

Throughout my life, cars have been my strongest passion. Everything about cars —working on, designing, customizing, replicating, drawing, and especially driving them—excites me in a way that nothing else can. I decided at a relatively young age that as long as I got a job working on or with cars, I would be happy in life. Once I was a junior in high school, I was accepted into the Engineering Design and Build program at Warren Tech, a Career and Technical Education school. I joined the program's Shell Eco-Marathon prototype hydrogen car team, where I had the opportunity to design parts like an air intake scoop. I was incredibly excited to be promoted to Team Lead as a senior, as I knew how special this role would be and how it could open doors in my future.

However, during the fall semester of my senior year, I was driving irresponsibly at school and ended up chipping the paint on two teachers' cars. This resulted in the loss of my driving privileges, my parking pass, and, most importantly, having two significant roles of mine revoked, including my position as the Team Lead of the Shell Eco-Marathon team. Of course, it was a devastating setback, but it also taught me a fundamental lesson about what makes a leader.

The role of a leader is to educate, advocate for, inspire, and empower others. In the Shell garage, the Team Lead educates their teammates on various mechanical, electrical, and otherwise relevant topics. However, educating the team on the significance and potential of the program is also important. Explaining the opportunities the Shell Team can lead to, college and post-secondary options, scholarships, proper race teams, specialized degrees, and more.

A leader advocates for their team ensuring everyone's voice is heard and valued, and their input is taken into consideration. This is critical to the success of the team and its members, as making sure that everyone has an equal voice and equally important input on the car will result in a more refined and polished final product. It is also essential as a leader to listen to and give valuable feedback on all ideas and proposals.

Leaders inspire their team to create new ideas, innovate solutions, and make the best possible product. Inspiration is fueled by the people who believe in you, support you, and by those you look up to. The Shell Team Lead inspires their teammates to be creative and work hard on a memorable project that will create future opportunities.

Additionally, leaders empower their team to share their ideas, innovate, and think critically. This could be through positive feedback, assistance on the design and installation of parts, and encouragement when struggling.

The role of the Shell Team Lead is not only to serve as the organizer and coordinator of the team and its members, but also to oversee the progress, quality, timeliness, and cooperation between the groups within the team. This includes tasks like test-fitting parts, checking in with team members, and reviewing the Shell rules and requirements. A leader must also set an example for everyone to follow, keep true to their word, and be responsible in all that they do and say.

What I did was in no way responsible or exemplary. However, through honesty, integrity, and taking responsibility and ownership of my actions, I was able to resolve the situation with the teachers and my school. Additionally, after deep consideration, I wrote a formal letter to my teacher expressing my leadership values and acknowledging the weight of my actions, which resulted in my reinstatement as the Shell Team Lead. Overall, this experience was indeed a setback for me, but the lesson it taught me about what makes a leader stuck with me and continues to inspire me today.

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