Exploring Personal Leadership through Social Change

Honors Seminar 401: Exploring Personal Leadership through Social Change, overall, has been an incredibly useful class. I did not learn about the human body or about how to solve complicated algebraic expressions, but I did learn a great deal about the world as a whole and about how to become a successful leader. This class has allowed me to learn a lot about myself, as well. Through the experiences of this class, I have notably improved my leadership skills and thought a great deal about where I see myself in the future. I have put a great deal of effort and mindfulness into this class, and I hope this reflection demonstrates that.

Through this class, I learned that I have been a leader for several years, but I also learned how to become an even more effective leader. A leader doesn’t necessarily mean someone who stands in the front of a group and directs a successful group gathering. There are several types of leaders. There are leaders who do stand at the front of a group, and there are leaders who stand within the group. This semester, I focused on learning about leaders that stand within the group because that is the type leader I aspire to be. In order to become an effective leader that leads from within the group, I have to focus on the group values that were identified in *Leadership for a Better World* by Susan R. Komives, Wendy Wagner, and colleagues. These important group values are **collaboration, common purpose,** and **controversy with civility**. To sum up these values, I will need to work with people who have the same goals and ideas as I do while also being open to contrasting opinions and ideas. Several guests were invited to speak to the class about their passions and how they have worked towards social change. Every single one of the speakers talked about collaborating with people who have the same purpose. Accomplishing social change would be very difficult to do alone; that’s why it is important to work within the group.

Individual values that are identified in *Leadership for a Better World* include **consciousness of self**, **congruence**, and **commitment**. On the first day of class, I was asked to identify my top values. I had never thought about what I value, so this task was incredibly challenging for me. I felt guilty that I had never really thought about what I value, which means that I have never actually been conscious of myself. I managed to narrow my values down to achievement, passion, wealth, world peace, and health. After identifying my values, I started to realize who I identify as and what I want in life. However, at the end of the semester, about three and a half months later, I reevaluated my values and ended up adding two more: openness and risk. I thought about how selfish my values at the beginning of the semester sounded, and once again, I felt guilty.

The reason I added those specific values at the end of the semester is because of a certain experience I had. I began volunteering at Committee Against Domestic Abuse every week, and I quickly realized that I needed to reevaluate the values I selected at the beginning of this journey. I worked directly with the children of survivors of domestic abuse. I was able to see how domestic abuse affects the children that are exposed to it. During my second volunteering shift, I began thinking about how these kids would turn out in the future. Then, I began thinking that these children ARE the future. This is the exact moment when I began to recognize my privilege and realized that I my values changed. I chose openness because in order for social change to occurs, specifically domestic abuse, people need to be more open-minded. By open-minded, I mean people need to recognize that there is great stigma surrounding the issue, and society needs to work together to eliminate it. Additionally, it is very important for society to remain optimistic and realize that the issue can be improved over time. I chose risk because people who are privileged, such as myself, need to step out of their comfort zone and utilize their privilege to serve those who are less fortunate. By volunteering at Committee Against Domestic Abuse, I took my first risk in order to serve an issue I care about. I believe that if every person utilized their privilege to improve society, the words “social change” wouldn’t sound so far-fetched.

I learned an incredible amount of knowledge about global issues that need to change. I have significantly improved my leadership skills through this class; specifically, I feel as though I have improved my **congruence** the most. I recognize what my values are, and I make sure to stay true to them no matter the context. Additionally, I have relayed all of the information I learned in this course about different cultures and global issues to my family. My family is from a very rural area: Lamberton, Minnesota. Lamberton has a population of about 800 mostly Caucasian farmers. Most citizens of Lamberton are quick to reject different opinions. It is very difficult for them to recognize their privilege, so I have made it my personal goal to continue my congruence and work on helping them become more open-minded. I also plan to continue using my privilege through volunteering and donating to organizations that serve survivors of domestic abuse. Someday, I would love to say that I was a part of the social movement that ended domestic abuse.

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