

Demonstration of Initiative: The Art of Trailblazing

During the summer of 2003, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to serve as a Traveling Day Camp Coordinator in Colorado. At one particular site, the church had elected to transport the kids to a retreat center at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. This retreat center was seated at the bottom of a beautiful valley. The church had been struggling and they were in deep consideration whether to sell the retreat center to the highest bidder or to keep the center. The director and her husband were leaving the church and retreat center three weeks after camp ended. There one project they wished they would have been able to complete in the four years they had been there was a trail. They had wanted cut a trail to the top on the bluff and create a sanctuary worship area at the top of the bluff over looking a beautiful landscape to the west and downtown Denver to the east.

I was inspired to make this dream come true. Based on this random comment, this dream became a reality. I helped mobilize and find the equipment to see this task was finished. I enlisted the expertise of my counselors to teach me and assist in creating switchbacks, helping with placement of the trails for easy accessibility and utilization of the land (ex. being able to use trees to balance and pull yourself up in steep areas), cut and clear underbrush of the trail as well as make conservation attempts by placing log barriers so the trail would not wash out. This wasn't a temporary trail to be used only this week but we built the trail to last. We also used our resources of downed trees to created seating in our sanctuary which was beautiful. Although creating this place as a dream for the leaving directors, there were underlying circumstances as to why we chose to take on this project.

The children we were serving were from some of the poorest urban neighborhoods of Denver. They were amazed by the beauty of the outdoors and wanted to explore the awe of God's creation. Each day after the kids left for the day, we (three counselors and myself) would spend the rest of the day, until it was too dark to work safely, on this project. Each day the kids would want to know what we did after they left. Often we would tell them we read, played cards or just did whatever we wanted. The last day of camp, the kids were invited to spend the night at the retreat center. That afternoon, we left for about two hours to put the final touches on the sanctuary. The kids were amazed that we had been working on this project all week. While we were gone, the director worked with the kids on painting large crosses. Little did they know, these crosses would be nailed to trees along the trail and one would be placed at the front of the sanctuary.

That night, as dusk drew near, everyone climbed a mile of switchback trail to the new sanctuary. They were amazed that something like this could be done in one week, or in our case, three afternoons. It was an amazing feeling to give back to this dying church community but also to see the idea of service to others spark in the eyes of our campers. There was hope again that maybe; just maybe the church wouldn't feel like they had to sell the property so fast.

I thought this project reflected initiative in leadership because I was thrown out of my element and was forced rise to new challenge. Before this project, I knew very little about conservation of trails and the number of switchbacks that are needed for the climb to be reasonable. I was forced to rely on my comrades to fill in the gaps. This can be a challenge as a leader because often we think, as leaders, we should have a clue about all

the answers that could be. As a student of Wartburg, a college of the church, I can truly say I fulfilled the mission statement of "challenges and nurtures students for lives of leadership and service as a spirited expression of their faith and learning" in this project. This project embodied the expression of my faith and service by "taking responsibility for [this] community, and making them better through public action."

