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Let's Reflect.

Director's Dialogue -Dr. Hannah Carter, Program Director

Class X. Every time I write that I pause—Class X—how can that be? I came into the Wedgworth fold halfway through Class IV and was in awe of Dr. Trotter when he completed Class V. And now we are on Class X? That means that this marks the beginning of my fifth Wedgworth class. I am almost to Gene Trotter numbers—how can that be? Where do the years go? But it's time to turn our attention to the present and the future and focus on the group of individuals who are comprising the "X" of the WLI.

It always amazes me how on Day 1 of leadership programming everyone gets out of their car at the parking lot of Camp McConnell and nervously looks around—"Who are these people?," "Why am I here?," "Am I really going to have to climb a telephone pole?," "How am I going to remember everyone's name—when do we get a nametag?" And by the time we wrap up the day, the laughter and conversation among the group is that of old friends, of people who have known each other for years, not just hours. What also amazes me is that the process of choosing a WLI class continually works—we take 30 individuals and really focus on many facets of diversity—but in the end, these individuals form a cohesive unit and Class X did not disappoint in this formation.

People (mostly alumni) always ask me when a new class has begun "how are they?" or "how'd they do?" With this class, my answer has been "I'm in awe", and here is why. This class gets that they have been chosen, that

"Some journeys don't have endings, they lead to new beginnings." Alex Haditaghi

there are high expectations placed upon them and that they cannot and will not disappoint the people who have provided this opportunity to them. With that, programming becomes a bit easier as they are there ahead of schedule, technology is not a distraction and they are engaged learners.

We cannot and will not rest on our laurels when it comes to the program itself. Several changes have been implemented in programming for Class X. The biggest being is that seminars now begin on Tuesdays in the morning. This has been a huge mind shift for me—and at one point I did realize that even though we began a day later, I was trying to put in as much content as a traditional Monday start. So we have some things to iron out, but I think this may be a beneficial switch to programming. In addition, we have added a storytelling component to this class, during this seminar, class members told their leadership story—and they were amazing. This will be woven throughout their two year experience as they then will be telling their organization's story and then finish the program telling ag's story. Stay tuned for outcomes from this innovation.

Beginning a new WLI class is like the starting line of a marathon and I ask myself "can I do it?" and "can I meet exceedingly higher and higher expectations?" I am thankful for the opportunity to give this class my 100% best in trying to provide them an incredible leadership journey.



Meet

Class X Member Kevin Wright

Kevin Wright is an Agricultural Engineer working at Generation Farms, headquartered in Lake Park, GA. In his role, he manages the land and water resources for this fruit and vegetable operation in South Georgia and North Florida. Prior to Generation Farms, Kevin spent a decade with Suwannee River Water Management District in various roles, including lead for the District's Ag Team. Kevin lives in Live Oak with his wife Kristen and three children (Lucas, Adley and Sydney).



Sifting Through Seminar I -Kevin Wright

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu is credited with stating “A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. I feel strongly that I can say that my Leadership Journey took a colossal step forward with the beginning of Class X's Seminar I.

The day began with the first step in our journey, finding the McConnell YMCA center. Located just north of Micanopy, the YMCA center was the location of our first introduction to the members of Class X. When I first arrived, I was immediately greeted by smiles and friendly faces. This instantly brought a feeling of comfort to me and all others in the group. Once everyone was assembled, we were broken into two groups; mine would tackle the high ropes course first.

Now for me, heights are not something that I enjoy and the instructor wearing a sling did not help the situation. He kept trying to reassure us that his injury did not take place while climbing; but I still have my doubts. While most of the group volunteered to climb the pole, I hung back,



hoping that we would run out of time. Towards the end, I realized I would have to climb the pole and reluctantly I made my way up, over and down. Our group was very supportive, which seemed to calm my nerves.

Next we moved on to tossing several items between group members as we said their name. We started with one object, but eventually moved to eight objects all flying around between a circle of 15 people. Our take home lesson was to focus on your goal even when chaos is taking place around you. Our final activity at the YMCA center was a timed numbers games where we needed planning and coordination with just a little physical skill. After several attempts, our group finished with the daily time record. We have been told that this record is being questioned.

After the YMCA activities, we moved over to the Straughn Professional Development Center at UF. There we met Brandon Telg and Dr. Jaron Jones and learned more about telling our own stories. We completed a few activities, then were





handed a paper which asked “How do you want to be remembered?” This was my aha moment. The reason I say that is because I came into the program with the impression of how WLIANR would benefit me in my professional career, but as I answered the questions, my answers centered around my family. This made me reflect and ask myself what am I doing to ensure I am remembered to my family the way I hope to be.

That night we checked into our hotel at the Reitz Union, then returned for a meal at the Straughn Center. When we arrived back, we were greeted by Mrs. Gale and Ms. Dottie Trotter. That night we had the chance to rotate around the room and tell the class about ourselves. Each member was asked to bring one item of importance that could fit in our hand (Mine was my son’s Lego construction worker). That night each one stretched the recommended 2-minute time frame to at least 4 minutes.

The next morning started with greetings from both Dr. Brian Myers and Dr. Jack Payne. They both

“...I came into the program with the impression of how WLIANR would benefit me in my professional career, but as I answered the questions, my answers centered around my family.”

spoke about the connection to IFAS and how alumni are making a difference in their communities. Soon after, Dr. Kevan Lamm reviewed our Leadership 360 survey in which our supervisor, direct-report, a peer and our spouse rated our leadership abilities. We also reviewed our self-evaluations of our skills and how they compared to how others graded us. This exercise allowed us to determine our deficiencies and areas of potential strengths.

That afternoon, we heard from Dr. Rod Clouser regarding what types of communities are desirable to live in. We discussed what aspects that we felt were important, such as community funded services, recreation, housing, and quality employment. It was interesting to discover the significant differences in a city the size of Gainesville by moving just a quarter mile in either direction of the main roads.

Later that afternoon, we had the chance to view the newly opened Depot Park. This park was created over top of a state designated Brownfield site, near the headquarters of GRU. If you have not had a chance to visit this park, it is well worth it. There are pavilions with tables, playground and splash pad, green space used for concerts, restored train depot and under construction is the Cade Museum for Creativity + Invention. We started the discussion of the history of the park with former Gainesville Mayor Pageen Hanrahan. She how an idea to revitalize a city eyesore, slowly gained momentum. Sarah Vidal-Finn with the Community Redevelopment Agency explained construction and operation challenges. Finally, Dr. Jeanna Mastrodicasa (former Gainesville Commissioner and Mayor Pro-Tem) discussed moving the project



forward through the next generation of council members, during a time of budget reductions.

One last aspect to the community revitalization was the unique establishment located near the southern edge of Depot Park, First Magnitude Brewery. First Magnitude Brewery opened in 2014 by Gainesville locals. Inspired by the springs in North Florida, this craft brewery produces both seasonal and year round beers. In case there were questions on why we were allowed to visit a brewery as part of WLIANR, we did extensively discuss how their brewers' grain is being used by UF to feed cattle. There were also conversations about the hops industry and the challenges Florida's climate brings to growing this crop. I felt as that was plenty

of justification for me to sample their hard work.

That night we traveled to the UF Austin Cary Teaching Forest. At Austin Cary, we met Christopher Green with FDACS Division of Marketing and Development. Mr. Green's focus was on business etiquette and skills to use in social settings. We spent more than half an hour learning the intricacies

of the hand shake. From the bone crusher, to the dead fish, to the preacher; a good handshake can really make an impression.

That night, we settled in to the Reitz Union for the last time.

Thursday morning was probably my most enjoyable part of Seminar I. Not only did we have some incredible speakers, but we also were able to meet back up with our spouses. We started at Austin

Cary with our official group photo and head shots. Next we heard from John Spence, an author and



international business speaker. Mr. Spence spoke about leadership in the corporate world. He provided pointers on how to motivate people and leaving a legacy.

Later that morning was Jeremy Foley. Mr. Foley is the outgoing Athletic Director of the University of Florida. Mr. Foley spoke about his rise within the athletic department and his work ethic that carried him through. He stated that he reached a position in which he was warned he would never move beyond if he did not treat those around him better. After trying time and again, he overcame his own ambition and was able to show compassion to others within the organization. Mr. Foley also spoke about how important integrity is within an organization. Integrity by leaders help set the culture for others to follow. It was amazing to listen to him and



understand the passion he has for his staff and organization. Several times he stated that you must always put what is best for the organization first, even over yourself. These ideas are difficult, but will be rewarded.

Just before lunch, we were able to travel to the Hampton Inn and pick up our spouses. For many of

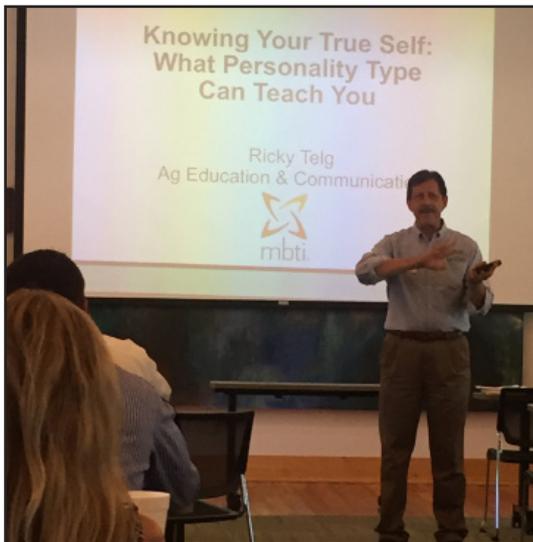


us with small children, it was the first time that both parents had been away at the same time.

Our next session was to help discover our and our spouses' personality. Dr. Ricky Telg first discussed the results of our Myers-Briggs indicators. We were asked to back into groups based on our four letter classification. It was slightly interesting to watch the highly introverted groups being forced to speak to one another.

Next we learned about a personality indicator test called True Colors. In this test we openly discussed our results with our spouses. I think that it was fun for everyone to easily guess their spouses "color" well before the exercise was complete.

That night Farm Credit of Florida prepared a meal for the group. Jeffrey Spencer (Class VII) led Farm Credits efforts and welcomed everyone to the Alachua office. After the dinner, a slide show was presented of our families. Most of us included



pictures of our children (whether they were human or fur babies) or special places we have been. We were all allowed to describe the people or places within our picture for the group. It was wonderful for the group to connect all of the families we had heard about earlier in the week with all the pictures.

On the last morning, we arrived at the Alachua County Extension office, near the Gainesville Airport. We began our session with Dr. Alexa Lamm and understanding how each one of us processes information and arrives at a decision. Previously, we were asked to complete an online assessment of our critical thinking tendencies. From this, we were asked to arrange ourselves around the room, based on our scores. My wife and I were actually pretty close together, while others were on opposite sides.



As a "seeker" of information, we want to gather as much information before we make a decision. I think this is very reflective, by how long it takes us to decide on where to eat lunch.

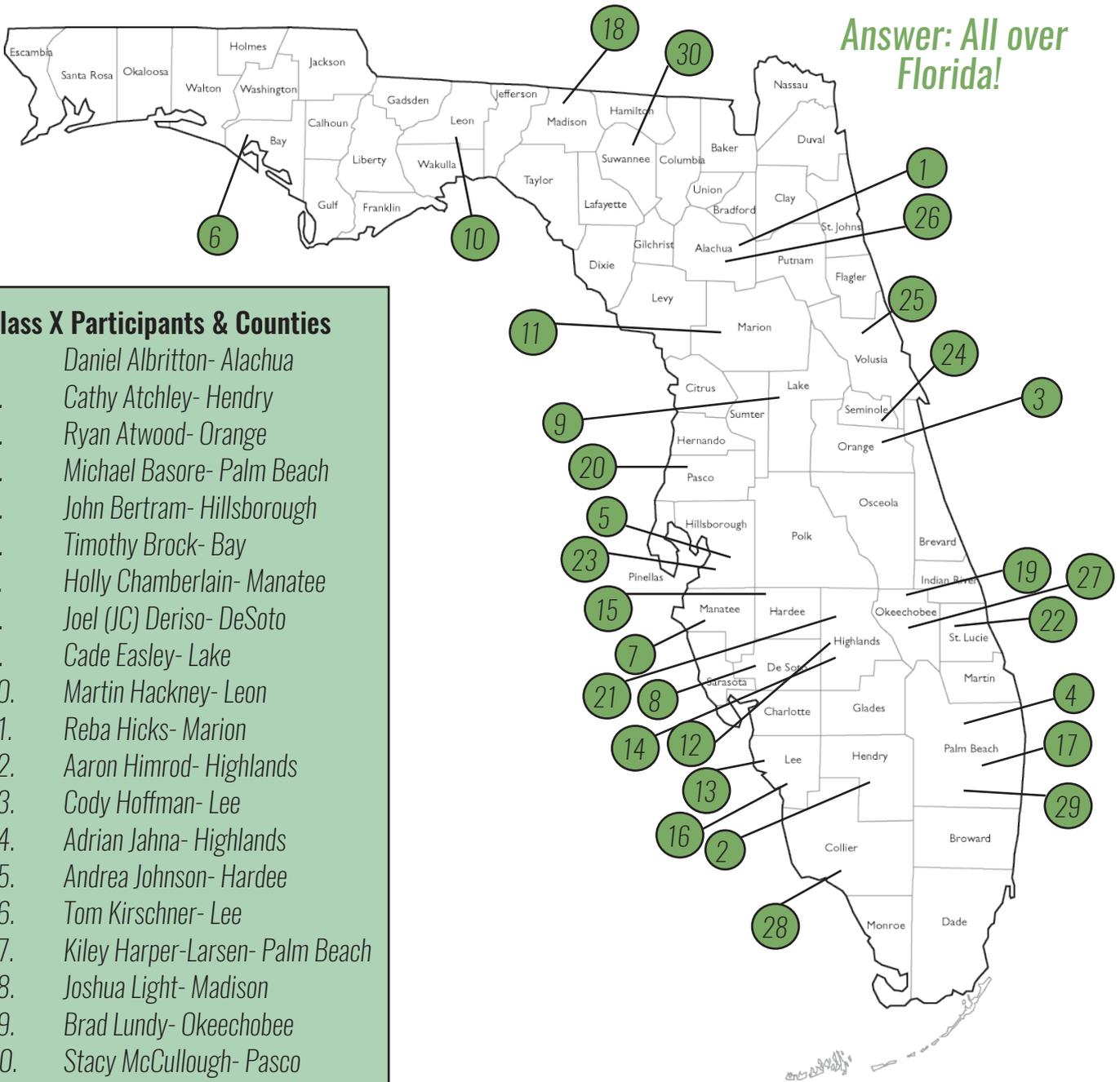
Finally, we were rejoined by Dr. Jaron Jones and Brandon Telg and separated into two groups to briefly tell our story to the group. These stories brought out both tears and laughter from the members. These stories allowed Class X to know each other even closer before we were to depart. When all the stories were complete, we joined back and listened to the final announcements of the day. I believe that all of us look forward to the next seminar in November. We will be traveling west, to the Florida Panhandle.



Class X by County

Where can you find Class X when they are not in seminar?

Answer: All over Florida!



Class X Participants & Counties

1. Daniel Albritton- Alachua
2. Cathy Atchley- Hendry
3. Ryan Atwood- Orange
4. Michael Basore- Palm Beach
5. John Bertram- Hillsborough
6. Timothy Brock- Bay
7. Holly Chamberlain- Manatee
8. Joel (JC) Deriso- DeSoto
9. Cade Easley- Lake
10. Martin Hackney- Leon
11. Reba Hicks- Marion
12. Aaron Himrod- Highlands
13. Cody Hoffman- Lee
14. Adrian Jahna- Highlands
15. Andrea Johnson- Hardee
16. Tom Kirschner- Lee
17. Kiley Harper-Larsen- Palm Beach
18. Joshua Light- Madison
19. Brad Lundy- Okeechobee
20. Stacy McCullough- Pasco
21. James McWhorter- Highlands
22. Tom Mitchell- St. Lucie
23. Sambhav Sambhav- Hillsborough
24. Sarah Spatola- Seminole
25. Austin Spivey- Volusia
26. Kyle Straughn- Alachua
27. Melissa Syfrett- Okeechobee
28. Alicia Taylor- Collier
29. Caroline Villanueva- Palm Beach
30. Kevin Wright- Suwannee



Meet Class X Member Melissa Syfrett

Melissa Syfrett is a resident of Okeechobee, FL and a Florida native. Melissa graduated from the University of Florida in 2000 with a major in Agricultural Operations Management, minoring in Food and Resource Economics and Animal Nutrition. She is the third generation working in her family's business, Syfrett Feed Company, which manufactures animal feed for Florida, the Caribbean, and Central America and will celebrate 60 years of business this year. Melissa has two children: Kathryn (8) and Evan (3). Kathryn shows bunnies in 4-H and this year will show a Holstein heifer. Evan is an energetic boy that enjoys anything with wheels. Melissa is looking forward to the experience of the WLI program and humbled to be accepted.



An In-Depth Look at Day 2 -Melissa Syfrett

Day two started at the Straughn Center classroom. Our morning began with a welcome from the Department of Agricultural Education & Communication Chair Dr. Brian Myers. I had yet to meet Dr. Myers, so it was a great opportunity to listen to his welcome talk.

Then we listened to UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Senior Executive Vice President Dr. Jack Payne speak about the Importance of Wedgworth & IFAS to the World. I have met Dr. Payne previously, however his talk on how IFAS was founded and how he correlates today's advances in agriculture to how we started the land grant university system was very informative. On most days he is letting us know how the department has just developed "blank". I have read about bits and pieces of some of his items that he spoke about, but correlating them all together went very well.

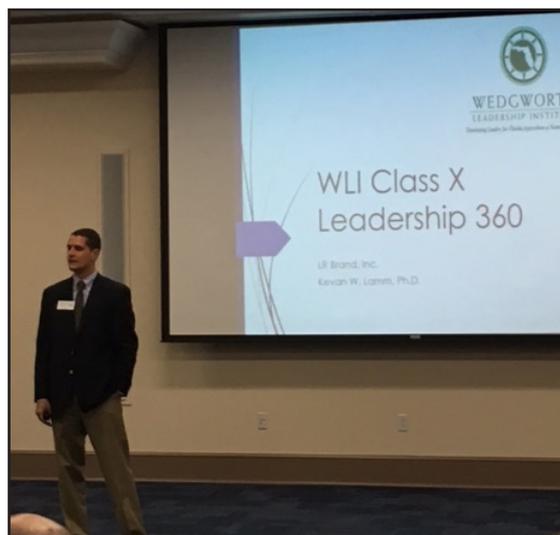
Then we were introduced to Dr. Kevan Lamm from LR Brand about 360 Degrees of Leadership. Dr. Lamm's reports on each of us were passed out and then he discussed how we can use his findings. Many of us wanted more though, to determine where the feedback was coming from. However, this is not how you should use the information that he presented each of us. We addressed that there are 7 underlying items that make up the different



leadership factors and they are: Action, Change, Communication, Interpersonal, Strategic Planning, Skills, and Process. After that filled morning we broke for lunch. We then varied from the schedule and did an evaluation or wrap up. We had learned a lot about what other people thought of us and about the university, so many were receptive.

The afternoon talk started with Dr. Rod Clouser who is the Associate Department Chair & Professor in the Department of Food and Natural Resource Economics at University of Florida. I had not met Dr. Clouser and I enjoyed his discussion on the "Essentials of a Community or Region".

It was eye opening to understand that most of us are concerned with the same things in our communities. We broke into groups and found an essential 5 that we all agreed



upon.

We then traveled to “Depot Park”. This park had an amazing journey with a group of strong willed leaders that saw a vision for the 26 acres of land and kept pursuing their goal for years. Dr. Jenna Mastrodicasa who is an Associate Vice President of UF/IFAS, Ms. Pageen Hanrahan, and Ms. Sarah Vidal-Finn, all spoke about the trials and obstacles that they overcame to make this



“It was eye opening to understand that most of us are concerned with the same things in our communities.”

Austin Cary; there we learned Etiquette & Social Skills from Mr. Christopher Green. This was an eye-opening experience for many but for some it was a refresher, but then we had more questions to ask and went deeper into some of his topics than he had planned, which was entertaining and educational. After the dinner, we then went back to the Reitz Union Hotel. Day two was fast paced with many speakers that integrated activities into the day.

park as grand as it is; and that they still have more goals for the future.

We then went down the road a bit and had a private tour of First Magnitude Brewing with Mr. John Deny. Mr. Deny and another brew master went through the process of brewing and they were both happy to answer our questions about their up and coming business.

After that we went north to the beautiful forest



“A Cup of Joe” with Dr. Joe



Inspirational Reading Reviews from Dr. Joe Joyce, Program Faculty Advisor



There is a continuing debate concerning whether or not great leaders are born with an inherent trait for leadership or whether leadership skills can be learned. I am of the camp that there are individuals that are natural leaders due to the strength of their personalities, but there are many others (most of us) who can learn how to be leaders.

I have come to this conclusion from a simple practice – reading about great leaders and many of the literature out there on leadership principles. I have always been interested in leadership traits and have admired many great leaders, both famous readily recognized leaders and other professionals I have encountered during my careers. But a big influence has been through reading which began while I was attending the US Army War College. Here I became exposed to insights into both military and civilian leaders. You all know some of the names: Washington, Adams, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lincoln, Lee, Grant, Truman, Reagan, Thatcher, etc. But there are also those leadership classics, like “Good to Great”, Seven Habits of Highly Successful People”, “The Truth about Leadership”, etc. that help to explain why these leaders were the men or women they were. So what happened to me? The War College forced me to begin to read and it has become a life-long pursuit. So this preamble is to explain what I intend to attempt over the course of Class X of WLI – provide an insight into some of the books and literature I have read and hopefully encourage you to read some of them also.

This initial attempt will focus on my most recent reading “George Washington on Leadership” by Richard Brookhiser. Brookhiser provides insight into many traits and exploits of our first president that we all know, but also into what framed his leadership characteristics. We all know he was a general and president but how much do we know of him as a soldier, farmer, businessman, family man

and slave owner. The book is divided into three sections, Problems, People, and Self. Much of what is learned about Washington comes from his diaries and letters and provides direct insight into his thoughts, his fears, and his decision making process. The book explains how Washington acquired his wealth, how he treated those he led, how he treated his leaders, and how he managed conflict and unruliness. But most importantly how he dealt with and learned from his military, political, and personal failures and the failures and short comings of his subordinates and peers.

Most intriguing to me was his view of order and rules which were formed early in his life. In his early teens he formulated his own manual “The Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation”. His 110 rules originated from French Jesuits in 1595. The “Rules” were an introduction to public life for young men just out of boyhood, i.e. how to walk, talk, dress, and eat. Brookhiser noted that, “When they (the Rules) do discuss substantive matters of business, it is only to explain how they should be discussed among adults – “Be not tedious in discourse, make not many digressions” (#88) - not to offer policy advice.”

I will conclude with a quote from the book that the author felt explained Washington’s view on leadership and helps makes my point about leadership education,

“There is no formula for educating a leader, because he must be responsible for much of his own education himself. He should receive the basic equipment that society gives its top tier, so as not to seem freakish. But the rest of his education will be governed by the problems he encounters, and the answers he must apply, and it will be a lifelong process.”

The book is a quick read, 237 pages. I highly recommend it as a first start to your leadership reading.

“...But the rest of his education will be governed by the problems he encounters, and the answers he must apply, and it will be a lifelong process.”





Coordinator's Corner

An Honest Letter to Class X:

-Valerie McKee, Program Coordinator

The number ten has always found its way back to me.

I was the tenth born grandchild on my mother's side of the family. My life was forever changed at ten years old when my father began his transition from head football coach to head pastor of a church. My flag football jersey in high school was #10. I graduated from Okeechobee High School in 2010. (Yes, I know I'm a "baby"...) I wear a size 10 shoe size. I even have ten fingers AND ten toes... (Now I'm just getting ridiculous, but you get the point.)

So here I am, in my very first real job after college starting with my very first class of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources with none other than Class X. It almost seems too perfect, perhaps even divinely orchestrated.

As I shared with you, Class X, on our unforgettable first night together, that night when we each introduced ourselves with our keepsake items, I sometimes struggle with putting the seemingly random pieces of my story together:

- The Pastor's daughter who loved to talk and write...
- The FFA member who didn't grow up on a farm but became passionate about the agriculture industry...
- The State FFA Officer who saw leadership development differently...
- Dr. Carter's undergraduate student who wanted the opportunity to do a little research...
- The Agricultural Leadership undergraduate who didn't know what she would do after college...
- The graduate student who moved all the way to Texas just to find herself...
- The newly hired WLIANR Program Coordinator who just feels humbled to even be here...

Sometimes it seems like life is made up of

a bunch of random turns with a few added gut-punching drops and exhilarating highs, like a roller coaster that keeps you guessing where it will lead but doesn't ultimately take you anywhere with purpose. And yet, as I look back on my life thus far, I am finding myself trusting the randomness and seeing where it fits into my story now. Perhaps you had the same feelings when you, Class X, were able to put together your personal stories during the first Seminar; perhaps you saw the randomness of your life begin to crystallize into place and lead you to where who you are today.

I want to be honest with you upfront, Class X.

"Each of you were specifically sought out, specially selected, and significantly seated for this class, the tenth class of Wedgworth."

Going into this experience, I doubted if I was worthy to be "yours", Class X, worthy to serve you, worthy to share ideas and conversations, worthy to rub elbows with you every other month over the next two years. I doubted if I had what it takes, if my experiences leading up to now would be enough to be what you need as a servant leader in this program. Maybe you had similar feelings going into this program; maybe you too wondered if you were Wedgworthy or had what it takes to fit in with a group of hand-selected, dynamic leaders.

I wasn't sure how my experiences added up to where I am today. My life seemed random and bumpy. That is, until I met you, Class X.

This entire experience with you thus far has been humbling, for sure. From collecting your nominations from those in the industry who respect you most, to walking you through the (crazy and long) application process, to interviewing you and discussing your unique place in the makeup of Class X during the selection seminars, to supporting the behind-the-scenes work to make sure your very first Wedgworth seminar was as great as it could be, each of you have been carefully and dearly thought about. Let me share with you this: each of you are not where who you are by random circumstance or





chance. Each of you were specifically sought out, specially selected, and significantly seated for this class, the tenth class of Wedgworth.

In some ways, my story is just beginning with you, Class X. Getting to know you all separately prior to Seminar I and then collectively during Seminar I has shown me why our experiences matter, why my experiences so far matter. Even the random points in our lives have something to contribute, especially when we are able to share them with others as part of our stories.

I am so humbled to be a part of your Wedgworth story over the next two years, Class X. I am excited to continue sharing my story thus far with you all, to continue hearing more of your stories, and to have each of you play a part in the writing of my own from this point onward. I am thankful to our amazing team, the ever-wise-and-knowledgeable Program Faculty Advisor Dr. Joyce, the ever-reliable-and-organized Program Administrative Assistant Janice Shephard, and the ever-caring-and-incredible Program Director Dr. Hannah Carter, for patiently working with me as I'm learning how to better serve you all, Class X.

As has been stated, if and when you have a question or concern, feel free to reach out to me, Class X, and I will be eager to help. If and when you want to talk about leadership, personalities, generational differences, the rise and fall of country music as it exists today (which, ironically, could be compared to the rise and fall of our political landscape if you ask me), or even simply share more of your story, I am eager for that as well. Thank you for reading this letter, Class X, and thank you for letting me belong to you.

Sincerely yours,

Valerie Lynn McKee
Program Coordinator, WLIANR



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Developing Leaders for Florida Agriculture & Natural Resources

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