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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 2014, the first 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 first ever GSLI Exceptional Leaders.

Carol A. Gruber, Ph.D.
Dean of Students
April, 2015
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“Hopefully, one of our motivations is the desire to see Mercy revealed more and more in our world. Hopefully, we can reach into that space and draw from it the energy and courage, compassion and playfulness, patience and trust, respect and love we need to be wise, effective and caring leaders.” (Leading from a Merciful Space, Sheila Carney, RSM, 2011)
Every journey has a beginning, middle and an end. However, in life, this may become discernable for many: where did an individual journey begin, even how? In my own life, I have had countless journeys, just as most others. However, one of my most life-changing journeys also happens to be one that I dove into headfirst: Gwynedd Mercy University. Little did I know upon my decision to accept Gwynedd’s offer letter would I become a leader in life. Since beginning my college education, I have been molding, strengthening, exploring and learning about my individual values: consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment. As Lauren DuCharme of Campus Ministry has pointed out, college is about being selfish – discovering who we are, as people, students, even professionals, and what we want next in life (“Alternative Spring Break”). Inadvertently aiding this process are the group values we encounter along our journeys; collaboration, common purpose and controversy with civility. College is not easy, yet it is worth the struggle and growth. Some sort of challenge or obstacle has driven each step in my journey, small or large. Nevertheless, each step has also made me into the person I am becoming. When I walked onto campus for the first time, I was able to picture myself walking to class and making friends. However, what I was unable to imagine is the reality of what my experience has become.

Before college, I was involved in dozens of activities holding leadership positions through school experiences and within my community. I took the leadership position during group assignments, on teams, on service projects and on planning processes. Yet, I was never truly taught how to lead; while some of my personality traits and characteristics naturally seemed to help me with this task, others made it difficult. Today, it is with difficulty that I even type the word ‘task’ in reference to leadership. ‘Task’ is no longer a word I deem appropriate to use in this context because my view of leadership has changed so drastically. The idea of whom I had previously envisioned as a leader has transformed as my thoughts, ideas and understanding continue to change and develop. Leadership is no longer a burdensome, yet powerful, position for the taking. Instead, I envision a leader who is driven, motivating, positive, resourceful, compassionate and committed.

The Social Change Model of Leadership Development emphasizes the idea that “leadership is a process” (Astin). This process begins with focus on and the understanding of self; personally, this was difficult to face. Recognizing our flaws, mistakes, misunderstandings and even our excuses can be a difficult challenge. However, realizing our successes and accomplishments as a dynamic counterpart to these negative examples becomes an eye-opening experience. Once I was able to recognize the correlation between what I need to improve upon and which qualities have helped me to excel, the process of understanding, a consciousness of self, began for me. As is so commonly familiar, the first step in solving a problem is admitting that there is a problem. Once this hurdle has been jumped, commitment and congruence must be recognized in order to continue moving forward in leadership development. Personally, this was the simpler part of addressing the individual perspective of The Social Change Model of Leadership Development. My “commitment to serve” has always driven my efforts, as has my “honesty” in “thinking, feeling and behaving” (Blueprint Leadership Development Program). Unlike many other leadership models, which may or may not recognize that the first step in change comes from you, The Social Change Model emphasizes the individual as a mode for change, despite the position of leadership he or she holds. A “leadership community” holds mutually impactful benefits for each member and ensures that leadership positions remain positive and beneficial, as opposed to negative and burdensome (Blueprint Leadership Development Program). This community then naturally becomes the catalyst for collaboration and controversy with civility in order to work towards a common purpose, eventually developing an optimistic and content citizenship.

While the Griffin Student Leadership Institute (GSLI) has helped to guide me with this process, becoming what some would say is an ‘exceptional leader’ began, for me, on my travels to Ireland with Gwynedd Mercy. I had no idea what I was getting myself into by applying for the ‘Ireland experience;’ sheer excitement drove me to hit send on the application! In August 2014, I had never left my home or my family for more than a few days. Even on these rare occurrences, I was able to call or text home every day. Despite having grown and changed since beginning college, I had barely left my comfort zone. So, signing on to travel across an ocean, to a different country and time zone with individuals I barely knew was kind of a big deal. Oh, and we were traveling and lodging with another university whom we, the pilgrims, had never met or spoken with before! However, this is an opportunity that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

The Young Mercy Leaders Pilgrimage is an international conference held on Baggot Street, Dublin. All collegiate level, and adult, mercy institutions are invited to attend on a bi-yearly basis. The entirety of the conference is held in the only place appropriate for such an event, Catherine McAuley’s home, basically the mecca of and for the mercy community. The focus of the pilgrimage and conference was for the attendees to better
understand mercy and its place in leadership, creating and encouraging merciful leaders. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to put an experience like this into words; the mercy community is so much larger than I imagined, despite having heard about its girth on multiple occasions. Upon walking through the welcoming bright red doors on Baggot Street, I found myself in awe of the longevity of Catherine McAuley’s legacy; a young woman, whom never intended on becoming a nun, changed the world forever with her compassion, determination and merciful leadership skills one day at a time. While attending each session, I found myself in situations I never thought I would find myself in, ever: analyzing Catherine’s personal and business letters, recognizing the living light of Christ in all people, washing my hands of the day to honor myself first, discovering and meeting people from around the globe, even performing in a talent show! Each presentation was breathtaking, each beyond inspirational. I was experiencing the international circle of mercy for the first time – it was overwhelmingly wonderful to fully appreciate that the circle is truly never ending.

During one of the presentations, we rediscovered a phenomenon, which is often indescribable but common, “lollipop moments” (Reynolds). Lollipop moments are those monumental moments in our lives which change our path or in which another alters our lives accidently. This name stems from a story about a woman who was given a lollipop, causing her to stay in school, receive her degree and meet the man of her dreams, all of which would have been impossible had she left. Probably the most amazing part of these moments is their accidental nature; rarely does the person whom changed your life realize what they have done for you, but it is something you will never forget. For me this phenomenon has occurred many times, some more impactful than others. Probably one of the most life changing was my scholarship interview at Gwynedd. Little do any of the board of decision makers know that this one opportunity in my life, has allowed me each opportunity which has followed it; each of my individual journeys have delved me further into discovering who I am, and who I would like to be, for my present, for my future and for the changes I hope to see in the world. This lollipop moment has prompted me to have a much better understanding of The Social Change Model of Leadership Development, though at the time, I was unaware that these subsequent discoveries were a part of something much bigger than myself.

However, more arose from this conference for me than the idea of lollipop moments. During my workshops and the keynote addresses, I was slowly discovering the keys to not only leadership, but to merciful leadership. Little did I know, until hearing about it that this was something I was looking for in my life - a new found goal. It was this concept, which led me to the GSLI and the Exceptional Leaders Program. In my personal experience, this program has been not only the logical next step after my experiences with leadership in Ireland, but it has widened my circle of mercy even further and my experience with mercy in unimaginable ways. However, when applying, I again was stepping outside of my comfort zone. Before beginning, the program was appealing to say the least, but it also was intimidating and unfamiliar. Honestly, I wasn’t sure that I was ready to take the next step on my leadership journey so quickly. But, I’m so glad I made the leap!

Despite being a commuter, I was driven to be involved on campus, even early on in my college experience. At the end of my freshman year, I was elected the President of the Special Education Club. This would begin on the first day of my sophomore year and I was excited to spread my wings and step out of my comfort zone and use the leadership skills I had been using all my life; this was the first time I truly had done anything risky since beginning college. However, my ideal and my reality were not in sync. College is so different than any experience I had attempted to take on and so were the people, the expectations and the projects! In high school, I had all of the support I needed and then some, in addition to an easy to manage schedule. However, in college, students make their own schedules and there is never a good time to ask people to meet, or accomplish additional duties. Furthermore, there are larger expectations for those in leadership positions and for organizations as a whole. In my head, I was going to be the best president the club had ever had: inspiring, helpful, devoted, excited, and committed to the cause and more. And of course, I was many of those things. But, I also found myself failing other portions of my job as president of the club; I had difficulty delegating and allowing others with power to take on tasks, I had standards which were too high, even for myself and I found motivating others to be challenging. However, I have used these challenges, in conjunction with the work I have been completing throughout my leadership training in order to become a more merciful leader with the goal of inspiring a leadership community amongst club members. This process is continuing for me, just as my journey continues each and every day in bettering my congruence and collaboration efforts.

This personal process and effort is endlessly aided through the GSLI Exceptional Leaders Program. Before applying, this program called to me – it was everything I had been hoping to be able to find after beginning my
leadership transformation in Ireland. My mentors, John Farley, of Mercy Volunteer Corps, and Marie Hoffmann, an honors math teacher at Saint Jude’s, are beyond wonderful; each are always ready and willing to listen, offer insights and advice, ignite discussion about the common readings and to apply their own insights to our animated and detailed discussions, as well as just being caring, merciful people to spend time with. I am so fortunate to have met these individuals who have impacted me more than they will ever know – more lollipop moments!

During our meeting times, each of my mentors has helped me to apply concepts and discuss ideas to my current leadership positions, but they have also helped me to develop real-world applications to take with me into my future endeavors as a teacher and leader. Our meetings became philosophical, educational, and practical – a time to look very much forward to during my day. Marie has helped me to envision bringing mercy to my teaching and applying techniques and ideas that I am learning now to my future classroom. Meanwhile, John has helped to me to better understand people and motivations, the process of working with groups of people in different roles and applying the concepts from each article and video to my daily life and leadership roles. Both have been wonderfully amazing in helping me to apply congruence to everyday life, becoming a sounding board and offering options or ideas to keep me guided and on a positive path. To say the least, this process has become an insightful journey, not just because of self-discovery, but also the discovery of others, and how this affects leadership. John and Marie have guided me in applying The Social Change Model of Leadership Development to my life and experiences. Before beginning this program, I had reviewed some research and have since then as well. However, what I did not realize until sitting down to reflect deeply upon my leadership journey, is that my brilliant mentors have been helping me to apply this model on and off of Gwynedd’s campus, and not just think about it.

Each set of readings and videos has left me deeply reflecting about who I want to become, and how to share that with the world. John and Marie have helped me to answer these questions and have had the difficult conversations with me to problem solve, brainstorm and dream about continuing my journey. Despite spending long hours in diners or meeting on campus in an attempt to better myself and my leadership skills, John and Marie have helped me to realize that this journey will never be complete; I will continue to evolve, change, grow and learn as a leader, dependent upon when and where I decide to apply my skills. This realization has helped me to begin developing a personal philosophy. Shel Silverstein’s poem, “Traffic Light,” our last common reading of the program sums up one of the greatest and most applicable phrases ever said, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.” Silverstein, in his poem, points out that many find themselves “patiently stand[ing] in the very same place / and wait[ing] for the light to change” instead of initiating change (Where the Sidewalk Ends). This explains the need for The Social Change Model of Leadership Development. Leadership is more than just the individual, it is the individual, the group and the community all working together to foster positive social change, only possible with consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility and citizenship. Even Catherine McAuley, revered for her work in developing the mercy community, recognized the need for positive interaction and optimistic, group leadership in order to achieve her goals – her letters prove it.

My journey is continuing. I will never be finished learning or changing, nor will most of the people whom I encounter along the way. Odds are that this process will pose challenges, for others as well. However, finding the light of Christ in each person I encounter is the beginning of problem solving. Leadership helps each of us to lead and make choices, but compassion helps us to grow, to excel and to make the difficult moral decisions we encounter on our paths for positive social change. If I continue to apply The Social Change Model to life, I think the future looks awfully bright!

Works Cited


Uncovering the Leader from Within
By: Elizabeth Mannino

“Emotionally intelligent leaders are acutely aware of what it means to be good citizens. They model the way, do what they say they will do, and embody the values of the organization.”
(Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, Shankman and Allen, 2008)
Leadership has not always been a simple concept for me to grasp. In fact, before entering college, I was terrified at the thought of leading a group of people and being responsible for the decisions of that group. My fear of leadership stemmed from my misunderstanding of the concept and my failure to realize the many facets of leadership. Being a leader is more than being in charge of a group of people. A leader is someone whom others can relate and look to for guidance and direction. My journey to becoming a leader has encountered many obstacles and is still not finished. To this day, I am still developing my leadership skills by learning from Gwynedd Mercy University students, my teachers, family members, and many others. I believe that the road to supreme leadership is a never ending journey because great leaders never stop learning and developing themselves.

Prior to entering the Exceptional Leaders’ Program, I was very unsure about my capabilities as a leader. I was very insecure about being held responsible for the group’s decisions and had trouble making final decisions for groups. Another major aspect that needed improvement was my inability to delegate tasks to others. Ever since I can remember, I have been someone who prefers to take control of a situation and complete all of the tasks myself. I struggled with working in teams because my idea of team work did not actually include the rest of the team. Also, I was very concerned and nervous about the failure of the group if I was leading it. I did not want to be known or labeled as an incapable leader who caused her team or group to fail. However, I was aware of some of my strengths, which included my ability to engage others and invite them into a conversation. I knew that I was very good at communicating my ideas to others and being open to their ideas. My decision to apply to the Exceptional Leaders’ Program was fueled by my eagerness to uncover the leader that I knew was within me.

My inspiration to become a well-rounded leader is based upon the leadership capabilities of Catherine McAuley. During my meetings with my mentors, Dr. Karen Scheer, RSM and Ms. Mary Jo Pierantozzi, Catherine McAuley was a major point of discussion because of her abilities to captivate large groups of people and lead alongside them. Sheila Carney, RSM described the great leadership ability of Catherine McAuley, the founding Sister of Mercy (2011). Catherine McAuley was able to make each person in a group feel that his or her abilities and duties were significant and helpful to the group as a whole. She always provided support and allowed these women to develop their own skills with her guidance (Carney 2011). This has always been something that I have struggled with because I have a difficult time delegating and allowing others to complete tasks.

Through this program, I have learned the importance of delegation and allowing others to feel trusted and develop their own sense of leadership. Sheila Carney stated, “I’d be willing to bet that Elizabeth’s great success was possible, partly at least, because Catherine showed how completely she believed in her and created the context in which Elizabeth could come to believe in herself,” (2011). In this quote, Carney describes Catherine’s ability to allow a woman, Elizabeth, to develop her sense of self and leadership. One of the most important things that a leader can do is to uncover the potential of the people that she or he is leading (Shankman and Allen, 2008). Catherine was also capable of leading well because she knew when to keep things serious and when to lighten up the mood (Carney, 2011). In my meetings with both Dr. Scheer and Ms. Pierantozzi, we discussed the importance of not taking everything too seriously. If everything is taken with grave seriousness, the drive and passion to continue is removed. Keeping situations light and joyful, but serious when necessary, allows for the best balance.

Based on the leadership of Catherine McAuley, I began reflect more clearly on my capabilities as a leader. The first set of mentor/mentee meetings involved reflection on individual values, which I continued to reflect upon throughout the duration of the program. “For leaders to be effective, they must know themselves,” (Shankman and Allen, 2008). Leaders must also be able to learn from feedback and choose not to be discouraged by it (Shankman and Allen, 2008). Dr. Scheer explained the importance of the integration of one’s own personal values into a situation because otherwise, the leadership will not be as enjoyable and meaningful to you. My meetings with Dr. Scheer and Ms. Pierantozzi allowed me to realize exactly where I needed improvement within my leadership. They both provided me with suggestions about how to develop the aspects of my leadership that needed improvement. For example, Dr. Scheer and Ms. Pierantozzi both explained the importance of delegation in leadership and that although it may seem appealing to take complete control; this tactic is not always realistic. The ability of a leader to be self-aware is absolutely necessary. Daniel Goleman developed the idea of Emotional Intelligence, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Lowney, 2003). These traits are all very important when leading others because in order for one to be aware of others, one must first be aware of oneself.

Another very important aspect of leadership that I learned from the Exceptional Leaders’ Program is the importance of being passionate about one’s goals as a leader. One of my favorite parts of the program was watching
Simon Sinek’s TED Talk entitled “How Great Leaders Inspire Action”. During this talk, he continually stated “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it,” (Sinek, 2009). This concept may seem relatively simple, but most people do not think about the extreme impact of this statement. Passion is necessary in order to obtain any goal, but is especially necessary when leading a group of people. In order for people to believe in your purpose, they must believe that you have a specific reason for attempting to accomplish what you want to accomplish. They must believe that you are passionate about your goals in order to stand beside you and support your cause. I realized the importance of passion, first hand, when I became the president of Gwynedd Mercy University’s Student Association of Science. I realized that students were only interested in participating in club activities if they were encouraged to be enthusiastic. The more that the other club leaders and I were enthusiastic about club events and meetings, the more other students became interested and passionate about the club.

The poem, “Fall in Love”, by Pedro Arrupe, was of particular importance to me regarding the importance of passionate leadership. In this poem, Pedro Arrupe discusses how humans shape their lives based on the things about which they are most passionate. They will plan their days, nights, and weekends according to the goals in which they are most passionate. I was able to relate to this poem because I realize, every day, how important passion is in order to obtain future goals. For example, my ultimate goal is to become a physician and improve the quality of life of others by using my knowledge and experience to treat those in need. I am extremely passionate about reaching this goal and in order to obtain it, I organize my time and decisions around that goal. A similar concept can be applied to leadership because leaders who are passionate about the direction and goals of a group will be the most effective leaders. If passion is removed, the leaders and their groups will not have anything toward which to work.

In addition to being passionate about a certain topic, one must surround oneself with other inspiring and passionate people who only want the best for him/her and will contribute to his/her well-being. In the past, I have had to leave situations in which the people in a certain group were not interested in my well-being. Instead, I have learned to surround myself with people who are supportive of my goals and aspirations. For example, all of the officers of the Student Association of Science have been the greatest support system that I have ever had. They are all fellow biology majors and are all very passionate about their education and achieving their goals for post-graduation. We are all very supportive of one another and respectful of one another’s goals. In Jacqueline Novogratz’s TED Talk, “Inspiring a Life of Immersion”, she explains that a life of immersion is necessary because humans only have each other. We need to work together and view each other as equal in order to inspire change in the world. This is the only thing that will sustain us as a species. I was able to directly relate to her explanations because of the close bond that I have made with all of the other biology students. I have realized that in order to be an effective leader, I must rely on others for support and cannot only rely on myself.

Perhaps the most important aspect of effective leadership that I learned through the Exceptional Leaders’ Program is the ability to undergo change. Change has always been a topic that has caused me to experience a great degree of difficulty. Prior to college, I was not accepting of change because I had never really experienced much change up to that point. Entering college was a pivotal point in my life in which I had to accept many changes all at one time. “Traffic Light” by Shel Silverstein was impactful for understanding how necessary change is for leadership and everyday living. This poem really affected me because it made me realize that in order to make change happen, risks must be taken. One cannot just wait for one’s goals and dreams to happen without putting in active effort to make these goals occur. The “hopeful gaze” that is discussed in the poem will not turn into a reality if the change is not actively faced. An effective leader is capable of making change within a group. In order for these changes to happen, a leader must incorporate the work of others (Shankman and Allen, 2008). Prior to the Exceptional Leaders’ Program, I did not realize how important change was for being an effective leader. Also, I did not ever realize the importance of leading alongside others rather than leading ahead of them. When I envisioned a leader, I always imagined a person who was more or less “above” everyone in the group. However, I failed to understand how that form of leadership is typically ineffective.

The Exceptional Leaders’ Program has allowed me not only to become a better leader, but has provided me with a clear understanding of leadership. This program has shown me that there is so much more to leadership than what is perceived. Being a great leader is something that is never definitively reached, but instead an ongoing process. In order to be a good leader, one has to be completely aware of oneself and true to oneself and must acknowledge his/her strengths and weaknesses. The piece regarding the leadership of Catherine McAuley really gave me insight into Mercy leadership: inspiring others, leading as a group, trusting others regardless of the
possibility of failure, and being able to draw a line between seriousness and light situations. The two most important facets of leadership that I want to continue developing are creating positive change for others in a group and in the community as a whole and shaping new leaders so that they will be able to contribute to the community in the future.

The Exceptional Leaders’ Program helped me to truly define my strengths and weaknesses and realize where I needed to grow as a leader, (which were a lot of areas!). In fact, I still need to grow as a leader. I often was very worried about what people would think if my group failed and that I would be perceived as a failure by my peers, professors, and friends. However, I learned that this is not the case. Taking risks and failure are necessary in order for changes to occur. I still need to continue working on delegation; I have gotten better, but am still not completely comfortable with it. I have become better at self-assessment and acknowledging my individual values. For example, I am aware that I needed to work on accepting failure of my group and now I am working on taking more risks and accepting failure if it occurs. In the future, I want to become more engaged in Mercy leadership. I feel that I am obtaining the abilities to become a better leader, but have not completely achieved the Mercy leadership status. Within my groups, I would like to become involved in more service and volunteering activities that give back to the community and help others. Also, I would like to apply these ideas and tactics to my Student Association of Science president position and engage others and their talents, specifically the freshmen, by making the freshmen feel more important and helping them realize that they are a fundamental part of our group.

Overall, I am very thankful to have been a part of the Exceptional Leaders’ Program. Over the past few months, I have not only developed leadership skills and learned about myself, but I have made long lasting connections with my mentors and other members of the program. Working with Dr. Scheer and Ms. Pierantozzi has been a very impactful experience. They have both contributed to a positive change in the way I view leadership. Ms. Pierantozzi truly showed me the importance of engaging and inspiring others. Each day she teaches and works with young people who are at the peak of their academic careers and are almost ready to enter the “real world”. She is responsible for inspiring them to continue to contribute to society and shows them the importance of being a good leader. Dr. Scheer showed me the importance of delegation in leadership and being true to my own beliefs and ideals. Delegation allows others to feel trusted and shape themselves into good leaders to continue to contribute to society. Dr. Scheer works with committees and patients each day and must lead in a way that includes others (leading with others). I will continue to apply what I have learned during this program to my leadership responsibilities as well as to my personal life.

Works Cited


Dream, Learn, Grow, Lead, and Serve: My Journey toward Discovering The Nine Essentials for Becoming an Exceptional Mercy Leader

By: Jacqueline Nedd, RSM, RN

“As a leader she created an environment in which every member of the group felt that her contribution was significant and welcome and important to the unfolding of their future together.” (Leading from a Merciful Space, Sheila Carney, RSM, 2011, speaking about Catherine McAuley)
Dream

One of my dreams is to be an Exceptional Mercy Leader. My dream is to learn and grow into the person that I was created to be. I learned from the Griffin Student Leadership Institute - Exceptional Leaders Program (GSLIELP) what I need to achieve my own dreams and motivate and inspire others to achieve theirs. Though I am not a born leader, I have the potential to be a leader. To realize my dream, I recognized I needed to surround myself with people who have the qualities of a good leader, role models whom I could observe, learn from and emulate. The GSLIELP has allowed me the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to grow into the exceptional Mercy leader I envision for myself and others.

Interviewing Dr. Roeder, my GSLIELP external mentor, has given me the opportunity to learn the skills I need to be an exceptional leader. Having Lauren DuCharme, my internal mentor and Campus Minister, to dialogue with and receive valuable feedback from has been an additional asset to my growth as a leader. I have processed all that I have learned in my interviews with Dr. Roeder with Lauren, and found that collaborating with these two people has helped me to learn and grow into an Exceptional Mercy Leader who is ready and willing to serve. I am closer to realizing my dream of knowing how to motivate and inspire others to achieve their goals and dreams. It is my responsibility to be open to learning what I need to grow into an exceptional person of Mercy so that I can lead by example for my community and society. It is my intention to share what I have learned on this journey to help others grow into leaders they hope to become.

Have you ever looked at people with exceptional leadership skills and wondered how they developed such skills? If you have done so and would still like to know how to develop those exceptional leadership skills you may want to continue to read this article. Even better, maybe you dream of becoming an Exceptional Mercy Leader who inspires or influences others to perform acts of Mercy. We all have dreams of achieving something great in our lives. You may not be a born leader, but there is no reason why you cannot become an exceptional Mercy leader, starting today. According to Dr. Roeder, leadership skills can be learned just like any other skills. After prayerful contemplation and my dialogues and experiences with my mentors, I have written what I believe to be “The Nine Essentials for Becoming an Exceptional Mercy Leader.”

Just think for a moment, if you can dream of being a Person of Mercy, learn the skills you need to know, grow into becoming an Exceptional Mercy Leader, and serve others, you can most certainly achieve these goals. According to Napoleon Hill, “Whatever the mind can conceive it can achieve.”

Learn

Consciousness of Self, Congruence and Commitment

Consciousness of self is the awareness I have of my beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions that motivates me to take action. One of my hobbies is reading and because of my love for reading, I am better able to articulate my own experiences. Reading articles and watching videos suggested by the GSLIELP gave me the words I needed to express myself clearly and enlightened me about the leadership qualities I want to embody. For the reader who is interested in reading and viewing these materials, some of them include: Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: Honest Self Understanding (Chapter 5); and Heroic Leadership: “The link between self-knowledge and success” by Chris Lowney; poem, “Fall in Love” by Pedro Arrupe, SJ, and the TED Talk: “How to Find and Do the work you Love” by Scott Dinsmore. I reflected on these materials in light of “Consciousness of Self, Congruence and Commitment from the Social Change Model (Individual, Group, and Community Values) and journaled what came to light for me as I read, listened and reflected. It was both challenging and helpful to make a list of my talents, hobbies, and interpersonal skills. These activities helped me identify who I am as a person which helped me because I am clearer about the gifts I bring to the groups I am involved in.

Dr. Kathy Roeder believes that leadership can be in-born as well as learned. She feels that born leaders like herself are able to see a situation, assess it, and move to clarify, rectify, or adjust the situation for betterment. Dr. Roeder is aware of having had leadership skills ever since she was a child and considers these skills gifts that she treasures. Kathy knew that she would be a leader because she recognized her leadership abilities which were sometimes perceived as “bossy”. On one occasion, she was told by a sister that she would be the leader of the Mercy Community someday. Dr. Roeder also learned that she had to adjust her behavior to avoid hurting others.
Discovering my strengths, talents, skills, and limitations in light of leadership has led me to realize what my strengths and limitations are, what I am capable of, what energizes me, and what challenges me. I have learned that it is as important for me to know myself as it is for others to know who I am. Joseph Jaworsky (1998) discussed “The Inner Path of Leadership,” which said that before you can lead or help others you have to discover yourself. I encourage you to take advantage of any opportunity to get to know yourself better. Self-knowledge is a great asset to have as an exceptional mercy person. “When you possess honest self-understanding you are more likely to demonstrate effective leadership, increase your confidence, develop robust relationships, and have healthy self-esteem” (Shankman & Allen). See Appendix A Table number 1 for a list of examples of talents, hobbies, and interpersonal skills.

This is what I would suggest: know your strengths and limitations, and find out what gives you passion and purpose. Journaling and sharing your understanding of yourself with others will aid in your awareness of self. Also, look at what leadership skills or professional skills you still need to develop. Surround yourself with people who would give you meaningful feedback. Knowing how others perceive you or what you bring to a group or organization is important. Make a list of friends and or family members who know and respect you and whose opinions you value and respect. Who you will need them to support them you on your journey of first achieving your full potential an exceptional person and second becoming an Exceptional Person of Mercy/Mercy Leader. See Appendix B Table 2 for examples of a list of strengths and limitations.

Congruence of self relates to the knowledge I have of my thoughts and feelings, and how they influence my behaviors. Knowing who I am and how consistent I am in my beliefs and convictions are important to being a great leader. This is because I take myself, with my values, belief, attitudes, and emotions to family, my community, my job, or any given situation. Thus, being aware of how I think, feel, and behave is also important because it influences how I relate with others. It is helpful to assess your values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions, as well as your consistency, authenticity, and honesty to know how you communicate and relate with others. Becoming self aware is an important part of the journey.

According to Dr. Roeder, the gifts of leadership can sometimes be perceived as “bossy.” You may need to adjust your behavior to minimize hurting others while maximizing your ability to adjust to other’s needs. Knowing what you are good at and how your feeling influences your attitudes and behaviors is very helpful. My attitudes have been influenced by the values my family held when I was growing up. My family strived to live the gospel values as seen in Mark’s gospel (American Standard Version, Mark: 12:31), “The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, there is no other commandment greater than these…” was one that they truly took to heart, accept everyone who came to our door for help, whether from near or far away was our neighbor and treated as our brother or sister.

I have the support of my family, community and friends which gives me the freedom, to seize opportunities to learn, grow, lead and serve others as I strive for a better future for myself and others. I have learned that controversy, misunderstandings and conflicts will occur but knowing my thoughts, values, and behaviors, will help me to effectively work through these situations. It is always important that your words match your actions because you are modeling the action of an exceptional person of Mercy. As an exceptional person of Mercy you are called to work interdependently with others, in the service of others, despite differences.

I have also learned that it is necessary to know what gives me life. It is important to be passionate about what you do, so do not only show up but participate fully, giving 100% of your time and energy. Fr. Arrupe said, “Fall in Love” knowing “what you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything as it will decide what gets you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evening, how you spend your weekends, what you read . . . ,” Fr. Arrupe, SJ. (2009). Thus, it is not only important that you know what you are passionate about, but also what gives you life.

It is important that you do the inner work as it will help you to know yourself better and give you the opportunity to grow and develop your leadership strengths/skills as it did for me. For example, I know I am passionate about life, mercy and service to the poor, sick and uneducated! I am passionate about Justice and Immigration Reform, Non Violence, Anti-Racism, Health Care, and Human and Women’s Rights. I am passionate about doing what it takes to stay happy, joyful, and healthy, spiritually, mentally, and psychologically. Ask yourself, what experiences you have had in the past that brought you happiness and gives you life.
I am challenged by public speaking, large crowds, conflict with others, learning a new language and understanding the idiosyncrasies of new cultures. I have learned to deal with these challenges by addressing them and even seeking situations such as a course in Public Speaking to help me to overcome my challenges. Believe me when I say, the more experience you have in your area of challenge, the better you become at responding to new challenges. Try to think of a time when you felt challenged by a situation. What did you do and why? How did it make you feel? Below is an example of a challenging situation that had a happy ending.

I believe that reflecting on your past experiences is as important to moving ahead as breathing. Reflecting on your experiences is essential to living and helps one to prevent making the same mistakes over and over again. Dr. Roeder remembered the first adult leadership role she had was as a medical director of an emergency department. Her job was challenging because she was a woman in a man’s world of medicine. She had the role and responsibility of overseeing the emergency department during its infancy. The hospital was in the process of forming a new medical specialty and at first the transition from the old way to the new ways was not easy. Many adjustments needed to be made and all staff, both old and newly employed needed to be informed of the changes and educated in preparation for the transition. Despite the challenges, Dr. Roeder remained committed to the project and successfully accomplished the task of helping everyone through the changes. After seven years, the hospital had the best trained Emergency Physicians who gave quality care to the most vulnerable population, and everyone was pleased with themselves.

I learned that a good leader calls one to accountability and models the respect and standards they desire of the group. It is also the leaders’ responsibility to observe the talents and potential of each member in a group and respectfully encourage and motivate each one to use their talents to benefit the group. The task is that of the leader of a group or organization to encourage everyone to become involved and for the leader to show appreciation for the contribution each member makes.

Grow

Collaboration, Common Purpose, and Controversy with Civility

During one of our conversations, Dr. Roeder asked me what my plans were following graduation. It was the second time that I was asked this question and I noticed that my dreams of nursing became much clearer to me each time I shared what I was thinking of doing and articulated how I hope to achieve my goals. Through this exchange I learned that it was much easier for me to decide what I could do once I was able to name what I was not willing to do. The one thing I knew for sure was that I was not prepared to work as a pediatric nurse at this time. This left numerous other options in the area of nursing for me to choose. It may be helpful for you to name what you are not willing to do which could narrow your list of options you might have. This is especially helpful if you find it difficult to choose a career.

On one occasion, I shared my thoughts with Lauren on the article “Leading from a Merciful Space” by Sr. Sheila Carney who shared her view of Catherine McAuley’s leadership skills in light of the stories told about Catherine’s life. Catherine was depicted as a merciful leader, who was full of energy, patience, compassion, and playfulness. She was a woman of great courage, a woman full of trust and one who was very respectful, affectionate, and loving towards others. Catherine was also seen as an exceptional Mercy Leader as she supported and motivated others with her presence, through poetry, and her letters.

According to Carmel Bourke, (1987) p.68 Catherine delegated authority to her sisters, “freeing them to act on their own initiatives… and she never ceased to love and support the sisters, at the same time enabling them to develop their own skills and initiatives, giving them the freedom and trust to judge for themselves the local situations and needs… and she never smothered them.” I found Bourke’s words to be a valuable reminder of interdependence and collaboration that Catherine fostered with her community members. I view Catherine as a relational person and a democratic leader who gave the members of her community the opportunity to develop their autonomy.

Lead

Change, Common Purpose, and Citizenship

Change, one of the seven C’s, is considered the ultimate goal of the creative process of leadership. The purpose of change is to create a better society for others, (Austin, Alexander, 1996). Any change can lead to controversy due to differences of opinions, feelings of loss, and stress. Many people, especially the elderly, find it
difficult to adjust to change, yet, change is inevitable. Thus, leaders should plan and gradually implement change. Leaders, who work to improve the environment and our living situations, are all called to be agents of change.

Exceptional persons of Mercy need specific skills and attitudes to aid them in resolving conflicts and assist them in taking risks because most people fear rejection. It takes a skilled leader to use his or her initiative to take advantage of the opportunities to promote change within the initiation phase. People may be encouraged by a leader’s actions and motivated to change, which may benefit someone, a group, or the whole society. A skilled leader needs to know how to responsibly negotiate and motivate for change. This may sometimes mean finding other change agents who are motivated and willing to engage in changing situations and organizations for better outcomes.

A good leader may decide on an outcome, without being attached to the outcome, remaining open with others during the process of change. Leaders have to be prepared to look at change from various angles and be sensitive to others’ needs and desires while attempting to resolve problems. Leaders take risks when they believe that there is an opportunity and desire for positive change. One way a leader may know if others have the desire to change is by asking the people who would be affected by the change how they feel about the change. Another way for the leader to know how the group feels about the change is by including the group in the decision making process to determine if making the change is best for the group. It is the leader’s responsibility to explain how the change will benefit the group and the length of time the change may take to occur.

An effective leader knows how to communicate his or her ideas to others to gain their support in planning, implementing and evaluating the necessary change. Everyone is not always going to agree, so a leader needs to be aware of how to deal with disagreement and encourage others to see situations in other ways. It is important that you ask yourself if you have these skills. If you recognize that you do not have the skills to motivate others to change then you may want to set a goal to cultivate this skill in the future. Many employers seek to employ people with strong communication skills who are able to deal with controversy with civility. It is helpful to be able to put yourself in other’s shoes and learn from their experiences.

Serve

Citizenship is the way in which I work to bring about positive change with members in my religious community, school, church, clubs, and organizations. As a leader, I need to have the ability to see the bigger picture and the emotional intelligence to recognize the need for interdependence. It is also imperative that I have the patience and the courage to take the necessary steps to affect change including: to let my actions match my words and speak out about the issues that affect others. Being an agent of change is not always easy, but a person of mercy who is sensitive to the needs of others may accomplish change in a responsible manner. As a good citizen, I am passionate about what gives me hope and how I can bring light to other people’s lives.

I believe that a good citizen places herself at the services of others for the benefit of the whole. If you look at exceptional leaders you may see how each leader participates in service. They experience more satisfaction knowing that they are working to help others in their group, clubs, organization, or community and affecting change to better the world. Being a good leader and citizen is said to take a certain amount of emotional intelligence and maturity.

“A good citizen is one who works for positive change on behalf of others and the community,” (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996, p.23). When one commits themselves to a group or organization, one is expected to know and fulfill their responsibilities, commit to the values, and follow the rules to achieve the goals and missions, in order for the groups or organization to be successful.

Good citizens may face many challenges that cause them to make personal sacrifices as leaders to achieve a positive outcome for their group. Good citizens and leaders place the interest of others and their group first becoming positive role models for others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Now I will share what I have learned about the qualities you and I already possess which can be developed further as we become exceptional Mercy Leaders.

The Nine Essentials for Becoming an Exceptional Mercy Leader
1. **Compassion** – Be compassionate, empathetic, and respect the dignity of others. Express understanding, show care and reverence for the dignity of each person. Recognize, honor, respect, and embrace people of diverse customs and cultures. You need to love and respect yourself so that you can love and respect others!

2. **Hospitality** – Be welcoming and open to create a space for others to feel safe in, especially strangers. Be an empathetic listener by giving others your full attention (body language, eyes, facial expression, and heart) when they are speaking to show you are interested. Repeat what you hear others so that they know that you hear what they say. Use words that indicate a feeling to let the person know that you understand how he or she might feel. Avoid interrupting while another is speaking and refrain from asking questions or giving advice unless asked.

3. **Articulate** – Be a diplomat by speaking your truth with love. Communicate what matters to you clearly and keep your words and explanation simple to avoid frustration in yourself and others. Always pursue integrity of word and deed to ensure that your words match your actions.

4. **Resilience** - Be responsible for the solutions to overcoming obstacles. Be flexible, calm, and surround yourself with positive people who accept and support you, even when you make a mistake. Maintain a good sense of humor!

5. **Academics** – Be a lifelong learner who is aware of what you know and what you still need to learn. Set personal and professional goals for yourself and work to achieve your dreams. It is important to know what you want, why you want it and how to get it. Be passionate and stay focused!

6. **Considerate** – Be kind to and considerate of yourself and others, especially those with different values, religions, levels of achievement, socio-economic status, etc. Recognize and embrace difference, and use differences as opportunities for personal growth and transformation.

7. **Trustworthy** – Be dependable and trustworthy, to develop others’ confidence in you. Admit when you make a mistake as it is human to err. Acknowledge when you do not have the answers to questions. Do one thing exceptionally well and do not plan unrealistic goals. Do not compromise your values or your dreams!

8. **Enthusiasm** – Be enthusiastic about your dreams and show interest in those of others. Know your purpose and what gives you passion because it is what motivates you. Strive for the change you want to see; be genuine, positive and joyful. Lead by example, and empower others to be their best selves!

9. **Reliance** – Be a team player; know who your support systems are and use them. Surround yourself with people who are genuinely supportive of you and give you joy. Admit when you need help. Let others know that you trust them, and you are there for them too.

**Congratulations!** If you have reached this far it is because you have taken the time to work on your foundation to becoming a person of Mercy. I believe that God, who has created us, has given us everything that we need to do the work that we have been called to do. As was noted in Ephesians 1:13: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (American Standard Version, Mark’s Gospel). Thus, I do believe that though some people may be born leaders, there are others who can become leaders though having support and encouragement from those you love, taking the time to do the work, taking advantage of every opportunity to learn and grow. Overall, this was a great experience for me. Sharing my learning experiences with Ms. Lauren DuCharme and Dr. Kathy Roeder was an integral part of writing this article. Our conversations not only helped to strengthen my communication skills but also my interpersonal skills.
Works Cited


Appendix A

Table 1
A List of Talents, Hobbies and Interpersonal Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talent</th>
<th>Hobbies</th>
<th>Interpersonal Skills</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Arranging Flowers</td>
<td>Adaptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>Baking</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>Genuine</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ping Pong</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Listening</td>
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<td>Tennis</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Management scheduling</td>
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<td>Patient</td>
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Appendix B

Table 2
A List of Strengths and Limitations

<table>
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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Attentive Listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed</td>
<td>Multi-Tasking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused learner</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective Writing-Journaling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-discipline</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“Leaders have the power to lead and they have a dream, to inspire others. People don’t buy what you do, they buy WHY you do it.” (TED TALKS: How Great Leaders Inspire Action, Simon Sinek)
Growing up in a household of five children and being the oldest I was always expected to be the “leader”. I had more responsibilities than the younger ones and I was going through all the first experiences, first. So, naturally that leading nature carried on with me through the start of school. It started with me coming up with the project ideas and strategies. Then it turned into me deciding to take on the whole project myself. While this is not the point in group projects I never minded because then I knew that I was doing my best and I deserved whatever grade I got out of it.

Coming to college was a big deal in my family. Neither one of my parents went to college, so this was a big deal for my family to see me get to this point. When I started at Gwynedd Mercy University I was only focusing on classwork. This was because I have always been very involved outside of school, and it wasn’t until my junior year that I got involved in anything that was within the school.

When I joined the first tier of GSLI in my junior year of college I didn’t know what to expect. I knew that this would look good on a resume, and that was the biggest motivation to join because deep down I was thinking that this was going to be easy for me. I was already a leader and there was nothing they could teach me about my leadership skills that I didn’t already know. Still, I tried to at least keep an open mind. At our first meeting in Philadelphia we learned about Mercy leadership and what Catherine McAuley’s leadership style was. During this meeting I also found out that we would be forming a group to plan and carry out a leadership project in the community. I sighed because it would yet again be a time where I will be doing most of the work and everyone would get the credit. Throughout the program though I learned to look at my leadership skills in a completely different way, and I was not working alone on the project. It was a great experience and it was what lead me to go on to the next portion of the GSLI Program.

Coming into Tier 3 of the GSLI program, similarly to the first, I still didn’t know what to expect, but I was confident that it would be another meaningful and helpful experience looking to my future. In the process of getting an external mentor I was paired with Julie Behr, a Family Therapist and Grief Counselor. Most Recently Julie was a Bereavement Counselor with Safe Harbor, Abington Hospital's Program for Grieving Children, Teens and their Families. During our many conversations we were really able to connect. I have a future goal of also working with children so having that similarity was helpful in the mentoring. I felt there were also a lot of similarities between Julie and me in our work and leadership styles, and that is where I valued the relationship we had in this program.

Working through the Social Change Model and linking it to my leadership ideas and style was something I was not formally familiar with. Going through it with Julie though made it so much easier. The way that the program was split up into three meetings to talk about different values was great organization. To be a great leader you need to of course be conscious of self, and then look at your group values, before considering your society/community values. I am very involved in my community and felt that I was a good leader in that, but after going through this program I now see that I may have been a little bit ahead of myself in some areas of my leadership.

Coming into the first meeting to discuss Consciousness of Self, Julie and I met in a very quiet and comfortable room in the library. We were talking about individual values; consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment. I have always credited my family for raising me to be an independent person who is strong willed and determined to do my best. Going through this section I became more aware of traits about myself and leadership style. Julie and I talked about doing what you love. After discussing and going through all kinds of questions about how my family played a role in my leadership and talking about what type of environment in which I have my greatest success, we then came to the question that I was dreading. The question was about a time that I made a mistake or failed at something and then how did it help me to be a better leader or person. This is one of my least favorite questions; no one likes to think about their weaknesses, and especially to talk about them out loud. After talking to Julie though it didn’t seem to be as hard as I first anticipated and it was something that is very manageable.

There was a reading that we did for this meeting that I have always gone back to and felt that I had a big connection to. It was a poem written by Pedro Arrupe entitled “Fall in Love”. There were four lines within the poem that stuck out to me and that I think are very important to remember and take seriously in my work. It says:

*What you are in love with,*
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.
It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning.

Every time that I take on a new responsibility or job I always think, will I wake up tomorrow and still enjoy the decision that I made? Before I read this I was applying to Social Work Masters programs, and in my admissions essay I wrote, “I love my job, and it’s what gets me up in the morning”. I full heartedly believe that this is a vital part of the job and in leadership too. You will never be able to lead if you are not enjoying your work.

During the next meeting we talked about Group Values; collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility. I think that this conversation with Julie was the one where I struggle the most in my leadership. Like I have mentioned before, I have always preferred to lead a group, but never had an issue if I ended up having to do most of the work. So, through this meeting with Julie we talked about controversy and working as a team. I started by talking about something I learned in one of my classes at Gwynedd Mercy. The class was Group Processes and we learned about the functions of a good group. Every group goes through stages of “forming, storming, norming”. I explained to her that the group will form and storm for a little while because the group is made up of many different people with different personalities. After they are able to appreciate what each member brings to the table they are able to “norm” and become a good group that can work together. For me, that class was the first experience I really had where I was in a group in which everyone was going to participate. It was an awkward feeling because I was not used to it, but towards the end I really learned to like it. Then again in GSLI Tier 1 when we were all working towards a common service project, I didn’t feel like I was doing any more work than anyone else, and the project turned out great.

At the end of this meeting with Julie and through the readings I became more aware of my leadership style within a group. I may still feel more comfortable being the one with a bigger voice, but I know that I need to really value the whole group and encourage them to be a part of the projects too, because they have special talents that could really lend to the productivity of the project.

There was a good TED talk that we watched done by Simon Sinek. He talked about how leaders have the power to lead and they have a dream, to inspire others. People will buy the WHY of the product more than they will buy the marketing for what it is. He talked about a leader being the same way. A leader needs to think about why they are leading and not so much about what the cause is and how they would do it. When I look at my own leadership I try and think about all aspects. Sometimes I find that the reasons that I do participate in leadership are linked very closely to the what and how, but most of all I try and think about why I get satisfaction out of the cause or why I will want to do a good job.

In the last meeting that Julie and I met we talked about community values. It was a big tie up for what we have talked about already in the previous meetings. We talked about how I was able to see myself grow through the program and how I feel that I can always have more room to improve.

I talked to Julie about the fact that during this tier three it wasn’t all about learning new skills or about learning how to lead. For me, this last tier of GSLI was about becoming more aware of the leadership skills I already have. It helped me to think about why I lead and why I enjoy it so much. I also enjoyed having mentors to guide me through this process. It helped me to process what I was thinking. I don’t always have someone to talk to about certain issues or about all of the things that I do, and to have two of them was a huge contributing factor in my success in this program. In the future I will be much more aware of the responsibilities that I take on, and I will be able to integrate learned skills through the GSLI program and apply them in my work. Using some of the values of the Social Change Model of Leadership in my work and remembering that a good leader will always strive to collaborate with others and to commit and work towards a common purpose to create change.
Learning to Lead
By: Jonathan Spector

Citizenship, as defined by the Social Change Model is, “process whereby the individual and the collaborative group become responsibly connected to the community and the society through the leadership experience” (A Social Change Model of Leadership Development Guidebook Version III. Astin & Astin, 1996).
There are many types of leaders in this world. One will encounter leaders in mostly every aspect of their lives. Here at Gwynedd Mercy, the mission is to become the best leader possible: a Mercy leader, one who inspires positive change in others and their community. Sometimes one has to go through a transformative type of journey in order to become a leader. If you would have asked High School version of me, “Do you see yourself as a leader,” I would have laughed in your face and told you, “Never!” The journey one takes to become a leader, to become a better person may take days, months, or even years. The journey I would eventually take was one that I would never have thought was possible. I never thought I had the skills in me. In order to talk about who I am today, I have to go back to my early college years, right out of High School.

I was the epitome of “How to Not Succeed in College” I attended Montgomery County Community College, which was a great stepping-stone type of school, although I did not use it to my advantage. I just did not care; I had better things to do, and more interesting places to be. I even managed to bring my GPA down to less than a 1- and that takes effort to achieve. I always loved learning, but I just could not find the inner motivation to do the work. I took a semester off to determine if time and distance from school would help me mature. Time off did not help much, I still just did not want to make the effort and to do the work. My grades slowly improved to barely passing, but it was not until I had taken a course taught by Dr. Harold Halbert, Science Fiction, that my whole outlook on education was changed. I loved participating in the class, and made an effort to attend every time it was scheduled. My only real issue was doing the classwork; I did not put in the effort to turn my papers in on time. I did the work, albeit very slowly. After receiving a barrage of C-grades on my papers, Dr. Halbert took me aside and plainly stated, “Jon, if you don’t get off your [behind] and stop being lazy, you are not going to succeed in your education, let alone a career! You have such intelligence and can make it so far, but you are lacking the motivation to do so. It needs to change.” Dr. Halbert was someone whom I greatly admired and respected so for him to confront me on my issues resonated deeply within me mentally. Something clicked internally after our conversation; it was the wakeup call that I needed to motivate me. Dr. Halbert actually showed that he cared about my success, he had a genuine interest in my education and wanted to see me be the best student I could be. He made sure that every student, as long as they made the effort, would succeed. He did not hold our hand, but he definitely helped guide us on the path to success. The mentors we meet in life are there to help us succeed. They have an interest in our success and really care about us their mentees as people. Dr. Halbert was one of the first professors to really believe in me, and that belief is what kept me motivated.

Where Montco showed me that there were professors who really cared, and could motivate, Gwynedd showed me the ways to be a positive leader, role model and future mentor for others. I was introduced to the Griffin Student Leadership Institute by Professor Reilly. She had introduced the Institute as a way to further my connections with the campus as well as become a better leader. I had no idea what to expect, and honestly went into this thinking it would just be something to put on the resume. When I had first met with everyone in the Institute, I realized how wrong I was. GSLI ended up changing the entire way I would look at leadership, teamwork, and even just interacting with others.

The Griffin Student Leadership Institute introduced me to the Social Change Model of Leadership, which is used in the Institute as a facilitator of change. Also known as the Seven C’s of Leadership, this model associates different values with positive leadership. The values of the individual, group, and community all work as a whole to inspire change. To teach the process of change, Dr. Carol Gruber and the rest of the organizers of GSLI put me and the other student members together with both an internal and an external mentor. Mentors and mentees were intentionally partnered up based on common goals, interests and personalities. My internal mentor was Dr. Tricia O’Hara, and my external mentor was Katie Reilly. They are both experts in their respective fields, as well as amazing teachers. Dr. O’Hara works at Gwynedd Mercy University as a professor of nursing, and Katie Reilly works at Souderton Mennonite Home in social services; overseeing personal care and dementia care. The idea was that the mentees meet with the mentors and through discussion and interaction the process of leadership and change would be explored. When discussing the Social Change Model, one must delve into the different values that make a successful leader.

The first of these values, are the values of the individual. Only when one knows one’s own strengths and weaknesses, are they able to motivate change in others. Each value of the model includes different aspects that work with each other to complete the value of the individual. One’s consciousness of self along with one’s own congruence as well as their personal commitment all encompasses the individualistic values of Social Change. While both Katie and Dr. O’Hara discussed the meaning behind consciousness of self, it was Dr. Halbert who
helped me come to a deeper understanding of it. While I have always enjoyed learning, I often lacked the motivation to complete the work. I was inconsistent with my work ethic. It was not until Dr. Halbert pulled me aside and gave the pep talk was I finally aware of the inconsistencies in my actions. When faced with difficult situations, one must remain committed to their own beliefs and act congruently in their actions.

The idea of commitment was presented to me when Katie Reilly explained her motivations for working with the vulnerable population of dementia patients. Katie first began working with the older population as a volunteer at St. Joseph’s Manor when she was five years old. Katie had stated that she used to be afraid, but her mother’s encouragement and persistence in helping others enabled Katie to become the woman she is today. Katie felt that her commitment to helping those unable to help themselves, especially the older population, molded her into the leader she is today. She believes that the commitment in doing what is right and keeping consistent in one’s own beliefs is what helps make a leader succeed. Where the individual values of a person helps themselves succeed, the group values are what leads to the success of the people collectively.

The Griffin Student Leadership Institute helped me further hone my values especially in working with others. The Social Change Model lists three values that make group collaboration succeed: collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility. Group collaboration can cause many headaches amongst its members. Discussion with Dr. O’Hara, as well as working with fellow members of GSLI in workshops helped change my viewpoint on group work, and completely revamped the way I would work with others. There were group workshops in the previous tier of GSLI which helped determine our working styles. There are different types of workers and the workshops help identify which we work best with. When working with others, the case tends to be that one person takes the bulk of the work while the others do as little as possible. In my past experiences in working with others, this tended to be the case, with me doing all the work. This either happened because the others in the group did not want to do the work, or because I ended up trying to take control of it all, which, as one can imagine, was not productive. If I was part of a group, I always tried to take complete control of the task at hand. I had always wanted to make sure the project went as smoothly as possible so I thought I would take the reins. My lack of trust interfered with the group dynamic and was off-putting to others. Through the workshops I have since learned about delegating tasks and work to others. Dr. O’Hara had said that she liked to have control of the situation and always had trouble giving the work to others. The delegation is about trust, Dr. O’Hara had stated, “one cannot be afraid to make the wrong decision.” When working with others, not only is the delegation important, the motivations and purpose of the collective group is key to maintaining success.

If the group lacks a common purpose, how can work be accomplished? When collaborating with peers, the internal motivations and purpose of the individuals in the group may not be cohesive with the group as a whole. Communication is extremely important to collaboration. Communicating ideas, struggles, and goals between members of the group is a great way to make sure every member is on the same page. Once every member has a common goal and purpose, collaboration can continue. When one person starts to flounder and have trouble, the other members are there to support him; they are there to put him back on track. The lack of common purpose and motivation would hinder the successful group work. Unfortunately, no matter how much communication exists between the members, disagreements do arise. The last value of the group refers to the miscommunications or disagreements between group members, controversy with civility.

The proper way to ameliorate these incongruities inside the group is by using civility. By communicating the issues, either in writing or in a group setting can greatly reduce the intergroup conflict that may occur. There have been times, even as a student at Gwynedd where I have disagreed with another student on how we would continue a project. Instead of bickering and refusing to work together, we both aired our grievances and communicated different ways in which we could both be productive. One aspect of civility that must be remembered, however, is that working with others involves compromise. One may not always get one’s own way, but when working with a number of people, especially those from other cultures, that is to be expected. Working in the community, one encounters all walks of life. One of the final values of the Social Change Model is citizenship.

Before joining the Griffin Student Leadership Institute I had never thought about citizenship. Citizenship, as defined by the Social Change Model is, “process whereby the individual and the collaborative group become responsibly connected to the community and the society through the leadership experience” (Astin & Astin, 1996). In other words, citizenship can be defined as one’s duty to help others in society. As a student of Mercy, I had to complete 120 hours for my internship. I interned with a hospice agency and was a companion to the agency’s
clients. I had never worked with older adults, let alone people on hospice. I spent many hours and days with these individuals, learning about their lives, feelings and even fears. Working with the Alzheimer’s and dementia population made me really feel that I was doing something positive for the community. There was a mostly nonverbal woman in particular, who really solidified the fact that I was connecting to the community. One of the last and only things she had ever said to me was, “thank you so much,” and those simple words made me feel that I was making a positive difference in her life. She had barely ever even acknowledged me before that moment so those four little words meant the world to me. Working with terminally ill people taught me much about the lives we live as well as the legacies we leave behind. I had learned much about the consumers I spent time with. They had all affected people in their own ways. Just because one moves away or passes on, does not mean that one’s legacy ends with them. The way we lead our lives, as well as inspire others lets our legacy or changes live on.

The final value in the Social Change Model is just that, change. While leaders inspire change among groups of people or individuals, I also believe these changes are their legacy. All of the previous values work together to create this change. The positive leaders we encounter, like Dr. O’Hara or Katie Reilly, all have their own legacies they wish to leave. While meeting with Dr. O’Hara, I had brought up the notion of legacies and had asked her what she hopes to leave for others. She responded with two goals: helping students pass their boards and the Dominican Republic Alternative Spring Break. Dr. O’Hara helps tutor students who have previously failed their state board exams. Her main motivation behind wanting to help these students is rooted in her own past. Dr. O’Hara had previously failed her board exams while attending a community college and stated that she had nowhere to turn. She does not want her students to have the same predicament and said, “I want them to have someone to go to, someone they are comfortable with.” She does her best to help every student who needs it, and is always there to lend an ear. The other legacy Dr. O’Hara wishes to leave is Gwynedd Mercy’s Alternative Spring Break to the Dominican Republic. While she was not the one who originally proposed the mission trips to the Dominican Republic, Dr. O’Hara is extremely involved in its sustainability. She makes sure she goes every year, as well as makes sure the relationship between Gwynedd and the Dominican stays strong. Her love for the community and helping people remains Dr. O’Hara’s main motivation for inspiring change among society.

While different, the legacy that Katie Reilly wishes to leave is one that resonates deeply with me: she wishes to make positive changes in the field of aging, as well as making the lives of her residents better. While working at Souderton Mennonite Home, Katie sees a multitude of residents every day. She works with their families and the residents themselves in order to make their lives better and more meaningful. She wishes to teach students more about the field of aging, especially in regards to dementia and Alzheimer’s. The legacy she is leaving others is the knowledge of the subject, as well as her own personal viewpoints on it. Her interest and commitment to helping those who have been afflicted by these diseases was an inspiration to me. She inspired me to look more into the field of aging and make aging-related research a career goal for mine. The legacy or changes we leave in this world influence many people. Some changes seem small, but those are the changes that affect people the most.

The values we all have inside of us encompass who we are. They dictate our work ethic, how we interact with others, as well as how we think of ourselves. Our individual, group, and community values all work cohesively to inspire change in others. The changes we inspire do not have to be grandiose: they can be as simple as a conversation between a failing student and a concerned professor. While seemingly small and insignificant, it is these conversations that inspire the most change in people.

Works Cited

Making a Change, One Patient at a Time
By: Hillary Ware

“What is it that I love to do? What work can I not “not do”? (TED TALKS: How to Find and Do the Work you Love, Scott Dinsmore)
The Social Change Model of Leadership

The social change model is a major component to the Exceptional Leaders Program. As participants we embody this model and fulfill it through the readings required for the completion of the program. The social change model is constructed into this program to allow students to develop leadership skills and continue as leaders into their colleges/universities and professional settings. The seven C’s that embody the social change model are: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. The main hub to this model is, change. Change helps us to realize our individual, group, societal, and community values. When leaders realize when and why they want to make a change then they can see the true meaning of leadership. Change creates a creative process of leadership with the goal being to make a better world. Through the Exceptional Leaders Program we are mentored in all seven areas and are taught how to make a difference in a meaningful way. There are different mentors for each student in the Leadership program, and each student will see a different way of leadership through past experiences, conversations, and observations.

Defining Leadership as a Gwynedd Mercy Student

Before we can continue with a program we must first ask; how do we define leadership but more specifically how do we define leadership as a Gwynedd Mercy University student. Expectations are set high at Gwynedd Mercy University (GMercyU). However, we are taught to excel not only in the classroom but also, as loyal citizens. Faculty and staff at Gwynedd molds and forms high quality leaders and students are taught to uphold the values that are set-forth in the classroom. With leadership incorporated into the curriculum we are taught to handle situations professionally, confront situations, allowing others to lead and setting an example of a leader. As being part of the GMercyU community these expectations are put into play as a distinguished part of the community. When defining leadership as a Gwynedd Mercy Student one must have grace, understanding and an open heart for others. These are all qualities that are possessed from GMercyU students.

The Start

I had previously completed the first tier of the Griffin Student Leaders Program and enjoyed the program. When the opportunity arose to apply to the third tier; The Griffin Student Exceptional Leadership Program I couldn’t help but be ecstatic to participate. At an evening get together our internal and external mentors were revealed. My internal mentor was Barbara Jones and my external mentor was Dr. Rachel King. I had met Dr. King in a previous class due to a presentation she was giving. She had much enthusiasm about her profession and knowledge pertaining to the field. I couldn’t wait to get started with the program and begin our meetings.

To complete the Exceptional Leadership Program we were required to meet three times from the start of the program, with our external and internal mentors. Each time we met there were required materials to be read and discussed between the mentor and mentee. During Dr. King and I’s first meeting in mid-October we began getting to know each other and expressing our thoughts on the required readings. A topic that evolved numerous times was our faith. We both have strong faith values and morals; this started a new conversation about leadership. I learned from one of these conversations that one’s faith is a guide in leadership and doesn’t always have to be spoken. Religiosity is a “touchy” topic in our society so, leading as a Christian is not always easy. I expressed my concern about this and her advice was a relief. She told me to; of course, stay true to my Christian values but to lead by example. This was such a simple answer for a major concern of mine however: I realized a simple answer was all I needed because her advice was exactly what I needed to do when putting my leadership skills into practice.

External Mentor

Meet Dr. King: A Walk in Her Shoes

Dr. King is a graduate from Gwynedd Mercy University. After Gwynedd, she continued her education at Temple University, where she received her Doctorate of Physical Therapy degree. Currently, Dr. King is a Physical Therapist in Cherry Hill, NJ at a facility called The Training Room. The Training Room is an outpatient facility that is committed to helping their patients return to their daily and extra-curricular activities. Dr. King does not treat her job as a typical job; she treats it as something she enjoys to do. When observing her compassion and loving personality it is evident that these traits help her to flourish in her field, making her a great Physical Therapist. She is not an overbearing physical therapist; she allows her patients to take the lead and do what they are capable of. She pushes them [patients] to reach for more, to get more, and most of all to do the best they can do. This is encouraging to all patients because their outcome is much more than the average. I was encouraged to see her have so much compassion for each and every person.
Sharing my Experience

I formed a relationship with Dr. King from the start. I thoroughly enjoyed listening to her experiences in school, graduate school, and personal aspects to her busy life. I also enjoyed talking to her about how she leads in her place of work, and how she manages her patients. Since, I aspire to be a Physical Therapist I knew the information she was offering me would be very valuable to me in my future endeavor. Every time we met there was always something to talk about, elaborate on, and something for me to learn. As I met with her in the fall I knew that my last semester of college was approaching. During this last semester, like most majors, I am required to do an internship. Despite my major being Psychology, I am planning to pursue my education in the field of Physical Therapy. I was able to receive an internship at Dr. King’s place of work for the spring semester. I was so grateful for this opportunity and was sure this would be a great learning experience for me. I couldn’t wait to get started. Therefore, a few weeks into the semester I started my internship with Dr. King and shortly began to learn more about the field of Physical Therapy than I could have possibly imagined. I was so humbled by the great work I was seeing and the compassion that not only Dr. King but the other Physical Therapists she was working with were showing everyone within the facility. I knew this experience would be a milestone in my education. Currently, I am still interning at The Training Room and am learning something new every day. I love being able to communicate with different people on a daily basis; listening to their stories, as well as, gaining an understanding of the professional side of learning.

How Dr. King Embodies Specific Elements of the Social Change Model

As stated before, the social change model is a major component to this program. Gaining both an understanding of how to incorporate this model and how other leaders incorporate this model makes for an overall greater understanding of one’s own leadership skills/ability. When considering the seven C’s, Dr. King embodies all of them, the most important one being change. Understanding that change is the ability to adapt to different situations in the environment, different people, and adapt to the constantly evolving unknown, it became evident that Dr. King embodies change with an open mind and heart. She works with patients to help alleviate pain and improve mobility. She creates exercise plans for her patients including, a home exercise program. Her profession creates an environment that causes her to adapt to change quickly and professionally.

Inspiration from the readings

How I was Inspired

During the Exceptional Leadership program, we were given many readings and videos to watch. I found these materials to be insightful and allowed me to think about not just my own leadership skills but leadership skills I have seen in others. The readings and videos caused me to think critically, put into practice my leadership skills, and question myself—why do I want to lead? Where am I leading from? Why do I want to go into a helping profession? These are just a few of the many questions that were not just pondered throughout the program, but were addressed and answered throughout it as well. Do to the precise answers I received from this program, it helped to further solidify why I do the things that I do.

Out of the many materials for the required readings, I found two of them to be the most influential. There was a TED Talk called “How to Find and Do the Work You Love” which discussed finding one’s passion. As I watched this talk, I began to ask the following questions: What is it that I love to do? And what work can I not “not do”? These thoughts led to the following deeper question: What does it mean to live a life that is authentic and filled with deep meaning? I could not help but think that this question is all in reference to what you love to do. When you are so passionate about something, such as the work that you do, it creates authenticity in your life. The TED talk discusses having an impact and I believe that having an impact on others’ lives is to enjoy and to feel passionate about what we do. Before we can find what we are passionate about, we must first find out who we are and what we are looking for in this life. If we do not know what we are looking for, then how can we find it? As leaders we need to surround ourselves with others who have a passionate existence and who are doing the impossible. Surrounding ourselves with passionate people creates a new passion for existence in our own lives. We begin to discover more about what we are searching for in this life. Therefore, living an authentic and deeply meaningful life is to live out your passion and encourage others to find their own.

The second influential material was called “Leading from a Merciful Space.” The article really pin points and makes the readers dig deep into where there motivation comes from. However, to ask where motivation comes from we must first ask who inspires us. The reading tells the story about Catherine McAuley; her background, how
she led, and a few of the challenges she faced as a leader. This was an influential reading because it solidifies the importance of understanding where one leads from and why one would want to lead. Through this article in self-reflection I find it important to trust one’s self in leadership. Also, making others feel as if they are a significant contribution is an important concept in leadership, as well. I thought Catherine McAuley was a true leader that society set as an example on how she led others and how she never refused to give everyone respect even if she disagrees with them. McAuley allowed others to take the lead which is just as important as knowing how to lead. She understood that being a leader did not just mean to be in control and telling people what to do. She led from a very merciful space.

How Dr. King Embodies the Readings

Incorporating the readings in regards to my external mentor; Dr. King, I know that Dr. King knows how to lead and sets great examples for future leaders to follow. She knows herself well enough to lead from a place of mercy, commitment and from a place of passion. These adjectives are all shown in her work and daily life. Dr. King embodies Catherine McAuley’s leading practices that Gwynedd students are so often reminded of. From a student’s perspective, it is great to see these concepts placed into practice. The leadership program is an extracurricular activity but I am finding it to be more prevalent in my life than any other class that I have taken in my undergraduate career. Dr. King has been a wonderful mentor, and possesses many qualities that I hope to, one day, do the same as a future Physical Therapist. She shows and treats all of her patients, coworkers, and interns with respect, joy and compassion. I feel honored to have such a great mentor to look up too and to guide me in the right direction; in my personal life as well as, my professional life.

Incorporating Leadership

How exciting it is to think about upcoming graduation. With graduation approaching it is also a perfect time for reflection; on the past years at Gwynedd Mercy as well as, the many years ahead of me. I am in hopes of becoming a Physical Therapist and this experience, with Dr. King as my mentor, has been one for the books. I have learned many great things that I will carry into my future endeavor of becoming a Physical Therapist. Dr. King has made this experience much more than I could have imagined. As a new professional I hope to incorporate the many things that Dr. King has showed and taught me throughout this process. One of the most important qualities that I hope to portray is her compassion for people. Today, it is very easy to get caught up in our own problems and believe that these are superior to others’. However, we need to remember that everyone has their own difficulties in life and compassion for others is necessary to be an exceptional leader. Only when we lead from a merciful position and express compassion to those in need can we expect the same in return. Dr. King has been a great example of the many qualities a great leader should portray.
Leading From Within: 
A Modern View on Leadership 
By: Sean Welch

“What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,” (Fall in Love, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ)
The word leadership has been defined within dictionaries like any other word; however, the concept of what it is to truly lead can take on many shapes and therefore escapes a common definition. Many people perceive leadership in the form of historical figures, whether presidents or dictators, as well as actors and actresses who take on such roles within movies or television. These examples embody many factors of leadership such as the capacity to communicate thoughts clearly, the capability to invigorate others, and the ability to create a common goal among a group. Throughout my own time as a leader, whether in the form of service organizations such as my role as Eagle Scout and Troop Quartermaster within the Boy Scouts of America or in my academic experience, I have seen that leadership takes many forms and each person has the potential to lead in very different ways. Leadership does not only follow the classic idea of one who is able to make memorable speeches, it also involves respect, tolerance, inspiration, a balance of teamwork and independence, and an ability to motivate others as well as oneself. Modern leaders, whether leading within the public arena or within the everyday workplace, must not only embody these ideals, but also express a love for education and an ability to empathize with others. With these traits, and an ability to recognize one’s own flaws, any person has the ability to develop their identity as a leader and as an individual.

Throughout my life, ranging from elementary school to Gwynedd Mercy University, I have been a dedicated member to many groups in educational settings, clubs, and community service organizations including the Boy Scouts of America, the National Honor Society, the Knights of Columbus, Youth & Family Services, Mercy Advocates in Service, Sigma Phi Sigma, the Student Association of Science, and the Peer Mentoring Association. I have held a variety of leadership positions, ranging from leading group projects and laboratory experiments within educational settings, to managing the multi-month long projects involved in scouting. During my time in scouting, I was welcoming to all people whether they were older or younger than I, in a different troop or my own, and especially if they were considered outcasts by others. This welcoming attitude helped me to develop my leadership skills a great deal by uniting groups of people under a common purpose. This was especially apparent when, at my Eagle Scout Project, one of the final requirements for Eagle rank, I had full participation of each scout in the troop, each scoutmaster and assistant scoutmaster, and even some parents which seldom made it to scouting events.

Another group which has certainly helped me to grow is the staff and volunteers of Manna on Main Street, a soup kitchen and food pantry which I have volunteered at each week for two years. The building assistant of Manna, Scott Lukens, as well as each volunteer and client who enter the doors of Manna have taught me to give up any and all prejudice, as prejudice is almost always inaccurate and leaves little room for mental or emotional growth. Scott has helped me to work on my introversion so that I can work with, and manage other volunteers who visit Manna. Through these simple actions, I have certainly become a better leader and a more complete person, as I now attempt to learn all I can from others about themselves and about the surrounding world. Finally, within educational settings, I have often become the appointed leader of many group projects, utilizing basic organizational and delegation skills to ensure that the job gets done correctly and in a timely manner. Through my own experiences in team-oriented and leadership-based roles, I have grown to see that my own vision of leadership conflicts with the classic model of leadership, and I have therefore looked to the Griffin Student Leadership Institute to fully understand my role and responsibilities as a leader.

Prior to the GSLI Exceptional Leaders Program, I had held a certain set of expectations regarding the actions, appearance, and language of a leader. The word leader is reminiscent of a political figure standing in front of a press corps, promising the public a better tomorrow, or of ancient figures which wore crowns and fought wars, those who express the classic leader values of delegation, communication, and the ability to thrive under pressure. I know that this is not a complete view, however, as many leaders must express other values such as commitment, altruism, creativity, and the gift to entertain others, as well as the ability to recover from any loss which is extremely important, as triumph is simply not always an option. This is certainly the case in the modern world, as those who most closely follow the classic leadership model are those who attempt to use power, rather than understanding, to lead. This model has led many governments and groups to fall at the hands of its own members due to ineffective leadership techniques which are neither welcoming nor altruistic. It is for this reason that the classic view of leadership must be changed to embrace the dynamism of the twenty first century. Although it is well known that each leader is human and that each leader must therefore contain some amount of flaws, it is the unique ability to humans to recognize and work to correct these flaws, as I have attempted to do through the GSLI Exceptional Leaders Program.

The Exceptional Leaders Program has provided me with excellent sources in the form of leaders within the Gwynedd community as well as documents written by a variety of people in leadership positions, so that I may
further develop my ideas of leadership as well as my ability to lead. My external mentor, Andrea Vettori, CRNP, is the Clinical Director and Nurse Practitioner at the Mary Howard Health Center. She shares a love of service with the Mercy community by serving those in Philadelphia who do not have access to healthcare. Through my time with Andrea Vettori, I have gathered a greater understanding of what makes a true leader. She has shown me that a leader must be fully conscious of their strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge of oneself is then able to generate empathy, so that a leader can work to understand why others act as they do, rather than simply studying how others act. Empathy, and the deepened understanding which stems from it, allow a leader to resolve conflict in a more fluid manner by increasing the effectiveness of communication. When a leader is able to understand how a member of their team thinks and how they have developed that method of thinking, the leader is more able to overcome controversy and unite members of a team who hold disparate opinions.

Throughout my time speaking with Andrea, as well as my time at Manna, I have put these teachings to work. I have attempted to eliminate my prejudice of others, so that I may see people as more than clients of Manna, and instead see them, quite simply, as humans. Each person contains their own history, their own relationships, and their own methods of relating with their surroundings. Once these truths are realized, it is much easier to speak with others and to resolve conflict. It was said by Herman Melville that “of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity, nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well fed.” If we, as leaders, are to be effective, we must acknowledge that each person has had very different experiences in life which have led them to their current state, and that a true leader must work to overcome personal barriers. The sooner that a leader is able to empathize with others, to drop their prejudice and to understand that not everything is chosen by free will, for instance the genetic or psychological disposition of some people, as well as their surroundings as a child, the sooner a leader can work to improve the status of those around them. This shows that the first necessity of a leader is not only understanding through empathy, but taking action to rectify the wrongs in the world, to provide service for those in need.

My internal mentor, Dr. Monica Walsh, has bachelor’s degrees in music and education, as well as a master’s and doctorate, each with a focus in education. She has taught at a variety of institutions and is currently an Assistant Professor at Gwynedd Mercy University. Dr. Walsh and I have found common ground on a number of things including something as simple as having large Irish families, or something as complex as a love for discovery and the intrinsic value of education. Though we each follow very different paths, with Dr. Walsh focusing on education and I on science and medicine, we have each found that the discovery of knowledge is invaluable. In the poem Fall in Love by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, it is stated “What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.” In this statement, Father Arrupe has shown that a leader must be passionate. To expound on this, Dr. Walsh has shown me that a leader must dedicate time and energy to their goals while sacrificing a part of themselves in an altruistic way. Throughout my experience in education, I have remained passionate about discovering new knowledge and transmitting this knowledge to others, whether through tutoring or through my recent experience of teaching a science lesson at Hobbit House. This love for education must cross into both professional and personal lives, to ensure that each person remains open to receiving education from others.

This idea of constant education throughout life was later emphasized in GSLI by M. Shankman and S. Allen in their writing “Emotionally Intelligent Leadership.” In this writing, honest self-understanding is the emphasis of what makes a leader great; however, this honesty must also be shared among a team. A leader must seek the opinions of others so that they can educate themselves about how their efforts, actions, and statements are perceived. One must then decide what they accept to be true, meaning that a good leader must believe in their own abilities so that a group maintains cohesion, while also believing that the members of their group who voice their opinion about negative issues are being honest. This shows that a leader must believe that they, as humans, have flaws that must be addressed through education, and that they as leaders have strengths which must be used to allow for optimal group function. The second necessity of leaders is therefore that a leader must be passionate about education, teaching themselves and others that change is sometimes needed for progress.

The third and final necessity of leaders not found in the classic model of leadership is leadership from within. This implies two things. First, leadership can be found within any member of a team, provided they are given enough support to develop their skills. Many organizations and teams do not maintain a dedicated leader, thus providing the opportunity of leadership to all the team’s members. Though this is in direct conflict with the classic model of leadership, it shows that each person within a group may be capable of leading under certain circumstances. This idea is embodied by the values of citizenship. A citizen must follow many of the same
methods as a leader by working for positive change, acknowledging their role as a small part of a large whole, and by dedicating time to fulfill such a role without maintaining the role of a distinct leader. Second, leadership comes from within oneself. Leadership cannot be a mere façade; it must be the full expression of what a person believes. True leadership cannot be faked; it must be achieved through belief in oneself, belief in the value of the group which they lead, and a belief that changing weaknesses to strengths is needed for progression and growth. As shown by the previous requirements for leadership, a passion for education and service must be established within a leader, and it is this passion that is distinctly visible among leaders.

Though I have learned a great deal about leadership through my experiences in service and education, I have continued to learn through GSLI and plan to continue my learning on the topic of leadership, and education in general, for the rest of my life. I have found that leadership, like any other important quality of a person, requires lifelong commitment and is reshaped many times over the course of one’s life. Leaders must be guided by a sound moral compass, whether found in religion, spirituality, or normative ethics, all of which may be based on the principles of a Mercy Education. Through this lifelong commitment to Mercy education, a leader can derive the importance of dignity and respect for all humans, the necessity of compassion, and the ability to listen to others in order to learn and interpret information in a way which may work to resolve conflict and inform the decision making process. Although being a good leader is more complex than attempting to be a good person, it is certainly the best place to start, so that the goodness reflected in a person’s actions, words, and intentions may help others to recognize their capacity to lead.

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“Honest self-understanding means that you celebrate and honor your strengths and talents while acknowledging your limitations (Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, Shankman & Allen, 2008).”
A school is a complicated factory made of many moving diverse pieces. The principal is the leader of the school, charged with managing all the diverse personalities, varied goals and unexpected surprises, with a primary function of guiding teachers and students to success. My external mentor, Renny LaJara, is the principal and leader at Stetson Avenue Charter School in Philadelphia. Mr. LaJara, an effective leader, abides by the seven essential values. The seven essentials are broken into four sections which include individual values, group values, community/societal values, and change. The seven essentials include consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility and citizenship, and change. These values help develop and mold effective leaders such as Mr. LaJara. My time with Mr. LaJara allowed me to develop my own leadership philosophy on how to be an effective leader.

Mr. LaJara has been the principal of Stetson Avenue Charter School for eight years. He inspires his teachers and students by being a role model. Without a strong principal leading by example, the school system would be less stable. With someone taking the responsibility to be the leader of the group, the school is able to run smoothly. Mr. LaJara is a perfect example of an inspiring leader. His lifetime experiences allowed him to prove to himself his ability to persevere and generated in him a strong desire to be successful in all that he does. He is passionate in his community activities, working with others, and assisting whenever needed. Through the mentorship, I learned and experienced firsthand the many qualities a leader possesses and how a leader uses his skills in a school. As an education major, the experience was invaluable as it taught me how to lead and motivate both students and teachers to become successful. I can use the many suggestions, tips, and strategies learned from Mr. LaJara to assist my colleagues and students to be the best they can be. The examples include the “Principal’s Pencil,” motivational notes, words of encouragement, and more. I have used the motivational notes with my students when the students stayed on task and completed their work. Some of the suggestions are to be honest with themselves, honest with others, open to suggestions, a good role model, maintain an upbeat attitude and be flexible with regards to long and short term goals.

The first individual value is the consciousness of self, meaning taking an action that is motivated by one’s awareness of beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions. The article states, “Honest self-understanding means that you celebrate and honor your strengths and talents while acknowledging your limitations” (Shankman & Allen, 2008). It is important to understand one’s strengths and weaknesses. Mr. LaJara feels that it is important to know the strengths and weaknesses of himself which helps him become an effective leader. He explains that you know your weakness when you pay close attention to what pushes your buttons.

“When you possess honest self-understanding you are more likely to demonstrate effective leadership, develop robust relationships, and have healthy self-esteem” (Shankman & Allen, 2008). Knowing his strengths and weaknesses, allows Mr. LaJara to develop relationships with the teachers in the school. Mr. LaJara is also aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his teachers. This knowledge allows teachers in the school to be comfortable approaching him with situations, knowing he will analyze them fairly. He likes to lead through a positive experience and has often been told that his ability to lead without judgment and to guide without harsh words is one of his greatest attributes as principal.

Congruence is the second individual value that means feeling, thinking, and behaving with consistency and authenticity. The TED talk explains the three passionate work frameworks which include becoming a self-expert, do the impossible, and surround yourself with passionate people (Dinsmore, 2012). These steps include the framework to finding work that you love. Mr. LaJara recognized his strengths and values and thus felt he would be a good principal. He continually pushes his limits to follow his dreams to become an even better principal and he continues to work towards becoming a superintendent. Throughout the process he surrounds himself with passionate people who possess the same goals, from which he can learn, grow and remain motivated.

Mr. LaJara, as principal, sometimes has to deal with difficult situations and decisions. One example is dealing with teachers. He holds teachers accountable for consistency and honesty. He provides teachers with policies and rules to follow. He recalls an occasion when he had to terminate a teacher for not following the rules. Mr. LaJara acted with consistency, as he holds all of the teachers accountable, and when the teacher disobeyed the rules there was a difficult decision to make and consequences to be faced. He maintains congruence throughout each day.
The last and final individual value is commitment. Commitment can be defined as passion, intensity, and duration. Mr. LaJara enjoys his work and is happy with his career choice. He enjoys inspiring students and motivating teachers. One of his proudest accomplishments was when he pushed his teachers to be the best they could be. Due to his hard work and commitment, twenty of his teachers are now certified principals and are in his school teaching. This shows Mr. LaJara’s commitment to the success of his teachers and students. He likes to inspire someone to be better. Mr. LaJara himself is attending classes to become a superintendent. His goal when he acquires this new position would be to even inspire more teachers and students as his realm of influence would expand.

As a principal in Philadelphia he was committed to giving back to the city. From the beginning, he created a community that is committed to providing the students with an education. The community has come together to give back to the school by providing a clean and safe place for the students to learn. He motivates teachers and faculty members in his school through “Principal’s Pencils.” The “Principal’s Pencils” are given to teachers who have motivated and inspired students. In addition to the “Principal’s Pencils,” he motivates teachers through messages and activities that help build a community that is committed. This process motivates the teachers to make students successful and keeps them committed to the goal. I have used this strategy of “Principal’s Pencils” during Student Teaching. For example, I have given students a “Teacher’s Pencil” when he or she completed their work and followed the classroom rules. This motivated all of the students to work towards my example of Mr. LaJara’s “Principal’s Pencils.” Mr. LaJara’s uses this strategy to motivate his students and teachers in his school to work towards the honor of being selected to receive one of the “Principal’s Pencils.”

The first group value is collaboration, meaning working together towards a common goal, purpose or effort. The leader empowers self and others through trust. The article “Leading from a Merciful Space,” states, “Because 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” (Carney, 2011). The leader needs to motivate his followers. Throughout the school year, Mr. LaJara instills collaboration and community of learners through different activities. There are fundraisers, teacher appreciations, principal pencils, raffles, and many other activities intended to keep everyone engaged. These are used to motivate teachers to exceed expectations and continually encourage students towards success. Mr. LaJara believes when you show passion you generate passion and that allows people to continue to strive to grow.

The teachers work together to help make the school system run smoothly. Mr. LaJara delegates tasks and projects and allows input from others. Everyone working together helps the school run smoothly. Mr. LaJara is a great example of a leader as he delegates teachers to lead activities, clubs, groups, and teams. The school works together with many leaders overseen by Mr. LaJara. He recognizes he could not do it all himself, and this leads back to the importance of self-awareness. Allowing others to lead generates opportunities for them to grow as individuals while ensuring the school and students benefit from the many talented individuals collected there.

Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, is a great example of a leader who instilled the value of collaboration. When the Sisters of Mercy began spreading through Ireland and England where new convents were built, McAuley needed leaders to help run the new convents. “She delegated authority to her sisters, freeing them to act on their own initiatives” (Carney, 2011). While she was the named leader, she delegated tasks to others to help the system run smoothly and to allow those under her tutelage to be empowered. This is a form of collaboration which demonstrates people working together. McAuley also demonstrated the second group value, common purpose. The common goal of the group was helping women and children.

The second group value is a common purpose, a group working together with a shared vision and values. The Stetson Avenue Charter School mission statement is, “To empower our community through advocacy, and the education and leadership development of our youth” (John, 2013). This mission is the goal of the school and Mr. LaJara instills in his teachers the need to lead to students to success. All of his teachers and faculty are aware of the common purpose and goal of the school allowing them to function as a unified group working together to educate the students and give them a positive school experience.

The TED talk “How Great Leaders Inspire Action,” talked about a group that needed a common goal and purpose. The TED talk explains how some leaders inspire by using three steps which include why, how, and what. This will lead to success. First, you focus on the why which is the reasons for leading the group that include cause,
beliefs, and purpose. Next is the how which is the process. For example, Mr. LaJara inspires through the “Principal’s Pencils,” notes, words of encouragement, and consistency. The last step is the what. Mr. LaJara’s last step is to inspire and motivate teachers and students. Every teacher and member knows the goal and common purpose of the school which is to educate and inspire students. Mr. LaJara completes this by distributing leadership throughout the school community. The teachers have the power to make decisions and come up with ideas to drive towards the common purpose. This gives the teachers a chance to exercise their leadership abilities.

With Mr. LaJara having earned my respect, I asked him what three qualities he would like to see in a new hire in his organization. Without hesitation he stated his list would include dedication to the education system and students, a well-rounded education, and the person’s wellbeing. These are qualities that he instills in teachers and students in the school.

The final group value is controversy with civility that is to recognize differences in viewpoints with courtesy. Though I try to avoid controversy, Mr. LaJara is the total opposite as he likes to embrace controversy. For example, with a controversy between two people, Mr. LaJara invites them into the office. He facilitates an environment that helps make the people see each other’s view while maintaining respect for each other. This helps the two people learn how to handle the difficult situation. Then he has the two people apologize and talk it out. He finds the most challenging people to work with are the parents as they have questions, look to defend their children and are not usually receptive to negative feedback. Despite the situations being challenging, it is important to address the issues and deal with them accordingly, while remaining respectful, polite and professional.

Sarah Green wrote the article “Difficult Conversations: Nine Common Mistakes.” She mentions the nine mistakes that people make when having difficult situations. One example is “We fall into a combat mentality” (Green, 2010). Mr. LaJara feels that it is important to go in with a calm attitude and just help people see each other’s viewpoints. Another mistake is “We rehearse” (Green, 2010). Mr. LaJara feels that we can rehearse the conversation; however it will not go the way we anticipate. Instead he suggests creating talking points. This is a great way to control the conversation and ensure that the outcome is a mutual agreement.

The community and societal value is citizenship. Citizenship is the process of individuals and the group becoming a responsible community. The leader guides the group and individuals. The article “Emotionally Intelligent Leadership” states, “Part of the job of an emotionally intelligent leader is to fill the organization with as many good citizens as possible and to hold everyone accountable to a set of standards” (Shankman & Allen, 2008). Mr. LaJara hires teachers and individuals who share the purpose and ideas of the group. “However, in an organization filled with good citizens, a different reality is possible – one in which everyone is respected and appreciated, in which someone has taken the time to tap those individuals and have one-on-one conversations to increase motivation and involvement” (Shankman & Allen, 2008). Mr. LaJara has a great group of teachers and staff who are working towards the purpose and goal of the group. Sometimes Mr. LaJara has had to remove some individuals due to not following policies and to make the group better. He motivates and involves the teachers through various activities to be the best they can be.

The ultimate goal of leadership is change; the goal of the creative process of leadership is to make the world a better place. “A change agent is also sensitive to time” (Shankman & Allen, 2008). The most important element of change is the timing. Mr. LaJara looks at change as not always a bad thing, yet something to which one must adapt. He likes to observe and identify the goal of the change. A legacy that he would like to leave is leadership ability and style. The key elements he brings to the school are a dedication to working hard, looking to make the world a better place, striving to be productive, and being the best role model citizen he can be. He is passionate about education and inspiring students and teachers to be the best they can be is his purpose.

Lastly, we talked about the three essentials qualities Mr. LaJara believes a leader should have. The qualities include personal skills, communication, and passion. I feel that I have all of these qualities as I have personal skills, I can communicate with others, and show passion for my goals and dreams. My personal skills include being kind, caring, thoughtful, nice, generous, hardworking, and much more. I work well with others, enjoy being part of a team, speak well one on one and in groups, and work with dedication towards my goals.

Throughout my mentorship, I have developed my philosophy of leadership. A leader is a role model people can look up to. My philosophy is molded by the Social Change Model of Leadership. It is important to
know my individual values. Through my experiences, I have learned my strengths and weaknesses and knowing these has helped me become a better leader. My gifts include being a supporter, listener, role model, hard worker, and much more. My growing edges include confrontation and talking in front of big crowds. Leaders are honest and trustworthy to colleagues and are authentic. A leader needs to be committed and dedicated to something that drives them. This is a form of passion. The leader collaborates with the group and works toward the common purpose or goal. When there is controversy, the leader needs to deal with controversy with respect for others. Lastly, change should not be avoided, but considered and when it helps the group reach its goal and purpose, should be carefully implemented. Change often involves opportunities and risks. It usually involves a period of adaptation. A good leader explains the reason for the change and helps with the implementation and adaptation.

I have learned how to be an effective leader through my external mentor and internal mentor, Sister Ellen Murray. I will use what I learned whether leading my field hockey team, club, or students in the classroom. The leadership philosophy will help me become an effective leader in every activity as I lead the group with a purpose to our goals. In the classroom, as the teacher, it will be my role, as the leader to teach, motivate and inspire the students to be the best they can be, and to not give up. I am motivating my students as well as my colleagues through the different motivation strategies that I have learned from Mr. LaJara.

I was very fortunate to be mentored by an experienced and excellent leader. The leader Renny LaJara is the principal of a school who leads the teachers and students to success through example, hard work, dedication, passion and respect. Learning from my mentor, I have been able to develop my own leadership philosophy that I will use to lead my teams, groups, and students.

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About the Authors

Jacqlyn Gallagher is a junior Honors student in the Early Childhood and Special Education program. She is the current president of the Special Education Club and participated in the Young Mercy Leadership Pilgrimage to Ireland in the summer of 2014. Jacqlyn is also active in the Teacher Apprenticeship Program with the Upper Dublin School District, and works as an Assistant Teacher for Saint Anthony Preschool and Child Care. In her free time, she enjoys crafts, reading and coaching softball.

Elizabeth Mannino is a junior Biology major with minors in Chemistry and Microbiology. She is also a member of the Honors program and a recipient of the Dean’s Scholarship for academic merit and the E-STEM scholarship. Her leadership involvement on campus includes serving as president of the Student Association of the Sciences, Assistant Captain/Treasurer for the Gwynedd Mercy University Dance Team and a member of Sigma Phi Sigma, the Griffin Ambassadors, and the “Mercy Movers.” Elizabeth aspires to become a surgeon or a pediatric geneticist.

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Carol Anne Patton is completing her Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services in May 2015 and upon graduation will pursue a Master’s degree in Social Work with a concentration in Family and Child Counseling at the University of Pennsylvania. When not busy working as a Milieu Counselor at Warwick Family Services, Carol volunteers with The Solana House, St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, and the CMLI Campus Ministry Leadership Institute in Ohio. She has previously been awarded the title of “Volunteer of the Year” at Grand View Hospital and is an active member in the National Human Services Honor Society.

Jonathan Spector will be graduating this May with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology, having previously earned an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Studies from Montgomery County Community College in 2013. Jonathan was a prior member of the Tier 2 Griffin Student Leadership Institute and was a leader in the coordination of the book donation service project. He is currently an intern with Caring Hospice Services in Willow Grove, and aspires to career in Alzheimer and Dementia research.

Hillary Ware is a senior Physical Therapy major and a member of the Gwynedd Mercy University Softball team. She was the recipient of the Colonial States Athletic Conference Sportsmanship Award in 2014, and was named to the All-American Academic Team. Hillary’s leadership and volunteer experiences include serving as the Program Director and Sports Coordinator for Woodmen of the World Youth Camp in Hagerstown, MD, along with work for Habitat for Humanity, The Turkey Trot, and Earth Day. She is also a student worker in the Career Development office.

Sean Welch is a junior Biology major and recipient of the Presidential Scholarship. He aspires to a career as a physician, specializing in pathology, or brain and nervous system disorders. Sean has earned the prestigious rank of Eagle Scout and is an Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 50. At Gwynedd Mercy University, Sean serves as a tutor in the Academic Resource Center and is a member of Sigma Phi Sigma. He is also an active volunteer with Manna on Main Street, and the Knights of Columbus.

Brittany Wilson is a senior Early, Elementary Education and Special Education major and the 2014 Captain of the Field Hockey team at Gwynedd Mercy University. She has been repeatedly named to the Colonial State Athletic Conference All-Academic Team, and the National Field Hockey Coaches’ Association Division III National Academic Squad. Brittany is also a member of the Kappa Delta Pi International Education Honor Society and the Sigma Phi Sigma National Mercy Honor Society. In addition, she volunteers her time and talents with numerous area youth Field Hockey clinics and at Gwynedd Mercy track meets.