

TRIP REPORT

Location: USACE Emerging Leaders/Senior Leaders Conference, 3-10 Aug. 2001, Chicago

NARRATIVE:

1. I was honored by my selection as one of 36 Emerging Leaders to attend the weeklong conference in Chicago. I wasn't quite sure what to expect when notified of my selection, knowing only that the focus would be on teaching me become a better leader and growing as a person. I was excited by the prospect of the training and the opportunity to spend part of the conference observing USACE senior leaders as they focused on ways to "Achieve the Vision."

2. ELC: The first four days of the conference were devoted to the "Emerging Leaders" portion as we attended the leadership workshop. Our work included team-building exercises, numerous psychological and personality tests as well as their interpretations, and information about different leadership styles and situational leadership. Each EL also developed an individual "Just Do It" plan, which described a specific action the EL will do to help achieve the USACE Vision. We also spent time preparing for a class project, which involved producing a booklet of the individual "Just Do It" plans, a small list of actions Senior Leaders need to take that will help USACE, as a whole, achieve the Vision, and three commercials, which discussed the three focus areas of the Vision – people, process and communication. Throughout the workshop, I found myself assessing my own actions, lack of action in some cases, and responses to leadership scenarios. The various tests and exercises helped me learn about my best leadership style, my effectiveness as a leader, identify salient behaviors and how I act in groups, and gave me pointers on how I can become better at what I do.

3. SLC: On Tuesday, 7 Aug., the "Senior Leaders" portion began as the two conferences merged into one, at least for that day. Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Robert Flowers stressed the importance of "all" leaders, both emerging and senior, to work together to achieve the Vision by making the Corps "a learning organization;" by implementing the Vision Campaign Plans; by making the Project Management Business Process a reality by October 2002; by telling our story better and engaging our critics as we learn to actively listen; and by embracing the notion that "leadership equals learning which leads to change." It was interesting to see the Senior Leaders interact with one another and with the Emerging Leaders. Luncheons and team-building events offered the Emerging Leaders an opportunity to sit down and meet Senior Leaders and to discuss issues of concern. Senior Leaders were interested in hearing our thoughts and asking our opinions. It was extremely interesting to hear Gen. Keane, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, discuss Transformation, but the highlight, for me, was the presentation by Michael Grunwald of *The Washington Post*. It was not so much what Mr. Grunwald had to say, but the fact that I thought I saw the light go on in a few eyes of some Senior Leaders and Emerging Leaders, for that matter, when he discussed how being upfront and open with the media from the beginning can have an impact on how the media covers the Corps. He reiterated what Public Affairs staff members have said all along, if you are open and honest with the media, you have a chance of getting a fair and balanced story, but if you leave a news vacuum, someone else, most likely your critics, will fill it. I think the fact that the Chief invited Mr. Grunwald to speak impressed quite a number of the Emerging Leaders – it demonstrated that the Chief definitely walks the talk.

RECOMMENDATION:

My No. 1 recommendation would be to integrate the Emerging Leaders even more into the Senior Leader workshop. On Thursday, there were a number of workshops and presentations that I thought would have been of great benefit to the Emerging Leaders, but we were busy working on our project.

CANDICE S. WALTERS
Public Affairs Specialist
CEPA-MP