Before LeaderShape I would have defined leadership as the ability to guide a group of people towards a common goal, however, as I journeyed through LeaderShape my definition grew and evolved just as I did. I would now define leadership as believing in possibility, constantly working towards a personal vision, building relationships with people who can support the vision, and living every day in a way that aligns with personal core value.

 LeaderShape is a six day retreat hosted by the University of Cincinnati Honors Program and facilitated by the LeaderShape Institute. The purpose of LeaderShape is to empower students to create and attain bold new visions for the future and to develop foundational skills in leadership. I attended LeaderShape the week of December 9-14th, 2013. Sixty students gathered with six faculty leaders, three student helpers, and two retreat “Leads”. My role as a participant was to be actively engaged and to contribute to the learning process. The program was broken down in to three main settings; Large Group, Family Clusters, and Individual Time. Large Group time involved collective discussions and instruction time. Family Clusters were groups of ten students led by one faculty leader; time with the clusters included more intimate discussion and simulations. Finally, Individual Time consisted of personal reflection. I was part of the “(…)” Family Cluster led by Jason Autry.

Each day of LeaderShape was centered on a theme. Day one was “Building Community”, and I learned that relationships are the foundation of leadership. Day two was “The Value of One, The Power of All”; I took DISC personality test and learned about group dynamics and synergy. Day three was “Challenging What is, Looking to What Could Be”, and I learned about using my passions to discover my vision. Day four was “Bringing Vision to Reality” and I began to understand how I can use manageable and stretch goals to realize my vision. Day five was “Living and Leading with Integrity” and I reflected on what my core value are and how I can use them to lead with integrity. Day six was “Staying in Action” and I learned how to bring my vision and the skills that I learned back to the “real world”.

I chose to engage in LeaderShape because it was highly recommended by students and mentors who I admire. It was described to me as a life changing experience and that it was very influential. However, praise was all that I heard of the program, I had no idea what to expect or what would be required of me. At the orientation meeting, I made it my goal to go into the program with an open mind and to trust the process. After having completed LeaderShape, it definitely deserves the accolades bestowed to it. In just six days I made strides toward becoming a notable leader and also a more self-aware individual.

On day one the most meaningful concept presented was the Johari Window which represents the four areas of self-disclosure: the public area, blind area, hidden area, and un-known area. The public area is information that is known to self and known to the public, the blind area is information un-known to self and known to others, the hidden area is information known to self and un-known to others, and the un-known area is information un-known to self and un-known to others. I was most intrigued by this concept because when I am working in a group setting it will be important to establish what level of communication I want to facilitate to reach a specific area of self-disclosure.

My favorite experience, and the most meaningful overall, was on day two when I took the DISC Personality Profile test. I am a “D” which stands for dominance. This means that I have a tendency to “…get immediate results, cause action, accept challenges, take authority, solve problems, and question the status quo”. At first I did not think that this was an accurate description of my character, but then I went on to learn my Classical Pattern which is a more in-depth look at my personality. My Classical Pattern revealed that I am an equally strong “D” and “I”, which stands for influence. I am described as an “Inspirational Pattern” because I have very extreme “D” and “I” traits and very week “S” and “C” traits, which stand for steadiness and conscientiousness. This pattern is described as consciously attempting to modify the thoughts and actions of other through use of charm, direction, intimidation, and rewards. This is a much more accurate depiction of my personality because I have a tendency to take charge, but at the same time I want to facilitate relationships and to create a positive atmosphere.

What I appreciated most about the DISC test was that the activity did not end with self-awareness. Once I was aware of my personality traits, the rest of the day was used to explain how to work well with different personalities and understanding how my personality appears to others. I learned that the Inspirational Pattern can appear manipulative and insincere. I need to use my ability to influence others to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels included, and not just to further my personal goals.

On the fourth day I began to realize my vision for what I consider to be an ideal world. I was first challenged to analyze what my passions are and after reflecting I decided them to be: human rights, human trafficking, travel, global health, art, and spreading the gospel. I used these passions to develop my vision for the future. In this way I was able to bring past experiences with me to LeaderShape. I envision a world in which each global community has accessible healthcare that meets their unique cultural demands and is not limited by social barriers. The main social barrier I want to focus on is human trafficking. Manageable goals for the future include, getting involved with the Salvation Army and their anti-human trafficking campaign, getting into medical school, and pursuing a certificate in international human rights. Each of these goals will give me the skills and knowledge that I will need to both provide healthcare and to fight human trafficking. Stretch goals for the future include eradicating human trafficking, and creating sustainable healthcare for every human being.

To specifically fight human trafficking the major goal is to raise awareness; most individuals are not aware of this problem. Greater awareness will lead to changes in legislation and eventually to eradicating human trafficking globally. Awareness campaigns can start locally at the University of Cincinnati through simple paper campaigns, bringing in speakers, and having fundraising events. I can use my connections to health organizations on campus to bring about this goal. GlobeMed, Circle K, and the Aruna 5K are all organizations related to health and human rights that I could collaborate with. In addition, my mom works for the Salvation Army so she could facilitate a connection to the human trafficking work that they do in Cincinnati.

The fifth day of LeaderShape was dedicated to integrity. To lead with integrity means to stay true to my core values when no one is watching, and when everyone is watching. I brought my previous knowledge of what I value to LeaderShape and decided that my core values include: faith, grace, joy, peace, and love. To lead with these values means that I will stay true to my faith, forgive others easily, always have a positive outlook, actively work to pursue peace, and approach others with an attitude of harmony and love. These values are shown through my vision. My faith guides my core values so I relied on it when I was examining my passions, my commitment to grace drives me to give every prostitute a second chance, joy gives me to passion to overcome evils in the world like domestic violence that prevent health, peace leads to me work towards a world where every human being has rights and can live a healthy life, and love affects my attitude towards my vision. I do not view those I want to help out of disdain, but through love and empathy. As I pursue sustainable healthcare systems free of social barriers I will need to lead with faith, grace, joy, peace, and love.