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The Leading Institute

Leading from the Middle

2005 Course Evaluation Report
November 2005

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"This program has definitely raised my consciousness of the difference between managing and leading; it is challenging me to separate the busy work that makes me efficient from the kind of work I really need to do to be effective."

The Leading Institute: Leading from the Middle
COURSE EVALUATION REPORT
NOVEMBER 2005

The test of any training and development program is whether it influences the way participants think about a subject, causes participants to change their behavior, and leads to some meaningful impacts. By these measures, The Leading Institute passed the test. *Leading from the Middle* (formerly APA/LeadershipPlenty) changed the understanding most participants had about leadership – and about what they need to do to be leaders. Most of the participants said they used their learning to communicate more effectively, manage conflict, or otherwise influence their colleagues, supervisors or peers. Several were already starting to see some impacts from these behaviors.

This report is drawn from the course evaluations of the *Leading from the Middle* program, between January and September 2005. Nineteen of 29 graduates of the program completed the course evaluation. It appears that all members of the class received some benefits from the program, but the type of benefits – and their impacts – were as diverse as the students themselves. This is not surprising; in a course that deals with at least 10 distinct subjects, students are going to be drawn to different subjects.

To provide some examples of how *Leading from the Middle* impacted participants and their work:

- Participants said they used what they learned in the program in training or to solve problems more effectively, to communicate more effectively, to manage conflict, to better address diversity issues, manage meetings better, and identify partners.
- Several participants said they have already started to see impacts from their new experiences. These impacts include being more influential in their organizations; being more proactive in resolving problems; getting clearer perceptions or new perspectives on issues; and having more productive relationships with supervisors, colleagues and constituents.
- Several participants said they approached and resolved problems differently after going through *Leading from the Middle*. These include “persuading” instead of “selling”, seeking to understand sources of resistance rather than blaming others for their unwillingness to agree; promoting collaborative leadership within organizations; and using systems thinking to better analyze problems.

Participants also reported receiving a number of other benefits from the program, including: reduced stress, joining a network of peers, more confidence, having new tools, and more “open-mindedness.”

The positive comments far outnumbered the negative comments. However, some participants wanted more time between sessions to review materials, and some felt that the initial sessions were not organized as efficiently as could be.

BACKGROUND

Leading from the Middle is a unique leadership development program. It is the only program designed for mid-career and mid-level professionals in community development and urban planning, and the only one that combines training workshops with executive coaching. Training sessions covered issues such as: leading without formal authority, powers of groups and communities, conflict management, meeting management, group dynamics, values-based planning, cost-efficient evaluation, and managing the challenges of diversity. Each *Leading from the Middle* Fellow who completed a minimum number of training sessions was matched with a coach – an executive- or senior-level professional – who worked with the Fellow for at least two months. (Coaches receive training in The Leading Institute’s *Executive Class* program.)

In 2005, *Leading from the Middle* served 31 professionals in the community development and urban planning fields. The two classes were in New York, NY, at New School University; and New Brunswick, NJ, at Rutgers University. The 2005 class is diverse. Members represent the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and range in level from project managers to directors of small organizations. The Fellows live or work in a wide area of the New York metropolitan region. The following chart shows the diversity of the 2005 Fellows:

APA/LeadershipPlenty 2005 Class Characteristics		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Number	Percent ¹
White non-Hispanic	14	45%
Black non-Hispanic	9	29%
Hispanic	5	16%
Asian-American	3	10%
Native American	0	0%
<i>Gender</i>		
Women	22	71%
Men	9	29%
<i>Age</i>²		
18-24	1	3%
25-34	12	39%
35-44	6	19%
45-54	9	29%
55+	2	6%

¹ Percentages may exceed 100% due to rounding

² One Fellow did not respond to this question.

APA/LeadershipPlenty 2005 Class Characteristics		
<i>Sector (industry) of work</i>	Number	Percent
Government (<i>type</i>)	13	42%
<i>State</i>	2	
<i>Local</i>	8	
<i>Regional or quasi-governmental</i>	3	
Private sector and independent	4	13%
Non-profit (<i>industry</i>)	14	45%
<i>Funding</i>	2	
<i>Faith-based</i>	2	
<i>Community organizing</i>	1	
<i>Education and technical assistance</i>	2	
<i>Community and economic development</i>	7	
<i>Other nonprofit</i>	2	
<hr/>		
Practicing urban planner (or trained in planning)	13	42%
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Total Enrollment, 2005	31	100%

METHODOLOGY

The course evaluation instrument was given out to all 29 of the participants who graduated from the program. Two other participants withdrew from the program, but plan to join it again in 2006. The course evaluations were distributed at the final class on September 30, and to the participants who could not attend the final class. All of the participants had attended at least seven of the 10 training sessions, and most had completed their coaching assignments, by the time they filled out their course evaluation. None of the participants had received training in managing diversity when they were asked to evaluate the course.

The evaluation consisted of 15 questions based on a five-point Likert scale, eight open-ended questions, and a chart asking participants to list the positive and negative aspects of the program. The Likert scale questions measure changes in the participants' knowledge base from before the program started to the time of the evaluation. The open-ended questions are designed to discover whether the program caused cognitive shifts (i.e., new ways of thinking), behavioral changes (i.e., new ways of acting), and positive impacts from these changes. The open-ended questions, which are the focus of this report, include:

- How has this program changed the way you think about leadership?
- How have you used the training you received from the APA/LeadershipPlenty program?
- How have you approached or resolved a problem differently from the way you would have before the program?
- What impacts, if any, have you seen from applying what you learned from the APA/LeadershipPlenty material?
- What did you find most beneficial about the APA/LeadershipPlenty program?

- What did you find least beneficial about the APA/LeadershipPlenty program?
- What additional benefits have you gained from this program?

WHAT THEY SAID: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

The best way to demonstrate the benefit and impact of *Leading from the Middle* is to let the participants speak for themselves. The following consists of quotes taken from course evaluations. To save space, similar comments made by more than one participant are paraphrased. The number to the right refers to the amount of participants making this or a similar comment. (*These comments are italics*)

Note: The surveys were submitted confidentially. There were a few instances of participants listing more than one answer to a question. However, no participant listed more than three answers.

How has this program changed the way you think about leadership?

- *I understand how to lead from the middle/ I understand the powers of non-traditional leaders* (7 responses) Examples:
 - “My perception of leadership has evolved exponentially. I formally considered leadership to require ‘front-end’ leadership.”
 - “Before I assumed that all leaders had... a certain stereotype: charismatic, energetic. Now I realize that all people have the potential to be leaders in different ways and that there are different kinds of leadership.”
 - “I now understand that your position is just one of many factors that can empower you to lead.”
- *I understand the value of collaborative leadership* (3) Example:
 - “That it’s not just about the strong person taking the reins – it’s about having everyone contribute and feel that they are part of the process.”
- *I understand the difference between leadership and management* (2) Example:
 - “This program has definitely raised my consciousness of the difference between managing and leading; it is challenging me to separate the busy work that makes me efficient from the kind of work I really need to do to be effective.”
- “It has been wonderful in the sense that it has not only brought in fresh perspectives, but also references concepts that were fading or lying dormant in my memory.”
- I am “more thoughtful about resistance.”
- I “understand the importance of conflict resolution to leadership.”
- I am more confident in “the delegation of authority.”
- I recognized my “lack of leadership skills.”

How have you used the training you received from the APA/LeadershipPlenty program?

- *Improve communication with supervisors, colleagues or clients* (4) Example:
 - “In all aspects, I have begun to identify opportunities to let go of older paradigms and allow/encourage leadership to emerge from the well spring of resources that exist in business and community relationships. I have

become a better listener and have learned to ask better questions to surface true needs versus pre-conceived needs.”

- *Training and (unspecified) problem solving* (3) Example:
 - “On the job, the program’s principles and tools have been useful for pushing an agenda forward and for working more productively with colleagues.”
- *Manage conflict* (3) Example:
 - “I’ve learned how to evaluate the different styles of the way people contribute/work and how best to respond to them.”
- “Better meeting management”
- “Gave me confidence”
- “Identify who would be a good partner”
- “Dealing with diversity”
- “Validates (my) existing actions”

How have you approached or resolved a problem differently from the way you would have before the program?

- *I am better able to manage conflict and resistance* (4) Examples:
 - “I have approached current, unforeseen, challenges quite differently than I have in the past... I have encouraged (senior-level staff) to allow us to open dialogues with stakeholders and seek viable solutions.”
 - “I approached certain challenges more strategically, looking for appropriate partners and pathways to support (efforts).”
 - “I take the time to listen, to not take for granted the importance of following up and making people feel that I have their best interest in mind – that they can trust me.”
- “I was afraid of being marginalized by a new program at my work, but I was able to keep myself relevant by making the goals of my program central to the new program.”
- “I have thought about my ‘powers’ before responding to a specific problem.”
- “I persuade instead of sell”
- “I identify influence hubs and strategic partnerships”
- “I use systems thinking to understand the relationships of problems to each other”
- I “Promoted collaborative leadership within organization”
- I have “become more influential”

What impacts, if any, have you seen from applying what you learned from the APA/LeadershipPlenty material?

- *Not sure/Too soon to tell* (3)
- It has “strengthened my role as an influence hub”
- “It has made me confident in my ability to lead regardless of what situation I am placed in.”
- “I am able to take a fresh perspective on problems that seem (at face value) too tangled to unravel.”

- “I have been able to use my personal powers to influence the traditional leaders in my organization, to improve my work environment.”
- “People are more receptive to my ideas when they are communicated differently.”
- “I am more proactive in resolving work problems – be it troubleshooting an issue for a specific client or devising an action plan to achieve personal goals.”

What did you find most beneficial about the APA/LeadershipPlenty program?

- *Peer coaching* (3) Example:
 - “Peer coaching and the exercises associated with each lesson; the roundtable with fellows from the previous class.”
- *Coaching* (2)
- *Materials, reading* (2)
- “Open dialogue”
- “People”
- “Structure”
- “Leo’s expertise”
- “An opportunity to reflect crucially on my (organizational) challenges through this, plus excellent coaching”
- “I was exposed to many things I have never given much thought to before – especially in reading people and the most positive ways to deal with them.”

What additional benefits have you gained from this program?

- *Network of peers* (5) Example:
 - “A network of peers; an opportunity to learn about planning issues in New York and New Jersey.”
 - “I’ve met a group of people from all different backgrounds who are all very bright and dedicated. It’s very heartening.”
- “Open minded-ness, less need to ‘lead’ from the front, reduced stress!”
- “I feel more confident and connected.”
- “It’s given me a toolbox, and it’s helped me realize how much work I have to do as a professional and what direction I am to go in the future.”
- “I really gained true skills with tangible results.”
- “A newfound appreciation for developing my leadership skills to a new level.”

Additional positives of the program cited by participants

- *Diversity of students is refreshing/ different from most of the situations I’m in* (5)
- *Open dialogue/ opportunity to discuss issues* (4)
- *Excellent curriculum/ structure* (4)
- *Good networking opportunities* (4)
- *The tools/reading materials/references* (4)
- *Quality of Instruction* (3)
- *The sessions covered a broad group of topics/ interesting topics* (3)
- *Open discussion to real-life situations/ ability to bring real life examples to the class work* (2)
- *Website/ online network forum* (2)

- *Practical exercises in each module (2)*
- *Peer coaching was very useful (2)*
- *Coaching (2)*
- “Strong team of program directors/coaches”
- “Non-traditional view of leadership development”
- “Class is casual, so you don’t feel intimidated to speak up”
- “A non-planner can benefit from the principles given; they really can apply to almost any type of work/relationship situation”
- “Schedule and length of sessions”
- “Group dynamics was great”
- “I want all my staff members to participate”
- “Academic structure, yet practical approach”
- “Great leadership”
- “Leo really cares about his students and their progress”
- “The program is evolving”
- “Different perspectives on existing problems”
- “Program design”
- “Supportive environment”
- “Leadership skills make a difference”
- “Knowledge of planning models”
- “Exposure to community development issues”
- Give language to leadership ideas

PROBLEMS, ISSUES AND AREAS TO BE ADDRESSED IN FUTURE CLASSES

The positive comments far outnumbered the negative ones. However, there appear to be some areas that The Leading Institute can address or improve on in future programs:

What did you find least beneficial about the APA/LeadershipPlenty program?

- *Not enough time to complete all materials (2)*
- “Instructor needed to reign people in when they talked for too long”
- “Perhaps the coaching would have started a bit early – say the middle of the program”
- “Short time frame of class; lack of organization at beginning of program”
- “The theory in the beginning without any practicing of its application.”
- “Session time – Saturdays can be tough”
- “I thought the support staff could have been more diligent in confirming students’ RSVP to the graduation”

Negatives

- *There was a lot of material to cover but not enough time; therefore it seemed like we crammed a lot (3)*
- *Getting materials to students in a timely manner (2)*
- *Online resource underused (2)*
- *Lack of structure initially (2)*

- “Sometimes incomplete discussion of issues”
- “Notice of last meeting given too late”
- “Limiting long-winded rants”
- “Somewhat scattered”
- “Often behind schedule”
- “Class and meeting times sometimes difficult to attend”
- “Should use more outside materials”
- “Would like more trip and research/ field opportunity”
- “The curriculum doesn’t have a formal mechanism for integrating the concepts in our day-to-day professional experience”
- “Coaching started too late”
- “There were no workshops”
- “Not accessible communication (i.e., online forum not always available)”
- “Did not connect with the group as much as I would have liked”
- “Difficult to make time for homework”
- “Must bring in other experts”
- “Too long between sessions; too difficult to retain information”
- “Seemed to be spread out over too much time”
- “Would have liked more case studies/ problem solving”
- “Saturday meeting time”

CONCLUSION

The course evaluation shows that *Leading from the Middle* provided participants with knowledge and skills that they were able to apply in their work. But it also revealed some areas of weaknesses in the program delivery. Some of these problems were not a surprise – the program was evolving and changing during the course. These resulted in the instructor’s difficulty in getting materials to students quickly and keeping to the written schedule. The Leading Institute board has already begun to address many of these issues.

- Students will receive all of their course materials at least two weeks before the beginning of class, or as soon as possible if they register within two weeks of class.
- After a wholesale change of the program in 2005, there will be minor modifications in 2006. Any major changes will be implemented in later years.
- TLI is seeking to hire a part-time program manager to streamline administrative procedures. Because of budget constraints, TLI has relied mostly on graduate students working 10 hours a week or less. Though the students were capable and did exceptional work, they had to fit TLI around their academic schedules.
- There will be more opportunities for TLI Network members to connect with each other, in person and online. TLI board now has a member who is dedicated to community building within the TLI Network. In July and August, 2006, we are planning networking events to allow past and current Fellows and Coaches to meet and build relationships.