

Eight Is Enough

Students teach leadership together

By Ana Ribero

This is the true story of eight strangers picked to lead and excel. They have eight different personalities and leadership styles. They come from eight different backgrounds. They have eight unique points of view and eight individual strengths and weaknesses. Find out what happens when people stop being selfish and start being real. This is the story of the **Seminole Community College Leadership Challenge Team**.

While many groups tend to obsess about each other's differences and let them become obstacles, this team celebrates its diversity and uses it as a way to improve. The group uses this technique to run the SCC Leadership Institute workshops that help other student leaders achieve success. Together, they prepare the 35-hour retreats, make presentations about leadership, and run team- and leadership-building activities. "We present workshops about how to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses while learning more about how to interact with other people on a day-to-day basis," says Brian Murray, 23, a SCC psychology student and Leadership Challenge Team member.

Murray got involved in the program because he wanted to help others grow as leaders while at the same time expand his own leadership skills. He wanted to use his strength—self-confidence—to improve his weakness—listening—and help others with similar problems do the same. In contrast, Ashley Simpson, 19, needed a little more self-confidence. The education student wanted to use her intelligence to boost her self-confidence and help her be a better leader. Kim Lewis, 21, a biology student, also got involved because she wanted personal growth. "I saw this as an opportunity to grow personally and open doors for myself," Lewis says. But although her initial intentions were focused on herself, Lewis used her biggest strength—willingness—to become an active member of the team and make a difference in the 45 to 65 people who attend each retreat.

Leslie Brown, 21, has a background that's miles apart from any of her team members. The education student is hearing impaired, which has given her experiences and perspectives that many students can learn from. "I joined the team because I wanted to learn how to use my experiences to better my life and that of others," Brown

says through an interpreter. She admits to getting too emotional when she receives negative feedback, but through the program, she has learned to control her weaknesses and showcase her strengths. "I didn't think that I'd be a good leader initially," Brown says. "Being deaf, I just didn't see it happening. I was afraid to even go to the interview during the application process. But I went, and becoming a



RAY CARBON

A tightly-knit team: Seminole Community College's (from top) Michael Tallone, Kim Lewis, Brian Murray, Ashley Simpson, Ayanna Beckles, Collin Klien, and Leslie Brown (not pictured: Rick Webster).

member of this team just blew my mind."

Rick Webster, 21, had the brains and enthusiasm to be a great leader. However, he lacked tactfulness. "I'm just a little too abrasive," says Webster, a psychology student. Ayanna Beckles, 18, was an outstanding listener but didn't have the guts or motivation to participate in everything she wanted to. Michael Pallone, 24, on the other hand, needed to improve his listening skills to complement his fervent assertiveness. "I went to the first retreat and learned a lot about myself," he says. "I wanted to learn more about how I could become a more effective person, so I came back."

Last but not least is Collin Klien, 20, who's attended 14 leadership retreats this year and plans to break the record of 16 by the end of the fall semester. "I wanted to

join the team to meet new people, and through them, I realized all the benefits that there are in a leadership program," he says.

Although their personalities, strengths, and weaknesses may be very diverse, the team uses this as a tool, not as a hindrance. "Their personalities clash all the time," says Randy Pawlowski, director of student life at SCC and Leadership Institute organizer. "But they don't let that get to them." To find out more about each member's quirks and qualities, each team member takes the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator which tells them about their personality type and leadership style. "Knowing what each of our personality types are really helps because we know where one person's weaknesses are and where we can help them grow," Murray says. "They, in turn, know our weaknesses and where we need to grow. So, we work together as a team to help each other out." This also prevents them from finding out about each other the hard way through conflicts or arguments.

Having so many different perspectives in one tight-knit group helps the team tailor the leadership-teaching strategies they use at the retreats toward each particular group's needs. It also aids them to deal with adversity efficiently and peacefully. "All of us deal with adversity differently," Webster says. "But then we all discuss the ways we deal with it so that we can try to alter our untactful means to get communication across. We learn from each other."

Through discussion and feedback, the team is able to solve problems both in the group and in themselves. "I rely on feedback to change my behaviors because I don't have a third-person perspective of my own actions," Webster says. "The team tells me what I'm doing wrong, and I try to manipulate my own behavior for the better."

They've also learned a great deal about what leadership should be, even though they each have a different idea of what the most vital trait of a student leader is.

"Consistency is the most important trait of a student leader," Simpson says. "Stepping up every time you have an opportunity to lead is important."

As Pallone says, "Self awareness and assertiveness are most important. You must know what you're capable of and assert yourself."

"This program has changed my life completely," Brown says. "After I joined the team, my participation in the classroom improved ten-fold. I actively spit out my opinions and ideas. In general, I learned how to use my life experiences to better the lives of others and myself." 🐾

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