

Chicago ELC/SLC Trip report:

I arrived at the Ambassador west hotel at 1500 hrs on August 3, 2001. As I was checking in, I met one of my fellow Emerging Leaders. We introduced ourselves, and went on to the OPS center to pick-up our ELC material. At the OPS center, I met Margaret Tindall-Fisher, for the first time. She informed us that there was to be a team meeting at 1630 hrs. Our team was the Red Team, and we met in the Gainsborough room. This is when I first met my fellow “Red Team” members. All of these people were complete strangers to me. Except for Mike Watson, whom I had met, very briefly at the MVD/ELP meeting in St. Louis, the previous week. At this point I was feeling a little apprehensive, because I was not sure what to expect, or for that matter, what was expected of me.

On the evening of the 3rd, we had our ELC icebreaker. We socialized for a period of time, then we were all asked to sit with our teams members. Dr. Nap DuFault took the floor, and introduced himself, and a few other key people, who had been instrumental in setting up the ELC. Afterward, we were given a box of materials. In the box, there were various items, such as, pipe cleaners, paper plates, paper cups, twine, construction paper, self-stick letters, numbers, and a paddleball. Our instructions were to build a product using only the material that we were given. Then we are to make up a commercial, to advertise, and sell the product. Finally, our team will act out the commercial for the entire group of ELCers. Then, of course we will all be judged, and a winner will be declared. Unfortunately our “Party Line” project did not win.

The first day of class, Nap DuFault, guaranteed us, that his class would be a life changing experience for us. I had my reservations.

Nap talked about himself, his various careers, his background, and his life experiences for the first hour. We learned about, qualities of a good leader, as well as, how & when to delegate work. That was followed by a discussion about Situational Leadership. One of the lessons here, was to treat each person according to the skill level that they exhibit. We did several exercises, each of which taught us a different lesson. One, for example, taught us that once trust is lost it is very hard to get back.

Before I came to the conference, all of my peers, and I, were asked to do an adjective inventory. During our 1st session I learned what that inventory had revealed, about how other people saw me, and how I saw myself. I found this to be very interesting, and quite accurate.

Each evening we were required to write in our journal, about the day’s happenings, and to impart a “Nugget of learning” from that day. One of mine was “do not impose upon yourself or others, any rules that do not exist”. This was reinforced by an exercise where our team acted as planners, and another team acted as implementers. Us planners read the rules of the game over and over, until we finally realized that it wasn’t the rules that were most important, it was actually the things that the rules didn’t say that meant the most. **We were imposing rules upon ourselves that didn’t exist.**

I have to say that Dr. DuFault was right on the money; for me his class was definitely a life changing experience! It made me look within myself, to become a more effective leader.

On Monday evening, August 6th we joined with the Senior Leaders at the National Awards Ceremony. It was great to see all the great work that is taking place around the

Corps. The thing that was most inspirational to me was the Park Ranger who had come upon an automobile accident, and helped to save 6 lives. This act exhibits the true dedication, and compassion of the Corps of Engineers.

The next day we joined the SLC in session. Colonel Robert Crears was the MC, and he introduced several speakers. Gen. Robert Flowers especially inspired me, when he spoke about, "Our Brothers & Sisters engaged around the world". He also said that, "Our leaders must not become complacent, we need to solve the people issues, and re-establish relationships with the current Administration, Congress, and the public". I believe that these things are key to the success of our organization. My feeling is that General Flowers has set the tone for future Leaders of the Corps of Engineers.

One of the things that stands out most, in my memory, is the Team Building Event at Navy Pier. At one point in the evening, everyone was ordered to get up on the dance floor, to do the slide. At first I wasn't sure what that meant, however it didn't take long to find out. The "Slide" is a line dance. I'm not much of a dancer myself, but I figured that if Gen. Flowers can do it, so can I. My two left feet quickly became painfully obvious, but I had great fun trying.

Finally, the last day came, and it was very hard to say goodbye to all of my new friends. Everyone was asked to sum up the conference in 3 words. Mine were Emotional, Enlightening, and Gratifying.

Essayons
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