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Explore Leadership

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Final Paper

This semester, the overall goal of the Explore Leadership seminar was to see how leadership is used to affect social change using John Lewis’s *Walking with the Wind* and selections from Barbara Kellerman’s *Leadership* and then apply the ideas learned to an organization of our choosing. The major topics discussed were leadership theories and styles, followership, group dynamics, and creating social movements. To me, the most interesting aspect of leadership we discussed was the role of followers in social movements. Leaders are the ones who recognize an issue, awaken the preexisting passion for a cause in others, and then guide the social movement, but the followers are the ones who give the social movement the power and authority to create social change.

Before the seminar, I looked at social change as the product of the people who organize and lead the movement. I have never felt like to be a leader, I had to take an active leadership role where I am involved with making every decision; instead, I like to make a difference by supporting the efforts of others. However, while applying to various programs and scholarships, a large emphasis is placed on more active leadership roles. I have tried to take on more active leadership roles, but due to my more quieter personality, it does not work very well. Reading about leadership theories and styles in which the leader acts as a guiding hand and the power of the individual has allowed me to reaffirm that it is fine to take a more supportive leadership role. One can have just as much impact guiding others and being a part of what is considered the followers as one who is in the front making all the decisions.

The organization that I became involved with was the pet program at the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati (IHNGC). I have always liked animals, and I used to volunteer at an animal shelter. One of the reasons some of the dogs and cats end up in animal shelters is that owners are not able to care for them because they no longer have a home or enough money. Such cases are unfortunate for both the owner and the pet because the owner must give up a cherished companion while the pet is placed into unfamiliar and uncomfortable surroundings until a new home can be found. The purpose of IHNGC’s pet program is to allow people in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky’s emergency shelters to keep their pets until they can properly care for them once again. IHNGC provides food, shelter, and medication to the pets while helping the owners find a job and a home that accepts pets.

The pet program is made possible by volunteers. One of the issues with animal shelters is that the dogs and cats spend most of the time in fairly small kennels with limited exercise. The opportunity to come out of the kennels depends on the availability of volunteers to take them out which is not always regular. At IHNGC, volunteers regularly come in three to four times a day to feed the animals and take them on walks in addition to any time when the owners themselves can stop by to spend time with their pets. Without the volunteers, the pets would spend all their time in small kennels with limited human interaction, which is not fair to them. In this way, the power of the individuals to support and make an organization possible is shown.

When I first volunteered, I noticed that a lot of the volunteers were only there for about an hour, but I ended up volunteering for over two hours. I volunteered during the afternoon, so I made sure that the dogs and cats still had food and water and had time out of their kennels. Throughout the semester, there were usually three to four dogs and four to seven cats at IHNGC at a time. For the dogs, I made sure their food and water bowls were full and their kennels clean. I would let them play in the fenced-in area before taking them on a walk around the neighborhood so that they could see new people and places. The dogs were always excited and ready to go when they saw the leash; one dog was so excited about going out he would open the door out of the kennel room on his own as soon as he saw the leash. The walks were the highlight of the dogs’ day. For the cats, I would check their food and water bowls and clean their litter boxes and kennels. I would then play with them in the cat room or just pet them if they did not want to play.

Each visit, I tried to make sure that each cat and dog had at least 15 minutes outside of their kennel. The morning and evening volunteers mainly focused on giving each pet food and water and allowing them to go to the bathroom which is why they were there for only an hour to one and a half hours. From my own experience with my pets, I know how much dogs and cats do not like to be cooped up in a kennel, so I wanted to allow each dog and cat to have as much time as possible outside of their kennels which influenced how much time I spent per visit.

One of the major events during the semester is that two weeks ago, the cats contracted upper respiratory infections. All the cats were sneezing and lethargic. Both the cats and their kennels were covered in snot, and one kennel even had blood on the walls. One thing I noticed while volunteering is that the cat kennels always needed at least some cleaning. I usually sweep the kennels and clean the litter boxes, but when I saw how bad their cages had gotten due to the infection, I also sanitized the kennels and replaced the food bowls, water bowls, and towels in the kennels.

Volunteers are not monitored while interacting with the animals. They are given a quick thirty-minute orientation and then are left to use their own judgement in caring for the animals during their shifts. Because they are not monitored, volunteers have the opportunity to step up in the leadership department by taking extra measures to make sure the pets are as comfortable as possible beyond the simple food, water, and bathroom necessities. As already mentioned, I like to play my part in an organization by supporting the cause to the best of my own abilities, which is how I can display my own leadership skills. It was the little things such as cleaning the kennels both when the cats were sick and in general that I was able to support the program, the pets, and my fellow volunteers. As the program coordinator likes to always mention, any little bit of cleaning that volunteers do reduces the work other volunteers later in the day and week have to do.

The overall goal of volunteers like me is to care for the dogs and cats until their owners can take them back. We were not involved with finding homes and jobs for the owners, which meant our knowledge of the status of the owners was limited to the length of time the pets were at IHNGC. Out of the original three dogs that were there in late August, only one remains. One of the three was taken home just this week, and three other dogs came into the program and left during the semester. There were also three cats originally in the program in August, and only one of the three remains. More than ten cats entered the program over the semester, with five of them going to a shelter and being adopted within a few days, one unfortunately dying, and two being fostered. In addition to the one cat who remains, there are still three other cats still in the program.

The stay of the pets lasted anywhere from a few weeks to months. While many of the animals go home within a few weeks to one or two months, there are a decent number of them who are in the program for three or more months. While the pets who are there the longest have adjusted to living in their kennels, one cannot help but feel bad for them because they have been there so long. For example, the dog that went home just this week entered the program at four months old and left four months later, which means that she spent half of her life in the program. While she was adjusted to her kennel, she essentially grew up in that kennel and she was not able to properly use all of her energy. While volunteers like me cannot control the status of the owners’ home and job search, we can make sure that the stay of the pets is as comfortable as possible. During my time at IHNGC, I focused on supporting the animals themselves, making sure that they had clean kennels, full food and water bowls, and a decent amount of time to be outside their kennels while having someone’s individual attention.