

June 28-30, 2019

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*This June, I was able to attend the We LEAD summit in Atlanta, GA. Over the course of three unforgettable days, I and 30 other swimmers from around the States were taught about the main components of a leader and what it means to be one—what leaders do, how they do it, and why they do it.*

On the first day, participants listened to a presentation that set up the foundation for the rest of the summit: *The Three Primary Colors of a Leader*. Included with the primary colors was white, as a little something extra. Blue, the most important color of all, stood for character; yellow represented perspective, red became courage, and white portrayed favor. Character, we learned, is what enables a leader to do the hard things. It is everything unseen below the tip of the iceberg, and holds a much greater significance than talent. Perspective is the ability to see the bigger picture. Rather than focus on personal short-term goals, leaders aim to achieve long-term goals that bring benefits not only themselves, but their team. With perspective, they also have a higher awareness of the impact of their actions on others—again, the effect on the bigger picture. Courage allows leaders to step forward and take risks. It embodies the willingness to be the first to do something and the strength to do what is right (even in the face of resistance). Often, courage means making the difficult decisions. White, or favor, is a leader's capacity to inspire other people to join the cause. Simply put, it instigates others'

support of the leader and his or her mission. Favor is often one of the deciding factors of greatness because a leader without followers is just one person.

While at the summit, participants also learned about team culture and what it means. Fundamentally, team culture is all the characteristics that define a team. Take, for example, a local PNS swim team. What do the members do, or how do they act? What do they say to each other? What are the team's core values and beliefs? How does the team work? Every single team or organization has a culture that is unique to only them. These distinctive aspects culminate in a cultural torchbearer, or in other words an individual that represents every part of the group. A torchbearer, which closely resembles a leader, is not always the person in the front and center. Cultural torchbearers do not have to be the best, or the fastest, or the strongest—the only requirements are that he or she embodies what it means to be a part of that specific team and works to make everyone on it, and the team as a whole, better.

Lastly came the brief lesson on what leadership is like. Leaders, because they have the responsibility of making the difficult decisions and doing the hard things, will at times be seen as the “bad guy” or bossy and finicky. It is inevitable, and part of the job. In the end, the leaders are the ones constantly and selflessly sacrificing their own aims and ambitions for the good of the team. Even with their sacrifices, however, leaders often linger behind-the-scenes, without acknowledgement and out of the spotlight, to keep the rest of the metaphorical show running.

*One of the most important lessons I learned from this summit is that everyone has the power to take who they are as a person into their own hands. I am not the best version of myself, but I can consciously choose to try to be. I may not be a leader right now, but I can consciously choose to work towards becoming one. I have the ability to take my thoughts, my ideas, my plans—and act on them. I do not have to wait for fate, or for someone to do things for me. I can do it myself. To make things happen,*

*you have to act, or else your ideas are just ideas and nothing more. In closing, described above are the game-changing things I learned that transformed the way I think about my abilities, and they can be applied not just in swimming but all aspects of life, as well.*