achieve the ultimate goal of producing change for a better world.

With my foundation in leadership coming from my early exposure to it and my thoughts on its meaning, the first addition atop me that was learning more about psychology. It is a topic that has always held my interest and I was excited to see that taking a course on developmental psychology was required for my major. After completing that course, I found the deeper connection to education that I was craving and went on to learn more on my own. Through psychology, I learned a great deal more about myself and was able to interpret better the actions and words of those around me.

The second level of my structure is centered around authenticity and honesty. In the last year, I have done a lot of thinking about what makes some people obvious leaders in a group and why. After a great deal of observation, I have concluded that one reason why some people stand out as leaders is because they are being their authentic selves. When we put up walls and only work with an objective mindset, we can shut others out and turn people away, even though we may have praiseworthy intentions and goals. By being open and honest with ourselves and those around us, we are showing that we are human and approachable. I am someone that typically responds with answers that please people and don’t ruffle too many feathers, just for the sake of keeping a conversation short and calm. Recently, I have tried being more authentic with my answers instead of generic and I have seen great differences. Conversations with others don’t seem to be filled with so much surface content and I feel like I am making more of an impact with communication.

Another aspect of authenticity is finding what makes you happy. In the TED Talk given by Scott Dinsmore, he explains how you need to make happiness a priority in your life. (Dinsmore). By being your authentic self, you will find happiness and a love for what you do. That happiness will then spill over into other aspects of your life and affect them as well. Once I started showing my authentic self and not just giving people the answer I thought they wanted to hear, I felt so much happier and better able to relate to others. In fifty years, I want to be able to look back on my life and see that I lived a life that makes me happy and proud. I want to look back and see a life where I lived authentically and upheld my morals.

To build on that, the third level deals with morals. The standards I have set for myself are what keep me in check and constantly evolving. I hold very high standards for myself and that is one reason why I assume leadership roles. My faith and those things I am avid about are what guide me and give me strength as a leader. I believe that our morals couple with our personality to make us who we are and what we give our energy to.

The roof that seals and completes my structure is passion. Without passion, everything I say and do would fall flat because there would be no love or purpose behind it. With passion, however, I feel powerful and capable. I feel like I have the ability to instigate change and lead others in pursuit of noble causes. Passion unites communities and has the power to make a difference. One of my biggest passions is education. My thirst for knowledge and deep desire to share that knowledge with others is what gets me out of bed every morning. Being able to share my love for learning and inspire others to love it as well is why I wanted to become a teacher. Passion fills me with the fire I need to motivate others and collaborate to generate an outcome. In Chapter 14 of the book, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership it says, “Citizenship also implies an important larger concept. Citizens understand they are part of something bigger than themselves.” (Shankman, Allen, Haber-Curran, p. 82)
When your understanding that you are a part of something bigger coincides with something you are passionate about, great change can occur.

A personal goal of mine, and something that I am extremely passionate about, as a teacher, is to *teach* the change I want to see in the world. The traditional quote commands us to *be* the change, but that can be a very daunting task with no obvious starting point. It is my goal to give my students the tools and launch pad they need to propel themselves into the world as agents of change themselves. I want to help them discover what makes them feel alive, lead them in that direction, and encourage them to seek out opportunities to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others. There is a line from an Ignatian prayer that spoke to me as I was reading, and it said, “What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything” (Donnelly, Piderit). There could not be a better quote to describe my feelings towards finally accepting the call to teach. It was that decision that has made all the difference and has given me the passion that fuels my life.

I am able to practice and perfect my leadership every day when I walk into the classroom. I also seize teachable moments with my students where I can stray from the lesson plan and speak candidly about real life struggles and triumphs. Earlier this year, I found myself with an opportunity to do just that, in a big way. Inspired by intolerance and bullying that I observed while teaching, I was determined to take that incident and turn it into a learning experience and a chance for students to learn about empathy and inclusion. I know that intolerance and exclusion occur outside the boundaries of school and they are very real problems in the world today. By introducing students to the concepts of tolerance, inclusion, diversity, and empathy, I hoped to start the chain reaction that these students would carry with them for the rest of their lives. I wanted to show children that we can create a more colorful world that celebrates differences and encourages change.

So, along with a friend of mine teaching at the same school, I developed a program for preschoolers through to eighth graders that covered three topics, each designed to build up from the previous. Those topics included loving oneself and our differences and why that makes us special in God’s eyes, for the preschoolers through to the second graders, learning about empathy and how that can help us live out God’s Golden Rule, for third through fifth graders, and diversity and all its meanings, for middle schoolers. Working to create this program and following through with presenting it to each of these grades was such a fantastic accomplishment because I found an opportunity to teach the change, share my faith, and lead by example.

As with any desire to change and evolve, I take my inspiration from those who are demonstrating all that I hope to become. I am inspired by those who are kind to others, who demonstrate empathy, who include the shy ones and outsiders, even though they are easy to overlook. I am inspired by those who don’t have to put others down to win attention or a top position. I am inspired by small acts of kindness and the will to make this world a more loving place.

If I was to define leadership now, after having learned about the Social Change Model, I would say that it is a combination of many factors; having an honest understanding of self and living authentically, upholding your morals and beliefs, being able to understand and connect with others while respecting that you may have differing views, understanding what common purpose we are all working for and taking steps to achieve it, and being able to utilize your leadership skills to generate change. Leadership is so much more than standing at the front of a line and giving directions, it is a constantly evolving practice that represents part of who you are as a person. I feel better connected to myself now, both in a professional and personal context, after reflection of the various aspects of the Model. Digging deeper into myself was a crucial part in understanding who I am, what I’m truly passionate about, and how I work with others, in any situation. With the Social Change Model as my guiding light and resource, I feel very confident that I will be the best leader I can be and use my talents to help make a change in my life and the lives of those around me.
Leading from the Inside Out  
By: Christina D. Harris

“The true test of a man’s character is what he does when no one is watching.”  
---John Wooden
Life is full of surprises! Sometimes our path is clear, and we can see what our next step will be. Other times, we walk down a long path, and each step we take is filled with questions from the past and concerns for the future. When the weight of the world is wearing you down, and your heart is heavy, carry on, because someone cares for you. God has blessed me immensely, and one of His greatest blessings was leading me to a place where I can grow and serve. I am a witness to God’s love and grace and have experienced this through my participation in the Griffin Student Leadership Institute Exceptional Leaders Program. God has directed and redirected my path this year and has led me to this program where I have felt His mercy and support through the leaders, mentors, and students who have walked with me during this experience. This program has been an asset to my experience as a Gwynedd Mercy student and has allowed me to reflect on, grow, and change my philosophy of leadership. I have been able to weave together my personal and professional values and experiences, thereby providing me with the opportunity to examine myself as an emerging young professional and distinguished mercy graduate.

The nature of this program has allowed me to participate in rigorous self-reflection, and to evaluate my values and beliefs as a leader. My original philosophy of leadership has changed through the mentee relationships I have developed, the reading and reflecting I have completed, and the integration of my new understanding of leadership into my personal and professional life. Prior to participating in this program, I understood leadership as the ability to guide others in achieving a goal, completing a task, or promoting growth or change. I believed leaders were self-aware and demonstrated high standards of moral character. They are true to those they lead and are willing to evaluate their actions to create effective change. I have expanded these beliefs about leadership to include the new skills I have learned, and the understanding I have gained about mercy leadership.

I have had the privilege of being mentored by two exceptional women who beautifully demonstrate mercy values in their professions and share my commitment to social justice, and a passion for serving others. Janice Nuss, my external mentor, is the director of Behavioral Health Services at Indian Creek Foundation in Souderton, PA. Working with Janice throughout the program has provided me with not only a knowledgeable mentor, but also a professional friend as I emerge into the human services field. Janice helped me to recognize the importance of quiet leadership, and to reflect on experiences when I have demonstrated effective leadership qualities. In the nearing months, I will be preparing to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. When the nature of the helping profession becomes challenging, and at times heart wrenching, it is important to remain grounded and stay true to your values. Janice helped me to combine my Christian values with my professional objectives so I can remain true to myself and my faith while serving in this field. To further develop my professional self, Janice suggested that I write a mission statement that highlighted my goals, as a helping professional, and my personal values. My mission is to empower individuals to see their own strength and self-worth while offering unconditional empathetic support amidst their challenges. This mission statement has allowed me to develop a concrete and succinct identity as a human service professional.

Dr. Barbara Jones, my internal mentor, has also been gracious with sharing her experiences with me throughout the program. A distinctive mercy leader, Dr. Jones also exemplifies her commitment to mercy values and the teachings of Catherine McAuley in her position as the associate dean and professor in the Frances M. Maguire School of Nursing and Health Professions at Gwynedd Mercy University. It has been a wonderful experience to share and grow with someone whose values align so closely with my own. Although I do not share the same professional interests as Dr. Jones, our journeys of faith and decision to follow God’s call have bonded us as sisters in Christ. We both have a desire to make a difference in the world and are concerned for the emotional well-being of others. I am grateful to both Dr. Jones and Janice for mentoring me throughout this program and for strengthening my understanding of, and commitment to being, a mercy leader.

The meaningful discussions I shared with my mentors coupled with the readings and reflections have shaped my current understanding of leadership. The readings encompassed the three categories of the social change model: individual, group, community and societal values, and highlighted the seven values of the social change model. Understanding these values at the macro and micro levels of society allowed me to identify myself at these societal levels, reflect on my past experiences, and think about my future leadership roles. Shankman and Allen (2008) wrote in their book, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, that honest self-understanding is a crucial skill for effective leaders. When you do not reflect on a situation, “you don’t take the time to think through your actions or how your actions may have affected others” (Shankman & Allen, 2008, p. 34). The importance of feedback and reflection is congruent with my personal and professional beliefs. As a leader, you must participate
in continuous reflection and evaluation. This not only holds you responsible for your actions, but it also allows you to own your feelings and understand them. The readings about individual values encouraged me to identify my greatest strengths and limitations and challenged me to set goals for myself that would support my leadership journey and allow me to participate in deeper self-discovery. The dialogue questions relating to the social change value of congruence greatly challenged me to find the incongruities in my life between my actions and my beliefs. I had to confront myself, and hold myself accountable to demonstrate my values and fulfill my commitments.

The social change model group values of collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility, challenged my beliefs and furthered my self-awareness. Simon Sinek’s TED Talk, entitled How Great Leaders Inspire Action, left me questioning how I justify my actions. Sinek used a Golden Circle model to demonstrate how leaders justify their actions. The outermost circle represented “what,” the middle circle represented “how,” and the smallest inner circle represented “why.” Sinek said that leaders who are inspired will work from the inside out. “Leaders who start with “why,” have the ability to inspire those around them” (Sinek, 2009, 17:44). After watching this TED Talk, I questioned how I justify my own actions and was driven to become a leader who leads from the inside out. People know what they do, but they cannot always explain why they do it. This inspired me to become a group leader who can justify her actions and who will work with others to develop a cohesive group who shares a common purpose.

Additionally, Carney’s essay, Leading from a Merciful Space, also shaped my understanding of mercy leadership. Through her mercy leadership, Catherine McAuley empowered Elizabeth, and helped her to recognize her own ability to lead others. Catherine’s gentle nature and virtue of patience inspired new leaders to develop their potential and, more importantly, created leaders who lived by principles and whose beliefs were rooted in mercy traditions. Catherine McAuley’s greatest quality “is that she loved those she led…all that she did was fueled by God’s Mercy as she had experienced it, and from a desire to see that Mercy revealed more and more in our world (Carney, 2011, p. 11).

This is what made Catherine McAuley a distinguished mercy leader. She inspired others “from the inside, out” (Sinew, 2009, 3:12). Her commitment to the mercy tradition and her witness to God’s mercy motivated her to lead and inspire others to experience God’s power. While reading this, I felt deeply connected to Catherine McAuley’s style of leadership and became confident that this is the type of leader I want to be. My faith is what motivates me to lead a life of serving others. Catherine McAuley is highly respected as an authentic leader and distinguished mercy servant. I, too, want to lead and share God’s love with others. I want others to see God’s love in me and know that they too are loved by someone who died to know them. In 1 John 3:18, God calls his servants to “not love in words or speech, but in actions and in truth.” I want my authenticity and leadership to reflect God’s mercy in my life and to inspire others to welcome Him into their lives.

The Social Change Model also requires leaders to value and demonstrate citizenship in their community. Effective leaders need to hold high standards of citizenship and do this through their commitment and participation in their community. Shankman and Allen (2008) wrote that “citizens must give of themselves for the benefit of others” (p. 82). A good citizen will advocate for change that will have a positive influence on others. Individuals who display citizenship share Catherine McAuley’s commitment to social responsibility and are willing to address social issues and make necessary changes. Change is the conclusive goal of the Social Change Model. Leaders who have developed and display the seven values important to molding effective leaders will ultimately create positive change in their worlds.

After studying the Social Change Model of Leadership and understanding my responsibility as a mercy leader, I have chosen to be a leader who leads from the inside out! This is my new philosophy of leadership. Similar to Sinek’s Golden Circle model, I too want to be a leader who can answer the “why” for my actions, and use this “why” to build a firm foundation and foster leadership abilities in others. I want my internal drive and values to shine through my actions. When one chooses to lead, they recognize that a problem exists and search for a solution. They lead by example and inspire others to search for their “why.” When you choose to lead, your future success will be demonstrated through the success of those you have led. Watching others justify their actions using their “why,” displays effective learning of leading from the inside out!
Leadership is service, and I am committed to demonstrating servant leadership in my personal and professional life. Serving my school, church, and community has nurtured my desire to be a servant leader. Sometimes you need to lose yourself to find yourself again. This can be done through service. When you immerse yourself in service, you can find yourself and experience deep personal growth. I have experienced this growth by serving others.

Leadership skill-building is a continuous process that has room for growth and learning. I can confidently identify myself as an emerging mercy leader: someone who knows her values and lives by principles; someone who will be a leader in her professional field and let her moral compass guide her decisions; someone who wants to share God’s grace and mercy with others. Although the GSLI Exceptional Leaders Program is coming to an end, I know that I am only beginning to grow as a professional, and leader in my field. I still have much to learn as I continue down my life path, and I am grateful that I have found my voice as a young leader so that I have many years to grow and serve.

Works Cited
“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eye off the goal.”

---Henry Ford
What a very lucky growing professional business woman I am. I am so grateful for this wonderful experience I have had the privilege of participating in. I have been fearful of writing this summary as I did see some of the papers from last year and they were amazing! I don’t know if what I type will fully capture the transformation that got kick started through these past six months. We were all chosen as valid student leaders who, with strong mentorship, could be become more exceptional. I learned that you can greatly benefit from mentorship, and I also learned that I was not as confident in my “exceptionality!” I was exposed to two very unique and wise mentors that were chosen to help me down this corridor. My external mentor was organized and professional. I wanted to mess up his hair or his jacket to make him as disorganized as I am! (Oh, wait. I am supposed to be like him—not the other way around!) My internal mentor was laid back and inquisitive, her hair was tussled like mine from the rain. My time with both of these individuals was so extremely valuable. I still smile when I think about it. I asked good questions I found as I prepared to meet my first mentors, ever. “How do you spend most of your time?” “Are you currently working on a new area of growth for yourself?” “What is the single biggest problem you notice with your staff?” (and other fun things like that). One question I asked one of my mentors as our meeting was winding down was, “How do you perceive me?” This person responded that I was not ambitious. That blew me away, because for my entire adulthood I really thought I was ambitious! I tried not to laugh out loud and squeal really, with glee. This statement seemed to be freeing to me, actually. For a very long time I thought this was my truth, when in fact it was just a truth I told myself. A huge difference, indeed. Not being ambitious sounded so much like an underachiever to me. Having a big ‘to do’ list and being busy does not mean you are ambitious. Period. The truth will set you free! That is one moment I will remember for a very long time. I was even happier because a person whom I respected told me something very truthful and objective from what they had experienced from me in that short amount of time. Their only purpose for that conversation was me. I was their only purpose. My betterment and growth are what dragged them away from their family and yardwork that day. I had never been the focus of anyone’s attention that did not have an ulterior motive, in some regard. It was scary and fun and exhilarating and revolutionary.

I kept going back to this one instance with my well-designed gurus and this enlightenment, and this is how I approached and embraced the readings for the rest of the course. I concentrated on Individual Values, in our Social Change Model of Leadership, which spoke of consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment. Each and everyone one dealt with honest self-understanding, knowing your strengths and your limitations, self-knowledge and success, self-awareness—all the sparks that went flying through my cerebrum when I was told “I was not!”

In the end, that one moment of truth changed many things. I am certain this was not the first truth I had heard. It was also not a truth that I was necessarily prepared to hear, but somehow I was very ready and able to receive it. I believe it was possible to have this profound experience because of the delivery and nature of our interactions. I was given respect and concern quickly from both of my mentors that allowed me to trust their thoughts, judgements, and input. I took great note of the comfort this brought me, allowing me to open up to the vulnerability necessary for growth. In our reading from the book titled Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, I fixedated on the need to seek feedback, learn to hear the positive and the negative, and to embrace this as a gift, as it is not always criticism or censure. This gift “brought about possibilities.” One person shared their truth with me, which was different from my truth (will the real truth please stand up!!).

A wonderful author suggested to me by my internal mentor was Pema Chödrön—a gentle soul, who is an American Buddhist nun. I had heard of this woman before, but never spent any time with her. One quote from her book titled When Things Fall Apart tied into this lesson perfectly. It goes, “The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently.” I especially liked the ‘gently’ part as I was ready to dive in and beat myself up! I will continue to read Ms. Chödrön forever as I was intrigued and excited by the hundreds of other words and messages she spoke of—that I am certain she was talking directly to me and about me.

I was making some serious connections. These connections were of the greatest value to me. They were as ideal as the connections Geoff (external) spoke about in many of his stories and lessons. There can be no leadership without connections. Once the needs were determined and understood and respected, the connection arrived. I was ready, willing and able to be led because of the connection I had with my leaders. I wanted to know what they were thinking, what they were explaining and sharing. I wanted to be there with them. Just as
Maya Angelou has stated—‘it’s not the words that someone says or what they did that will be remembered, it’s how they made you feel that you won’t forget!’ The whole time they were talking, I was realizing and discerning and admitting—frailties and pain and similarities and aspirations. Figuring out the needs of the ones to connect with will be of great worth as I work toward the forward movement and the goal in leadership opportunities. I will work hard to cement connections in order to move people, and to be continued to be moved.

Having these seasoned leaders to hang out with made me realize I may have been equipped for leadership opportunities in the small town, but will need more development as I venture out into the big girl world! The perfect thought showed up in Thoughtful Mind as I was writing this paper. It is a quote attributed to Abraham Maslow where he says, “I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.” I had been hitting a whole bunch of nails and I feel like I got away with something. How could I have been so narrowly leading? I need to get a chainsaw and bolts and rivets and a jackhammer and an 18 volt lithium ion cordless drill! So many new tools.

All leadership does not look the same or happen the same, but collaborates for the common purpose—thoughts contained in the next group of values in our Social Change Model of Leadership—Group Values. I was pleased to see the story of Elizabeth Moore, a temperate being that Catherine McCauley personally chose to set up a convent in Ireland. I learned that Elizabeth was so caught up in her fears she was not able to be her best leader and ‘got white as death and her eyes filled like fever’ when a confrontation or situation arose. Catherine did her best to assure Elizabeth that she was chosen correctly and continued to give her support and tools for success. (Oh my goodness, gracious! I just realized that is what is happening here. I am the terrified one walking around with a hammer, and GSLI believes otherwise!) The leadership of both women are what I need to relentlessly embrace and pursue. Sheila Carney truly captures the growth of Catherine McCauley and all of her comrades in the paper titled Leading from a Merciful Space—stories of emotional intelligence and advancing development into the leader we know and love. Her path was hard and orderly and necessary and simple. Every interaction was validated with heartfelt emotions and concerns and trials as she moved from growth to growth. She lived and wrote the Spiritual Works of Mercy—to be a good listener and help others to know how good they are; to share advice and experience gently; to challenge the things that you know are wrong and let others know there are better choices; and to give others and yourself room to make a mistake. She led them toward the common purpose when they did not want to go or did not see the path as clearly as she did. She motivated them and loved them and fueled them. My mentors (without a doubt) did their spiritual works of mercy on me! I must pay it forward. I will.

All of these new thoughts and awakenings are what I am most grateful for. I had two ideal human beings spend time with me, share with me and guide me to be a better person than I was yesterday. I am confident, that as I continue to address and strengthen these individual values, they will have a strong impact to the group values and societal values of my next leadership opportunities. As clearly stated in our leadership development guidelines, “Change most certainly is the ultimate goal of the creative process of leadership—to make a better world and a better society for self and others.” I will make Catherine McCauley proud! Thank you.

Works Cited


Learning to Love the Process
By: Elise Nonnenman

“As we arise each morning, let us determine to respond with more love and kindness to whatever may come our way.”
---Thomas Monson
A Natural Leader. This is something that my parents have heard at almost every parent-teacher conference since Kindergarten. I have always, from the time that I was a little girl, felt an innate ability to lead. It had almost always been effortless to me. I was always at the front of the line, the teacher’s right hand girl, the first to answer a question posed by my teachers, and the first to help a fellow student who didn’t quite understand. It had always come naturally to me, so I never found it to be special—until I lost it. As I grew older and entered middle school, being the kind of leader that I was wasn’t quite as exhilarating as it was in elementary school. It became more of a burden, something that I felt I had to hide in order to fit the status quo. Standing up and standing out became a fear, and my innate ability to lead took a backseat to blending into the crowd.

I went about my daily life through middle and high school forgetting the days that I was a confident, self-assured young lady. That young lady who once was the first to answer questions became the young lady who sat in the back of the classroom, praying that she did not make eye contact with the teacher so she would not have to volunteer an answer that she thought was incorrect. Though it became dim, the light inside of me occasionally pushed hard to come through, but I quickly subdued it before anything that anyone might not agree with could come out of my mouth. This fear stayed with me all the way into my Sophomore year at Gwynedd Mercy University; where the light inside of me could no longer stay dim.

It took the hardest year of my life to remind me who I am—a natural leader. It took surprising myself by hurling what was being thrown at me in every direction to realize how tough I really was. It took doing what leaders, as described by Chris Lowney, do, which is to “smash through obstacles and produce change for the better,” to realize that I was still that special little girl that I remembered being so long ago. I let go of my inhibitions, and the light that I had fought for so long began to shine again.

As I began to take on more leadership positions, I found that leading wasn’t as easy as I had remembered it being in my elementary school years. There were many different challenges that I wasn’t used to, and many areas in which I felt I needed some guidance. Being a leader is fulfilling, but can feel very empty when you aren’t sure of yourself. I found myself making leadership decisions and never really feeling confident that they were the right ones—something that I knew needed to change. I would be embarking on my most important leadership role thus far within the next year—being a classroom teacher. This is where the Griffin Student Leadership Institute came in. It would provide me with the tools that I needed to be a strong, confident leader, not just in the classroom, but in all areas of my life.

I was thrilled when I found that my internal mentor was Ms. Christine Eberle. Not only is she a leader herself, but she leads always with a consciousness of others and God alike. Our first meeting was at a local diner, right before Christmas break. I was going through a couple things in my personal life that were causing me to be down on myself and doubt my leadership abilities. She shared her wisdom, touching on her own personal stories. This was the first thing that I learned from Christine Eberle—the importance of being honest and open with those that you are leading. Christine did not have to share anything about herself with me, but because she did, I felt a sense of comfort with her that made me want to follow in her footsteps. I decided to try it in my own classroom as I student taught, and I found it to be just as effective as I’d hoped. Being open and honest with those that you are leading, not only about yourself, but about your own mistakes and how you went about handling them, is vital. This is a leadership quality that I will carry with me throughout my life.

Also at my first meeting, we discussed some of the GSLI readings. Most memorably, and my favorite one, was the poem “Fall in Love” by Fr. Pedro Arrupe. Father Arrupe says “What you fall in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything” (Arrupe, 1991). The poem challenges you to ask yourself WHAT you love as opposed to WHO you love. Father Arrupe also says that “what breaks your heart” will affect everything as well (Arrupe, 1991). Through this poem, I found my sensitive heart to be less of a weakness and more a strength in leadership. What breaks my heart does not have to ruin me, but rather it can drive me toward change. It all depends on how I look at it.

This poem was incredibly relevant to my life at this point, and something I felt I needed to read at the exact moment that I read it. I decided to make a list on the back of the poem about what I love, being careful not to list who I loved. It helped me to look at things in a completely different light, and I realized that by doing what I loved, I would conversely affect all those who I love around me. Christine asked, with a genuine interest, what
my list of things that I loved had on it. She told me about the things that she loved as well, again, being open and honest. This made me feel validated and important—like the things that I loved had meaning. Through her actions, she taught me another very important leadership lesson. You must have a genuine interest in those that you lead. You must make them feel valid and important in order to make them genuinely want you to lead them. I, as a teacher, must find out what it is that my students love. I must validate those things, and consequently, I will validate my students.

I came into my second meeting with Christine, for lack of a better way to describe it, in shambles. I had been facing conflict that I felt I brought on myself. She allowed me a safe space to voice what was bothering me. I felt defeated. Christine offered me guidance, and we began to discuss the readings. We discussed the story of S. Clare Moore and Catherine McAuley. Clare was given the responsibility to paint the documents that would hang in the House on Baggot Street, and she was painstakingly slow. As everyone else became frustrated with her, Catherine remained patient and tried to enjoy watching her slow work. “Catherine understood, I think, that just because she didn’t have an appreciation for the process that didn’t mean that it wouldn’t, ultimately, bring the desired results” (Carney, 2011).

As we discussed this story, we discussed learning to appreciate the process. I needed this in my life at this very moment, to learn to appreciate the process. Though what I was going through was difficult, much like Catherine watching Clare paint, that didn’t mean that it wouldn’t produce the desired results. At that very moment, I saw Christine’s eyes light up. In the middle of our discussion, she got up excitedly, grabbing something off her wall. It was one of Clare’s paintings, directly behind me. We were both so shocked and fulfilled by God’s presence—by how he gave me exactly what I needed at the exact moment that I needed it—all we could do was be silent. This showed me that, though sometimes difficult, God deals us what we need at the exact moment that we need it. We must learn to appreciate the process to grow, both as leaders and as people on this earth in general.

My external mentor, Mrs. Michelle Lutz, was someone that I knew I would look up to from the moment I met her. Just the way that she carries herself—the way that she walks, speaks, and listens—was inspiring to me. I immediately wanted the confidence that she radiated. She is a success story in the career path that I have so lovingly chosen, and I knew that her wisdom would be of great value to me. In our first meeting, we got to know each other better. Michelle told me about her children, much like Christine, letting me into her life. Again, she spoke to my heart, making my desire to follow her much greater. She is someone who just does everything in her power to make the lives of those around her better. She gives her entire life to her children, even though she has a career that requires a great deal of her heart. I admire her so deeply for this, as I am someone who really has a difficult time splitting my heart and my time in so many different directions. I learned from her that, as a leader, we will be split in many different directions. It is up to us to find the right amount of time and the heart to give to the right places.

We also began to discuss the poem “Fall in Love” by Father Arrupe, and I shared with her the things that I love. At this time, it was around Christmas, and I had been feeling a strange sadness. Christmas wasn’t what it used to be—it wasn’t magical anymore. It was stressful. Something on my list of things that I loved was “a child’s heart and mind.” Underneath it, I had written “Will I ever feel the happiness and magic that I did as a kid?” Michelle answered this so beautifully, and it has stuck with me since. She said “No, you won’t but you will find a different kind of magic and happiness.” This spoke volumes to me as a leader. I want to be the kind of leader that finds magic in the least magical things, and happiness in the saddest of things. That is the kind of leader I would want to follow, and thus the type of leader that I want to be.

Michelle gave me so many vital career pointers. As a professional, I have struggled with various aspects. I am an excellent communicator with children, but I definitely struggle with communicating with adults. As a teacher, my children will all have parents, some that will question the choices that I make for their child. This lack of confidence in myself and the decisions that I make, which I spoke of before, simply wouldn’t do in these situations. Michelle gave amazing insight. First of all, be open to suggestion to a point. Again, appreciate the process—we are lifelong learners. There is always room for improvement and there are always opportunities to grow. Admit what you do not know, and assure yourself that you will find the answer.
Most importantly, she said “kindness goes further than knowledge”. This is so important for me as a first-year teacher, as there is so much that I simply do not know. When in doubt, simply be kind. It is such a simple idea that I truly wish everybody would be able to follow. Michelle instilled in me a new way to find confidence in myself. As long as I always do things out of genuine kindness, I will never be truly wrong. I will have always done something for the right reason, even if I didn’t do the right things. This is exactly the answer to my issue of self-confidence that I was looking for when I began this program.

Michelle instilled a confidence in me that I didn’t see before I met her. I was nervous about my search for a job doing what I love. I was scared that I wouldn’t be able to do what I loved for lack of opportunity. She saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. She genuinely believed that I was going to be great. Because of this, I now believe that I am going to be great. I will have a new found confidence as I go into interviews, knowing that this is what I am meant to do, so things will fall into place. I cannot thank Michelle enough for this, and I will always be grateful to her for showing me that being a young teacher is way more exciting than it is stressful. Because of her, I am so excited to begin my professional life, and I will carry all that she has taught me in all that I do throughout this upcoming year as I embark on my journey of being a real-world teacher.

The Griffin Student Leadership Institute helped me take the light inside of me and make it brighter. It helped me find who I am as a leader and who I am becoming. I have a new confidence that this light will always remain bright, for I have a better sense of what this light is. I feel that I know how to keep it shining so that it never grows dim again. I am thankful for the relationships that I have created and grown with not only Christine and Michelle, but also for the relationship that I have grown with myself. This process has been a great one, and because of it, I am not just a better leader, but also a better me.
“A smooth sea never made a skillful sailor.”
---English Proverb
Last summer, my friend asked me to come and work with her in a home-care setting taking care of a man with ALS. I asked around if this was a good idea. Most people told me it was going to be sad, that you’d get experience, but that the environment was going to be negative. I did it anyway. And these people could not have been more wrong. The man I care for is ventilator dependent, uses a PEG tube for nutrition and medication, and eye gaze technology for communication, but aside from all this medical equipment, he is a person first. After my interaction with him I found that he is hilarious although never speaks a word, the most loving husband to his wife and kids, and the most gentle and patient soul I have ever met. The disease is a catastrophic illness slowly disabling the person from the outside but also revealing incredible strength and resilience of the human spirit to live on despite the numerous setbacks. The disease causes families to adjust to a new normal but this is combated with a positive outlook on life, which they constantly adhere to. Although he could have the most competent nursing staff, he chooses to teach student nurses. By teaching student nurses, this is his way of giving back to society. He finds teaching others to be fulfilling in life. During my interview, his wife said to me, “You can’t be here unless you have a positive outlook on life.” It’s not so much what you can or cannot do but more about the energy you allow yourself to send into the world. With this experience, I realized the importance of the message your soul sends rather than the words your mind speaks. Leaders for me are people who are not assigned the title. They are confident people who lead by example and have a strong character. This man with ALS is a leader.

My definition of a good leader is someone who verbalizes, exemplifies, and promotes a virtuous lifestyle. Leaders move people to action. They do not have to be in a position of leadership but their actions are considered genuine to help support a cause in everyday life. A leader is someone who looks to work on behalf of all people and makes the world a better place. A selfless person who is well intentioned and genuinely kind-hearted is someone who I identify as being a good leader.

Being a leader begins with the realization that we have the ability to change our surrounding, ourselves, and eventually others. I have been blessed with many outstanding leaders who have paved the way in both my personal and professional life. Once a leader comes to terms with the fact that he or she can change anything they want, this ignites a passion to help others discover the same truth. In my experiences, the best leaders have always had this positive energy and passion for their work.

A true inspirational leader in my life has been and always will be my father. Motivational speaker Simon Sinek said in a recent TED talk, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” (Sinek, 2009). This is my dad. He taught me that human beings have the ability to mold their own happiness that parallels with the way we decide to live our life. This could not be more true- a person who shows an overwhelming passion for something will always be successful in everything they do. My dad started from the very bottom and continued to build his reputation, character, and love of life. He often told me that more people told him no than yes and that you have to pick yourself up and not give up. Soon you will get to where you need to be. He created a small business and ignited an undeniable fire within his soul and heart of his employees to continue to grow. His success and story has inspired me every day and inspired me to choose a career that I am passionate about. Like my dad, my job never feels like a job or some necessary evil of the world. It is the type of work I would do paid or unpaid. This is how I know that nursing is what I am meant to do.

My dad is my go-to for a pick-me-up or encouraging words to carry on, but one day he said something profound that has now become ingrained into my very being. Whenever I have had a hard test coming up or something that is going to challenge me, I have called my dad panicking. All he would say was this one word, which he would continue to repeat, as I continued to tell him how overwhelmed I was. He told me to “Rise”. Rise above fear, negativity, and self-doubt. This one word makes me feel like I am capable of doing anything that scares me. To me it means that if you want something that’s beyond your ability or hard to get, you need to grow. This one word taught me that sometimes our own fears are what hold us back, not our abilities. There are going to be a lot of things that will cause fear, but this fear tells me there’s room for growth and improvement. Future goals should be big and scary, because it matters. To this day to anyone looking for my advice, I leave them with the same message. If you feel inadequate or incapable, remember to rise and be better.

Throughout my college career I created a motivational wall of my favorite quotes and hung it in my dorm for daily inspiration. This wall is a physical reminder for me to stay driven and focused. This wall has also served as motivation for my roommates and visitors, offering advice or inspiration to anyone who needs it. I believe this
motivational wall was a huge contributor to my success and ability to stay determined. This makes me believe that success and being an effective leader is a mindset. If you think positive and productive thoughts, this way of thinking can be transferred to others like a ripple in a pond. Leaders must set examples for others to follow to enable their dreams as well.

Both my parents have laid a solid foundation for my brother and me to be contributing and active members of society. Their leadership, dedication, and commitment to each other is something I will cherish forever and strive for always. They have never held me back in life and have presented me with every opportunity in the world to find out who I am and what I stand for. Leadership is a growth process, and from the best examples, I have learned a great deal about people and achievement.

A prominent and turning point in my nursing career was when I recently traveled to the Dominican Republic with forty other nurses to provide medical care to the severely impoverished. Deciding to take on this journey to the Dominican Republic was a huge leap of faith but what I wasn’t prepared for was the journey and growth my soul would undertake over a week’s span. The group was overwhelmed by the love and generosity that welcomed us as we provided medical care and other essentials to the people of the Bateyes (a company town where sugar workers live). My biggest concern upon arriving to a Spanish speaking country was undeniably the language barrier. I wondered how these people would know that we were good and here to help. There were so many other messages being sent through our general presence, expressions, and body language. We need to focus more on the important things that bring us together over focusing on the parts that divide us. Being poor leaves people with very few options and I believe our presence allowed them to gain some control over one aspect: their health. I learned to serve others and suffer with them; because this is what it means to be human and share in that humanity. This mission trip opened my eyes to very real issues many individuals face day in and day out. Seeing such poverty paired with great happiness forced me to find clarity and reconcile my own trivial quarrels. It showed me the importance of being grateful and also giving of my whole self even when I have nothing left to give. Although the impact of our healthcare will fade, I am comforted by the fact that we left them with a message of hope. This was a group of people who wouldn’t otherwise receive healthcare and essentially be forgotten by the system. After going on this trip, talking with the people, and rooting myself in their culture, it was difficult to walk away feeling this immense responsibility for an entire vulnerable population. While it was we who provided a service, I felt a debt. How do you repay a group of people for changing your very core? Being a leader is about living with purpose. I have found my purpose and want to help others discover theirs.

Other service work that has impacted me is my involvement with Camp PALS, a camp where individuals with Down syndrome are paired up in a one-to-one model with a counselor for a week full of fun and educational activities. I have had previous experience with children with special needs and can honestly say their presence in my life has impacted how I see the world and interact with others. “Special” just means they have the ability to spread greater amounts of love and happiness to more people. They have this undeniable love of life and gift to make others happy. Shouldn’t we all strive to make others happy in how we choose to interact and behave toward one another? Some may see Down syndrome as a disability but in my eyes it is a blessing to be able to see the world as everything good. I have chosen to view the world as my friends with Down syndrome do. PALS is an organization created to bridge the gap and stereotype attached to the disability and advocates a message of inclusion and value. Everyone wants to be included and accepted for who they are; it is a basic human desire. The Down syndrome community holds a huge portion of my heart along with performing service.

I am accountable, responsible, enthusiastic, and a committed individual. Neither difficulty nor time constraints can deter me from the things I feel impassioned by. I am motivated by my own success and inspired by the success of others. A good leader has the ability to interact and understand all the beautiful forms human beings exist. Through my interaction with my ALS patient, the people in the Dominican Republic, and children with Down syndrome, I feel as though I am equipped to successfully communicate with a variety of different people. Communication is one of my strengths and it has grown because of the interactions with the wonderful individuals who have filled my life with so much happiness. The ability to collaborate and communicate is absolutely essential to be able to work with others in any setting. It is not only efficient but a necessity. Being a team player will always be a valuable quality because every leader needs followers who believe in the same cause. Being able to identify this strength and utilize it will make me a better and more effective leader in the future. Leaders must exhibit motivation to be better versions of their selves every day.
During my time in nursing school I wondered when I would feel like a real nurse doing meaningful work. What I found along my journey was in the little moments I did not expect to feel it. I felt like a nurse when I spoon-fed a stroke victim or when I rocke[d] a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) infant whose stats stabilized when in my arms. It was not in the medicine that I found my calling, but in the shared humanity. This shared humanity is what I seek in every individual I have the honor of treating, caring for, or speaking with. A very wise professor who recently passed, shared an extremely valuable lesson that has influenced my studies and success as a nursing student ever since. He stood in front of the class and said, “If you study only to pass a test, you are foolish. Study for life, study because you want to be the best and sharpest healthcare provider for your patients.” This message and wisdom has forced me to not only study to get a good grade but for my future patients. Nursing is the only profession for me and I am excited to be an evolving nurse leader and forever a student of humanity.

Gwynedd Student Leadership Institution (GSLI) has allowed me to evolve as a leader inward and exemplify it outwardly. This journey that I’ve embarked on will never stop and it has without a doubt been enhanced by the relationships and conclusive conversations I have had with my mentors and fellow mentees. The Institute allowed me to explore significant ideas and take vital stances on what I believe and choose to support moving forward.

Successful leaders will allow followers to be moved to action for a greater good. In our personal lives, we must start by first realizing that we are leaders and then through growth, we can make a positive change for others. Growth is the most beautiful activity an individual can undergo. Human beings were never meant to be stagnant in mind, body, or spirit. Leaders have the ability to change and adapt to be better and grow through life. We are never the same person in any phase of our life, which is why change is necessary. It is a beautiful life and I plan to make it one giant adventure filled with love, service, and positivity. I am grateful for the time I was able to spend with the GSLI community nurturing my leadership capabilities and learning how to utilize them in my life.

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An Effective Leader
By: Ben Shields

“A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there.”
---Unknown
In my life I have experienced many different forms of leadership. I have been a leader in the workplace, classroom, mentor groups, and my family. Going into the Exceptional Leaders Program my goal was to develop my skills and become a better, more effective leader. In this paper, I am pulling together all of my journal entries in an effort to explain my understanding of what makes an effective leader. When applying for this program we were asked our thoughts on leadership. It was really interesting to see how my thoughts have developed over the course of my readings and my interactions with my mentors. I believe that there is not one defining characteristic of a leader, rather a handful of qualities. A leader must be honest, understanding, respectful, and display effective communication skills. Leadership takes on many different styles. A leader can be hands on or a leader may sit back and observe. There is not one style that works for everyone and a leader must be able to adapt.

A leader must not only have great ideas, but they must be able to implement those ideas. There are so many people in the world with brilliant ideas, but they simply do not have the ability to assemble a team, lead that team, and succeed in implementing their idea. We live in a world full of people ready to second-guess your every action. This is bound to happen within a group. A leader will be second-guessed. He/she must remain confident in their ideas and stick to his/her plan. By remaining confident in your ability and sticking to the plan, the rest of the group will follow.

I think a leader must understand people of all different types. I was provided some reading by my internal mentor beyond those given to me by the program that really helped me in this aspect. A leader does not get to choose the group they lead. But rather they are thrown into situations with people they have never met. In order to be the best leader for every single member of that group it helps to be able to relate to each and every member on an individual basis. It is important to be approachable and respectful. A leader that incites fear in any member of the group is not an effective leader in my mind. A leader should not intimidate the members of the group. A leader must be able to pay attention to both individual members of the group and the group as a whole at the same time. This can be extremely hard and can seem overwhelming at times. But remaining confident in your abilities will get you through difficult situations.

Communication is such an important dynamic of a group. A good leader must have effective communication skills. This includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. When thinking about communication we typically think of the verbal aspect. And yes, leading with your words is necessary. However, I believe that people pay just as much attention to your actions. This includes your facial expressions, body posture, and hand motions. Small things such as body posture go a long way in displaying confidence to your group. Members of the group are constantly watching their leader and not only listening to their words, but also observing their nonverbal cues. Another important aspect of communication is the ability to listen. A leader must listen to every member of the group. He/she must listen to their words but also read their body language. When listening, it is important to ignore all outside distractions and focus intently on the speaker. I think communication skills take a lot of work and time and they do not come naturally for a lot of people. I cannot tell you how many times in my life I have seen individuals in positions of power with subpar communication skills. A lot of times people do not listen to what the leader is saying. I have seen this tear apart a group.

To be an effective leader, you must be honest with not only the group you are leading, but also yourself. If you fail to be honest with yourself, how can you influence those around you? This was a really important aspect of my development as a leader. It can be hard for me to admit to myself that I cannot be great at everything. Every single person has strengths and weaknesses. It can be hard to talk about the things we are not good at. It can be hard to admit when we are wrong. But the benefit of working in a group is the ability to utilize every member’s strengths. We can use those strengths together in order to solve a problem or reach a goal. There are many things that I am unable to do on my own. Being able to accept this is an important step in becoming a better leader. Just because you are in charge does not make you the best at everything. I think the best leaders are not the ones who know the most or have all the answers, but rather put people around them in the best positions to find those answers.

Trust is an extremely important aspect of any group. Without trust there is a large void between the group and the leader. This void ultimately prevents the vision from being fulfilled. In my opinion, trust is the glue that holds the team together. This trust drives the team towards the unified goal. A leader can have great visions, solid strategies, and superb communication skills. But if his/her group cannot trust the leader, everything is wasted. I believe that mistrust within a group leads to doubt and a lack of productivity. The first mistake a leader can make
when put in charge of a group is the assumption that he/she is trusted. Trust is something that is earned and simply does not come with a title. Trust is extremely fragile. It takes a long time to gain the trust of others and can be lost in a mere matter of seconds.

The Exceptional Leaders Program has allowed me to reflect on my abilities in an effort to be a better and more successful leader. I hold leadership positions on a daily basis, but this alone does not make me an effective leader. Being able to look within myself and analyze my strengths and weaknesses has allowed me to develop as a leader. We were required to read an excerpt from a book called *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership* by Marcy Shankman and Scott Allen. The article began by directing us to look in a mirror that reflects a picture of your abilities. This reflection reveals your strengths, talents, and skills, but also your limitations. The mirror helps to understand what you are capable of and what drives you. It also shows what challenges you and what exhausts you. You see the things that give you confidence as well as the things that challenge you. In order to be the best leader, you must have something called honest self-understanding. You must honor and utilize your strengths while acknowledging what holds you back. It is important to know everything about yourself. By knowing and understanding yourself, you are able to demonstrate effective leadership and develop healthy relationships.

This reading is one that will stick with me as I develop as a leader and enter the professional world. It reminds me that I must take time for myself, time to reflect on my abilities. We live in a world where oftentimes we find ourselves far too busy to learn about ourselves. When we miss these opportunities to reflect, we fail to learn from our experiences. By not reflecting on what has happened, we are not able to think through our actions and analyze how those actions affected people around us. In order to be the best leader possible, we first must understand ourselves. By having a better understanding of ourselves, we can then help others.

The program has also allowed me to realize that the end goal is not where a leader needs to centralize his/her focus. Some of the readings assigned through the course of the program made this point. It is important for a leader to focus on his group and their journey towards the outcome, rather than the outcome itself. Being an effective leader and keeping the group together and focused is more important. This will ultimately lead to the end goal.

In my readings outside the program I came across a really powerful quote that has stuck with me. Abraham Lincoln once said, “Most anyone can stand adversity, but to test a man’s character gives him power.” I feel like this quote is really important when talking about leadership. We often associate leadership with power. With power comes a great responsibility to guide others. As a leader, you cannot let the power bestowed upon you to get to your head. Time and time again we have seen examples of leaders driven by power. This power can lead to corruption. As leaders, we have a moral responsibility to use our power to serve others. We are responsible for getting the most out of every single member of a group. I like to think that with power comes the ability to empower others. It is up to us, as leaders, to help those around us grow.

Through my readings and my interactions with my mentors, I believe I have learned and developed some necessary skills in order to become a better and more effective leader. My growth as a leader will continue as I leave Gwynedd Mercy University and enter the professional world. The Griffin Student Leadership Institute has taught me that a leader must be understanding, respectful, and trusted. The most important thing that I will take from this program is the idea of self-understanding. Knowing yourself, including your strengths and weaknesses, is necessary in order to lead a group. We must take time out of our busy days in order to reflect on our actions. We then need to analyze how those actions affect others in the group.
About the Authors

Marena Bondi is a senior Education major specializing in the Early Childhood and Special Education program. She is the treasurer of the Best Buddies Club and the Secretary of the Gwynedd Mercy Association for Education of Young Children (GMAEYCYC). Marena is also an active member of Kappa Delta Pi, an International Honor Society for Education. In her free time Marena works at the Kiddie Academy of Collegeville, Pa., coordinating and instructing toddlers, preschool, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children.

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Kiersten Godzieba is a senior Education major specializing in the K-4 and Special Education Pre K-8 program. Kiersten has been Vice President of the Special Education Club, and a three year organizer of the Alex Valeno Exceptional Persons 5K Walk and Run. Kiersten is also an assistant soccer coach for the Montgomery United Soccer Club, coaching girls ages sixteen to nineteen. In her spare time she is an assistant teacher at St. Anthony’s Preschool and Childcare.

Christina Harris is a senior Human Services major who sees her future as a servant leader, helping others to gain a positive sense of their selves through the counseling and mentoring work that she intends to pursue. Christina is currently a Griffin Ambassador, a member of Sigma Phi Sigma Service Honor Society, a member of the Voices of Gwynedd, and a member of Tau Upsilon Alpha Human Services Honor Society. She is also a volunteer American Red Cross Health and Safety Instructor with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross.

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Elise Nonnenman is a senior Education major specializing in Pre-K-4 Education and Special Education. Elise serves on the Special Education Club Executive Board and is the Special Education Club Representative to the Student Government Association. She was the Vice-President of the Student Government Association in 2014-15. Additionally, Elise has participated in Alternative Spring Break in 2015, traveling to the Apache reservation in San Carlos, Arizona. She assisted our Campus Ministry department in preparation for GMercyU’s Pope-A-Palooza event during Pope Francis’ visit to Philadelphia.

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Benjamin Shields is a senior Biology major and a scholarship recipient in the NSF sponsored Ethics in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math program. He is a member of the Student Association of Science and a recipient of the Gold Transfer Scholarship. When not involved in biological research, or doing service and fundraising projects at GMercyU, Ben is Head Chef at the Chestnut Grill and Sidewalk Café.