

The Emerging Leaders Academy After One Year: Leadership Theories in Practice

By Dr. Barbara K. Gannon & Michael Noel

When we began working in community transportation 40 plus years ago, we didn't even know it was a career. Funding was, at best, year-to-year, services were limited and anything but sophisticated. To quote an old boss when asked if the buses were on time, "they were when they left here."

Today's transit workforce is smarter, quicker, tech savvy and connected. They want to do something important and work in a supportive environment. They are surrounded by technology that changes every two years. They can stay connected around-the-clock and can easily become burnt out with never-ending demands.

Today's transit riders are also connected and quick to challenge even the smallest mistake. Lawsuits are common and the stress can be overwhelming. The previous generation of transit leaders learned on the job, made mistakes, made adjustments and worked at a slower pace. This generation must strive to constantly upgrade their skills, deal with a much more demanding workforce and customer and find balance between work and personal life. It was this challenge that guided the development of CTAA's [Emerging Leaders Academy](#).

The goal of the first (2017-18) Emerging Leaders Academy (ELA) was to build a new generation of leaders in the community transportation industry and to provide motivation and information for participants to build their leadership skills. Perhaps the best summary came from one participant who said, "I came away with a different outlook on building my team back at home and creating an environment that allows everyone to have a voice. Together we can come up with the best solution to every problem."

Our hope for first class of ELA participants was for each to better understand their strengths, to apply leadership theory and practice to the good work they do each day, and to gain perspective on the industry through interactions with ELA colleagues, mentors and instructors.

We've been moved by the level of reflection and the focus on the personal and the professional goals during our study group calls. The conversations have been honest, vulnerable and filled with satisfaction. ELA colleagues have supported each other with ideas and stories of lessons learned.

The ELA is an example of CTAA's proactive approaches to building the bench strength of community and public transportation agen-



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cies and is an important addition to the stellar menu of effective certifications and trainings available to CTAA members. At CTAA's [EXPO 2017 in Detroit](#), the first class comprised of 19 individuals attended the ELA.

It began with confidential diagnostic, individual assessments and one on one coaching prior to attendance. The assessments included the *BarOn* Emotional Intelligent Quotient 2.0, the *DISC Style* Assessment as well as other informal assessments to identify and highlight leadership competencies for each attendee.

At EXPO, attendees spent two very intense days hearing from dynamic community transit leaders and spent time in individual and

group activities. This included understanding leadership concepts, strategic thinking, communicating effectively and developing performance-based teams.

In the 11 months that followed, all attendees have been receiving one-on-one mentoring from four community transit mentors: Ann August, CCTM; Connie Garber, CCTM; Lenna Kottke; and Rick Krochalis (*we featured profiles of all four ELA mentors in our [edition of DigitalCT last summer](#) introducing the ELA concept – ed*).

In addition, six Leadership Study Group conference calls were mandatory on a wide variety of topics including; ethics, coaching, team building, strategic thinking and much more.

Each participant continues to work on their chosen year-long Leadership Project. The projects will be presented and shared at [EXPO 2018 in Pittsburgh](#) through a poster session. All attendees were placed into peer groups for ongoing study and support, as well. The connections built in Detroit have been maintained throughout the year through bi-monthly telephone-based study groups, where peer support and additional leadership instruction has continued.

Anytime something new is created, there are growing pains. Much credit has to be giving to all in the first class who have given so much to making this process work.

The initial individual assessment and one-

on-one coaching was greatly valued. Many attendees felt that identifying one’s leadership strengths was very insightful.

The two-day classroom was intense. A lesson learned was that the attendees need to be totally involved over these two days with very few outside distractions.

The mentor program got off to a slow start, since each attendee and mentor had to go through an initial introduction after EXPO. While the startup took time, the value of a trusted and confidential mentor relationship was of great value.

Meanwhile, the bi-monthly Leadership Study Conference calls presented some scheduling problems for participants. And the year-long Leadership Projects have proven to be very challenging and – to a person – more complicated and comprehensive projects were chosen over simple projects. Most projects require a team back at home and will have long lasting positive effect on the individual systems.

In March, Dr. Gannon asked study group participants, “Tell me, how has the ELA helped you in your work?” A sample of the thoughtful responses are categorized below:

I am not alone:

“I am encouraged during the study group by the stories told and the topics that others are struggling with are ones I also have struggled with.”



“Others have already tried and succeeded in solving the problem before me – I don’t have to reinvent the solutions, just apply the lessons learned to my situation.”

The personal and the professional:

“The whole ELA process has helped me look critically at my own style and behaviors. I have chosen a few goals and focused on moving those goals forward.”

Another 2017 ELA participant accepted the challenge to lessen stress and to lose weight as a wellness goal during his ELA year. He believes that his ELA colleagues may not recognize him in Pittsburgh because of his success with this goal.

Mentor support:

“Having an ELA mentor for advice and counsel has been great. My mentor helped me to gain focus on my ELA project.”

“My mentor has helped me to consider my skill set to move my ELA project forward.”

Overall comments:

“As a leader in a DOT, my ELA colleagues have helped me to see the work from the perspective of my sub-recipients. I have felt more empowered to improve the state systems to be more responsive to the transit providers in our state.”

“The ELA has helped to build the capacity between transportation providers across this program.”

We have some changes in store for the 2018-19 Emerging Leaders Academy. The major shift for this class will be connecting the mentors with the participants. This will include a lunch with the mentors on the first day of the two-day program in Pittsburgh. This will allow for introductions and even the chance to set up the first call session and to work out a schedule that works well for both.

Congratulations to CTAA’s leadership on the successful launch of the Emerging Leaders Academy. Those participating in the first class of the Emerging Leaders Academy (2017 ELA) have enhanced their leadership skills, gained valuable counsel from seasoned mentors and tackled critical issues by demonstrating innovative and practical ways solve transit’s problems.

We look forward to welcoming the 2017 ELA class to Pittsburgh for a celebration of their accomplishments and the unveiling of the amazing ELA projects during the Poster Session at EXPO. And we look forward to welcoming the 2018 ELA class! **CT**

Dr. Gannon and Mr. Noel are the Co-Directors of the Emerging Leaders Academy. Dr. Gannon is the Principal of [GannonConsult](#) while [Mr. Noel](#) is an industry-recognized trainer and consultant, including Master Trainer of CTAA’s [Certified Community Transit Supervisor \(CCTS\)](#) certification program.

ctaa COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
Emerging Leaders Academy
 Are you seeking a way to identify and develop new leaders in your organization and in the community and public transportation industry? Or are YOU looking to hone your leadership skills and potential?

CTAA’s Emerging Leaders Academy offers promising community and public transportation leaders the tools to shape their future.
 NOTE: A minimum of 15 participants are required for the academy to take place.

OBJECTIVES

- GAIN UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR LEADERSHIP SKILLS
- LEARN INDUSTRY HISTORY, CURRENT PRACTICES, FUNDING & FUTURE TRENDS
- BECOME KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A LEADER
- COMPLETE A PROJECT DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES & APPLICATION TO A REAL-WORLD SITUATION

ACADEMY TIMELINE

- MAY 2018: Leadership Assessments Completed
- JUNE 2018: Two-Day Kickoff at EXPO 2018
- JULY 2018-MAY 2019: Individual & Group Work
- JUNE 2019: Poster Session & Graduation at EXPO 2019

ASSESS
 Assess the participant's current leadership style and potential

CHALLENGE
 Challenge the participant through a rigorous combination of workshops, seminars, independent study and projects

SUPPORT
 Support the participant through mentors, peer groups, access to course consultants, national transit leaders and CTAA staff

Register Now!

Visit www.ctaa.org/ELA to register or for additional details.