Lorena Roberts

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Reigniting and Refining

Leadership is often thought of in a way that closely resembles tyranny. Many people think of leadership as one person being in charge of a group of people, making key decisions that may (or may not be) what’s best for the group, depending on what leader comes to mind. However, in “Leadership Lessons from Teamwork,” researchers DeAngelis, Penney, and Scully investigate and study the seven leadership skills that can be acquired and improved through teamwork. They focus on the following seven skill areas: ambiguity, leading without position, reflection, areas outside expertise, collaboration, networking, and comfortability with diversity. In order to be an effective leader, all seven of these skill areas are greatly needed. As these three researchers have found, these skill sets can be greatly improved through the application of teamwork.

At The University of Tennessee, we have a great deal of organizations, and within each of these organizations, are a number of “leaders,” as defined by the title they are given. However, not all of these individuals possess stellar skills in the previously mentioned skill areas. In fact, I would say that this campus could greatly benefit from more of an emphasis on teamwork. It is my vision that one day this campus becomes as collaborative, comfortable, reflective, and flexible as possible in regard to campus leadership.

One way we have already started to implement teamwork is through the creation of SGA’s Q&A forum. Members of our Student Government Association are holding question and answer sessions with various campus organization leaders in order to begin tackling the problems we are facing. By collaborating with each other and being open to hearing one another’s concerns, we are using teamwork to become better student leaders.

However, I think our campus could benefit even more from taking SGA’s idea and implementing it in a way that reaches every campus leader across campus. My proposal for *Reignition* is based off the structure created by SGA. *Reignition* is a three-day retreat, designed to aid our organizational leaders in these seven skill areas. Optional, though highly encouraged, *Reignition* will focus on refining the leadership skills of leaders throughout campus. This will also provide them with an opportunity to collaborate with each other and network in order to better each of their organizations.

The University of Tennessee needs something like *Reignition* because one of the things campus leaders complain about the most is that too many organizations are trying to tackle the same problem. As of right now, the options that are in place for collaboration across campus relies on the effort of the individual. We do not necessarily provide an environment to spark this collaboration and networking among our organizations.

A retreat like *Reignition* would allow our campus leaders to learn how to reflect. Arguably one of the most important aspects of leadership, reflecting on the work you have done and brainstorming where you want to go should be a part of every leadership training. Our campus would greatly benefit from having more training in this area.

As well as reflection, The University of Tennessee also needs to improve their comfortability with diversity. As we have mentioned in our Emerging Leaders class, diversity means one simple thing: different. At The University of Tennessee, we claim to be friendly to all and hostile to none, but there are individuals that are members of our campus that would say we do not hold true to that claim. Our organizational leaders are students who spend some of the most time with the general population of our campus; therefore, there should not be any roadblocks between them and how they handle diversity. Being comfortable with people who are different than you comes from experiences, which is exactly what a retreat like *Reignition* would do.

In conclusion, every student at The University of Tennessee would agree with the fact that our campus leaders need improvement (after all, improvement is always necessary, isn’t it?). Leadership in general should always be an area that people are constantly working to better within themselves. *Reignition* is an idea that stems from what SGA has already created in order to refine leadership skills that are some of the most important. Researchers DeAngelis, Penney, and Scully have studied how leadership can be improved through teamwork, which is exactly what would be mission to accomplish during an intensive workshop/retreat like *Reignition*.

Works Cited

DeAngelis, L., Penney, S. and Scully, M. (2014), Leadership Lessons From Teamwork. Leader to Leader, 2014: 19–25.