

Cowan-Turner Program in Servant Leadership Reflections from Sponsored Projects

**North America Conference, Philadelphia
Georgia Tech MBA Net Impact Club
Fall 2008**

With the support of the Cowan Turner Servant Leadership Funds, eleven members of the Net Impact Club were able to attend the Net Impact North America Conference in Philadelphia. The generous grant made it possible for such a large number to represent the College of Management.

The conference was an extremely beneficial experience as it provided an avenue to meet other students interested and involved in the causes of corporate social responsibility and sustainability. More than two thousand people attended the conference. We heard from leaders such as John Brock, CEO of Coca Cola Enterprise, Carter Roberts, CEO of World Wildlife Fund, Kate Roberts, Founder of YouthAIDS International, John Wood, Founder of Room to Read and Mark Kistler, Senior Vice President of Sustainability at Wal-Mart. Collectively we attended more than 50 breakout sessions on topics ranging from Ethical Globalization to Leading Sustainable Change at the Workplace. From those speakers we learned that their communication of their intentions and persistence in reaching for their goals were just as important as the issues they championed.

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the trip was the ability to interact with hundreds of other MBA students with similar aspirations and varying inspirations. Other insights of the conference were the new tools and strategies proposed to us at the conference.

In attending the conference, we were exposed to many different ideas, styles and stories about leadership. What left the greatest impact was that the leaders we heard from started out as regular people. The leaders did not wait for an established group or leader to adopt their cause. By taking action, they drew attention to their idea and were able to gain support of others. This led to the realization that significant change can come from regular people. Their success was determined by their perseverance, commitment to the cause and their ability to serve others through their leadership.

Attending the 2008 Net Impact Conference was a fantastic experience that has made our Net Impact Club stronger and will enable our club to better serve the College of Management.

Habitat for Humanity in Jordan
Bill Bridgers
Summer 2008

Without funding from the Bradley Turner Servant Leadership Fund, I could not have had the most meaningful experience of my life. When I was asked if I would like to travel to Amman, Jordan to not only work with Habitat for Humanity, but to use a skill I have been developing over the past few years- running cars on waste fryer oil- I was floored. I did not fully grasp that I was on the verge of the opportunity of a lifetime, but was determined to make the trip anyway. The only things that stood in my way were my own weak faith and lack of monetary funds. Thanks to the Bradley Turner Servant Leadership Fund and guidance from Bob Thomas, these two obstacles were overcome.

Arriving in Jordan with no clear idea of what to expect, I tried to be ready for anything. I was not prepared, however, for the shock that came the very first day, when I was told by my only legitimate contact, Philip Griffith, he had resigned from his position as Director of Habitat for Humanity in Jordan. From that point on, my world was turned upside down. I came to Jordan expecting to have a relatively simple experience, to convert some cars to vegetable oil and deal with the associated problems, but did not realize that the course to fulfill this mission would change abruptly and often. Instead of working with Habitat for Humanity, I worked closely with Philip on a variety of projects.

Philip did not lose much time getting back to work after he left Habitat. He was already in the process of starting a for-profit community development company in Amman. One of the main underlying principles of this new company was that it must be integrated. For example, if the goal was to help improve the quality of life of people in a community, one could not simply give only discounted housing and expect that to be adequate. Rather, the community needs sustainable trade, schooling and after-school programs for its children, and access to healthcare-- to name but a small few. Philip desires to meet these needs not by focusing on one specific mission, but by creating an organization that integrates them into a system in order to truly meet all of the people's needs as they develop and become freer, more self sufficient individuals.

I worked with Philip on several initiatives for this company, entitled Entity Green. I helped create a recycling model for the large hotels in Amman, specifically the Sheraton. From taking pictures of recycling areas in the bowels of the hotel to negotiating a memorandum of understanding with the Sheraton's General Manager, I was involved in every aspect of the creation. The model we developed would simultaneously provide up to ten jobs per hotel and revolutionize the state of recycling in Amman. The hotels also produced waste fryer grease from their restaurants. I used this

oil to run a truck that we obtained from a local non-profit organization. The truck, which I converted to run on free fuel, could be used to transport the recyclable material to the site Entity Green had planned to make its recycling facility, since there was not a recycling center in Amman.

Entity Green was also a construction company for underprivileged families. If the individuals who purchased a house from Eternity Green did not already have a stream of income, they could work at the recycling facility converting recyclables into raw materials. In this manner the initiatives to accomplish the goal of simply helping people became integrated.

This trip was completely made possible by the Bradley Turner Servant Leadership Fund. While I was in Jordan, I learned much about Servant Leadership. I felt like a servant leader in the sense that I was in Jordan leading others on a topic I knew much about—vegetable oil—but the whole reason I went was to serve others with this knowledge. I imparted this knowledge—with Philip's translation—to a group of Jordanians in the hope that they can replicate the concrete model I left them and become freer more independent persons in this world. What makes a Servant Leader different is that he/she's sole reason for leading is to serve others—not his or herself.

Alternative Break Learning Experience Spring 2008

Thanks to generous funding from the Bradley-Turner Servant Leadership Fund, 9 Georgia Tech students spent 5 days lending able hands to the recovery efforts of St. Bernard Parish as part of the Alternative Break Learning Experience (ABLE). Of the metro New Orleans parish, this parish consistently lags behind all the others in terms of recovery. For example, only 40% of their population has returned, compared to 78% in Orleans parish. But St. Bernard, also known as, “Da Parish” is determined to re-build, and we were happy to be a part of this process.

Each day a mix of engineering, biology, management, and economics students took to rebuilding houses. We measured and hung dry wall, mudded holes, sanded, painted, and cleaned backyards. In true Georgia Tech spirit, the students worked with great diligence and determination while having a helluva good time. As they accomplished their tasks I noticed their individual leadership skills in action, effective communication, encouragement, support, teaching, and a boldness to learn and do new things. In total, the group hung dry wall in 3 rooms, prepared 8 rooms for painting, cleaned two backyards, painted the interior of 1 house, and worked on maintenance tasks at the church where we ate our meals.

In addition to service, what makes ABLE unique is the group discussion time at the end of each work day. Upon reflection amidst a sloth like recovery, a clear concept emerged. This concept is one long debated, and perhaps one of the greatest of our country: In the contract that we have entered into between us and the state, what is our role? What should we expect to have provided for us and what should we as active members of a community take responsibility for? We agreed that as tax-paying citizens we are entitled to certain services and public goods. But as we have witnessed through Katrina, local, state, and federal agencies can be surprisingly insufficient and irresponsible in times of crisis and their aftermaths. In these instances, we came to the conclusion that individuals of the community must emerge as servant leaders to take on what institutions cannot and have not accomplished. Indeed, this is the story of recovery in much of the gulf. Leaders from all over the country have established non-profits coordinating work, volunteers, and doing research all with the goal of recovery.

At the conclusion of our work the students provided the following comments on servant leadership:

“As Georgia Tech students, we are servant leaders. This learning experience to St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, has allowed us to practice servant leadership, we were able

to use our respective skills, knowledge, and hands to better the community of St. Bernard Parish.”

“Servant leadership distinguishes “great” leaders from “good” leaders. In my opinion, my Georgia Tech peers and I are ready to go back to our respective communities and become these great leaders.”

“Servant leadership shows how much a leader cares about their community, servant leaders are not chosen. They emerge in a crisis situation and put forth an honest effort to lead their community and our successful at it.”

“Servant leaders are those who are willing to sacrifice personal gain and possibly even respect in order to serve the community and stand up for what they know is right. With the example of the self-sacrifice they encourage others to do the same.”

“Servant leadership is different than the traditional form of leadership because it’s more of a building process, not necessarily for the “born” leaders, but for those that need a little experience to better understand the responsibilities of being in charge of others. Going into the community and serving others can inspire those “servants” to motivate those around them and promote understanding of what it takes to be a true leader.”

“Servant leaders are those that use what they have and know to make their communities a better place. I feel as Georgia Tech students, we hold inside an extra drive and focus that can and will inspire others to themselves be servant leaders.”