

Things That Matter to Me

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I found that my volunteer with young students in the science academy was the most important because it taught me about leadership.

Leadership can be defined in various ways. Leaders are expected to motivate or guide others toward goals, and they are expected to influence people's behavior in ways that achieve these goals. Leaders should identify problems and show by example the way to solve them. Leaders should inspire others.

I had the opportunity to practice these skills during my volunteer work at the SEMAA program during the summer of 2007. This is a NASA-sponsored program (Science, Engineering, Mathematics and Aeronautics Academy) for K-12 students. The mission of the program is to increase the participation of under-represented youth in these areas. I have always liked science and math, in fact, I participated in the program during middle school.

Subsequently, I became aware of some dismal statistics, and was puzzled by them. Many students, particularly African-American students, do not like science and math and do not do well in these subjects. I thought that this was strange and really did not understand why this was the case. The dropout rate in my city, Baltimore, is horrible. This means that many of Baltimore's students, statistically,

are doomed. I noticed that the young children attending the program were very enthusiastic and not at all fearful of the material. I also noticed that they were very smart. "What happens later?" I wondered. In this century, what will happen to students without the knowledge of technology? It has been said that technology widens the rich-poor gap. As such, it became obvious to me that these children must be shown the way.

In an effort to lead by example, I used my presence and enthusiasm for the subject matter to show campers what I knew and how much fun science and math can be. I boldly displayed my knowledge so they could see a young, black male speaking fluently about science and math without fear or trepidation.

I saw that I could inspire them by discussing my plans for the future and telling them that they could do the same thing. This experience taught me that I could and should make a difference in the lives of young people. It helped me to set a new more defined goal. When I participated in the program in the seventh grade, I saw it as a fun summer activity; I didn't know the purpose of the program. Now I see things in a different light. I know that I must learn in my formal education so that I may lead, initiate, and participate in programs that will help solve problems like these, ones that should not exist.

I listed this activity as the most important because it showed me the benefit of leading and it reinforced to me what I need to do to achieve my desire to help students in my city achieve in science. It truly has become a pet peeve of mine. I find it offensive when I read articles in the newspapers about the poor performance of our kids in science and math. I know that it does not have to be so, as this experience showed me.



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