

## Reflection Journal

The 23<sup>rd</sup> of March loomed faster than I anticipated and almost caught me off guard. From the tick of the clock at 1.00pm I was kept alert, focussed and energised by my fantastic team members. After uploading my introductory letter and my team's Bios, I typed up a table of their names, ages, contact details, time zones and attributes I found interesting about them as individuals. This allowed me to gain familiarity and insight into their backgrounds on both a professional and personal level. I consistently referred to this list as a reference when communicating; it enabled both parties to feel comfortable to talk in a friendly and familiar manner. This reference sheet quickly became a valuable resource for me and I never let it out of my sight. During the GEE I learnt five vital attributes necessary to be an effective leader of a diverse global team:

- **Committed Work Ethic:** The ability to work in partnership with a range of cultures is an evident tool for international business which requires a high level of commitment and devotion. Rolling over to my alarm clock at 3am one cold Tuesday morning to meet with my team members online proved my loyal work ethic. All but one member attended this particular Campfire Chat session; knowing that the majority of the team were as dedicated as I was energised me and gave me optimism about the project. I shared this notion with the rest of the team and from the beginning we became a high synergy team driven by success. I would praise team members on their hard work and efforts and they did the same when I did something well, this established an intrinsic motivation within the group.
- **Good Communicator:** Three team mates and I communicated on the first day via email, it was daunting at first as I was reasonably hesitant and careful not to upset anyone or create a negative first impression. Written communication was near perfect and ideas were conveyed with detailed descriptions; however our first Skype session was incredibly frustrating due to bad connections, strong accents and evident language barriers. As the facilitator of the discussion after every few sentences I found myself clarifying everything that was said, I really had to focus hard and listen carefully. Although terribly annoying at times clarification was necessary to ensure everyone understood what was being suggested. Ultimately technology failed and after static connectivity we lost one of our team members on Skype, it was subsequently decided that email and Campfire Chat would be the most effective means of communication for us. It was a significant challenge for me not to slip into my personalised text messaging abbreviations when chatting, as it would have caused great confusion amongst international group members.
- **Friendly:** After deciding on our concept and delegating sections of the report, I emailed each team member giving them potential topics they could discuss or research further into. The most gracious reply I received was from Robinah from Uganda; "Thank you sincerely for your help Phil, God Bless." I was naturally touched by her gratitude however it was not the first time she had called me Phil instead of Philippa or Pip, I had corrected her after the third time but she had obviously not quite understood and although humorous now it was starting to get slightly annoying. In this respect I learnt how vital it is to ensure you spell and pronounce someone's name correctly, it is a direct personal insult if you cannot take the time or patience to learn simple terms and concepts of another person's culture. Two group members added me on Face Book unprompted, this flattered me as it was an extension of our professional friendship, it was interesting to see their photos and other personal information as well!
- **Respectful:** I encouraged the notion of sharing ALL ideas no matter how silly or impractical they may seem. I did not however expect or completely understand the relevance of some of the ideas shared; for instance a high interest retirement fund for African children, I treated the idea with respect and encouraged the group to develop on the idea however it was not chosen. I can understand the need for a Kiwi Saver scheme in developed countries like New Zealand however in the African region I don't think it was appropriate, I believe I acted respectfully by not completely denying their concept but analysing it then developing others. There were times when language and cultural barriers were evident however they were naturally to be expected so I was prepared in terms of patience tolerance and respect. One member appeared to have significant religious beliefs and was (in my opinion) over committed; he could never seem to make the times to chat with the group and often seemed generally distant. I respected his commitment to his religion and although my personal cultural values and beliefs contrasted dramatically I was considerate of his feelings and attempted to make different group times available or emailed him a summary of the chat. Unfortunately we never had a Campfire Chat with all of the team members, although I was disappointed I was not overly upset by it as I expected some members to have limited internet access. I emailed missing Campfire Chat members to ensure they were

okay and summarised the chats for them so they were able to contribute via email, most of them replied however I lost contact with one, Bamidele Kogbe.

- **Open Minded Perspective:** I now view the world differently and question practices previously established, I have learnt there often is no right or wrong answer or way of doing things and sometimes it is best to just see what the day brings. As I gaze around the computer lab, I watch people working on their spread sheets or essays, or procrastinating from doing their mundane work and logged on Face Book, and I think, “I am doing something so much more exhilarating and life changing that they will possibly never experience.” The GEE inspired me to develop worldly thinking skills, think outside the square and consider possibilities previously thought completely unapproachable. Before working on the GEE I thought I was reasonably well travelled, I have lived and studied abroad in England and travelled a significant amount Europe however it became apparent I have only really been to the glamorous tourist sites; there is so much more of the world I want to see and engage with it on a more meaningful level and ultimately help indigenous people strive in their communities.

For future global teams I recommend creating a good balance of focussed and committed work ethic; and a fun, sociable element to the environment. Essentially prominent differences in culture, world views, levels of wealth and poverty did not have a direct impact on my team (except for losing Ibrahim), however, these factors evidently indirectly influenced the dynamics of the team in terms of the contributed ideas and work ethic. I found being the leader of a GEE team physically and mentally demanding but most commonly I was exhilarated and challenged. As leader my characteristics were reflected in the team’s enthusiasm, I therefore made a deliberate effort to always be full of energy, happy and achievement driven. This notion ultimately created a resilient and interdependent team who worked well together towards the vision of creating an exceptional sustainable product to foster indigenous development. I found the GEE an extremely rewarding and stimulating project which I have developed worldly skills, long lasting friendships and a strong need to gain a greater understanding of the complexities in the modern world.