

TRIP REPORT

Location: Corps ELC/SLC Conference, Chicago, IL (3-10 AUG 01)

Purpose of Visit: Attend Emerging Leaders Conference/Senior Leaders Conference 2001

Name of Attendees: Kim Gillespie, Huntsville Center (CEHNC) Public Affairs

Narrative:

My selection for the Emerging Leaders Conference came at a very good time. I became the Acting Public Affairs Officer at Huntsville Center in May, so I hoped that by attending the ELC, I would learn things to both improve and expand as a supervisor and as an employee.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect as far as what I (or we the ELC group) would be doing going into the Conference on Friday. We had been told to read and bring the strategic vision and campaign plan with us. We were also told to watch commercials and make notes about how the products were "sold" to an "audience."

I met my team (the six member Orange Team) that afternoon. We all seemed to have the same temperaments, which was a good sign. After the ice breaker our groups were asked to get together and make a product from a box of "materials" supplied to us and then sell the product with a commercial. Well, maybe this is where the commercial watching would help. Our group decided to make a dream catcher, or mobile for children. We had a lot of fun making it and our group was in agreement on all aspects of the product and commercial (uh oh!). When it came time to present, we were the only group whose product was not work related. Yes, my group was on the same sheet of music, but apparently it was the wrong sheet. Needless to say, we lost that competition.

Saturday was a new day, so I was sure that things would get better for our group. The information I received on Saturday is something I have taken back with me to the office. Understanding the leadership styles and how they are applied to the individual or situation made me realize where I needed to be. My nugget of learning for that day was "Lead not manage," and that is what I am now trying to accomplish. The group activity that evening was a scavenger hunt, and our team won! We redeemed ourselves!

Sunday we spent more time analyzing what our leadership styles and personalities can mean to our organization. I came to the realization that I need to work on being in control and delegating. I am way too willing to work independently. My nugget of learning for the day was "Leader is not a position." How true.

On Monday we did more exercises to see how we worked together with our group. These exercises were very good, because you look at how you contribute and move the

group, and what your strengths and weaknesses seem to be. I especially liked the project management exercise we did. This exercise involves prioritizing the steps of a project. Then your group does a “group” prioritization. I think the object was to score higher with the group than individually. Unfortunately, our group was the only group to do the opposite result. Two people had a good argument so we decided to do something “innovative” and used their idea. This exercise did confirm what I thought was one of my strengths—organization. Spending time with project managers has paid off! We also did a very difficult exercise where we had to assign pre-determined adjectives to other members of our group. It was tough, because many of the adjectives had a negative connotation. I think I learned this is where being a Public Affairs Specialist and having a facilitating skill can be very beneficial. I explained why I gave certain “negative” cards and this led to a very positive session. We all learned that maybe these “negatives” weren’t really negatives at all. My nugget of wisdom was “Knowing your negatives makes a positive!”

On Tuesday, the ELC was brought into the SLC. I began to see that what we were learning should be applied to LTG Flowers’ strategy and vision. LTG Flowers made it very clear, that while he knew where he wanted to take us, it was up to the “leaders” in the audience to get us there! I particularly liked his idea of “engaging a critic or negative situation.” This is where WE have to take responsibility, and yes, risks. Merging with the SLC also meant we were no longer using the smaller ELC teams. However, this was a good transition break for us to now become one ELC to support the SLC. On Tuesday night, I finished up my individual campaign plan. We were supposed to choose one of the strategies (people, process, communication) and prepare a plan that we could take back to our organization and implement over the next year. I actually came up with a plan for each. I decided to go with a “People” plan in order to help Huntsville Center achieve one of its organizational measures. Based on everything I had during the day, my nugget of learning was “Use your past and your present to make the future you want!”

On Wednesday we took our individual plans into the 36-member ELC group, and began our strategy for the ELC group presentation to the SLC on Friday. Working with 36 people is much more difficult than our six-member team group. Luckily, one of our members (Chuck Ford) took on the role of leader just to get things organized. He did a really good job. Based on this experience, my nugget of learning was “A larger organization can only operate through smaller groups.”

On Thursday, after Dr. Harback talked to us, things really came together about how we wanted to present our “recommendations” for achieving the vision and campaign plan strategies. We had broken out into multiple groups, and I chose to stick with the “People” strategy and then to focus on the commercial portion since that was my area of expertise. I really felt like a valuable team member. The “Communication” commercial group asked also asked me to advise them on their video. Our presentation would be fast-paced and entertaining, but all presentations had a serious message. We worked until after midnight, and it was one of the best learning experiences I’ve ever had. It was very much like doing my undergraduate and masters thesis presentations, but this was a group

effort! It all came together on Friday morning, and but I think the real learning was done on Thursday when we brought it all together. My nugget of learning: “Hard work and team work go hand-in-hand.

Conclusions/Recommendations:

Going into the ELC, I thought it might be limited to younger employees, but instead, the group consisted of anyone who has the potential to lead or make things happen in their organization. Everyone kept saying it was a life-changing experience, and it truly was. I have always wanted to do the best job I can in my field, by I learned different ways I can do this (and many involve trusting others to do these things). I also learned ways to help my organization become better as a whole, and that is what I truly want to achieve. I think the individual campaign plan I developed for Huntsville Center will help do that. I also plan to encourage others here at the Center to apply for the ELC next year, and to also encourage supervisors to nominate employees.

I will be providing the Huntsville Center leadership with copies of the ELC members’ recommendations for achieving our strategies and vision, and I will also be working on my individual campaign plan that is focused on recruitment of new employees, and is specifically designed to help Huntsville Center also meet its affirmative action goals.

The ELC is one of the best opportunities the Corps has to offer, and I want to make sure I get the word out about it. As a public affairs specialist, I’m probably in one of the best positions to make that happen!

/s/
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Public Affairs Specialist