

**CIANBRO COMPANY**

Education and Development Corner

By Pat Hinckley

One by one the team members from Maryland, Virginia, Connecticut, New York, Maine, and throughout the northeast arrive at the historic Eastland Park hotel in Portland, Maine. It is the night before class. Team members will now become students as they begin an intensive three month journey into the study and practice of leadership. Some of the lessons will be subtle and personal. Some of the lessons will unfold in teams. Some of the lessons will surface through the skill of our guest educator, George Manning.

After checking into the Eastland, students head for an informal gathering in the lobby. This first meeting is a time to build new relationships while getting acquainted with fellow students and faculty. Informally, students begin practicing their first leadership lesson: the value of building relationships.

Each class day begins early for our student leaders. Alan Burton, Vice President of Human Resources, Safety and Health, sets the expectations and standards for the course. He says, “Our mission is to develop leaders who value people. We are committed to educating our leaders for the long term benefit of our company.” Team members are reminded that their good job performance was the reason they were invited to attend the Cianbro Leadership Initiative.

At the heart of every leader is a story. For some leaders their story carries them through a life changing experience. Pete Vigue, Chairman and CEO of the Cianbro companies, knows this well. Delivering the keynote address, Pete takes the opportunity to greet each student personally before sharing his story. The mood of the room changes from the high energy of human connections to the quiet wisdom of personal reflection. Pete tells the story of a journey that took him and others through an internal struggle which ultimately led Cianbro to embrace a new piece of equipment and a new safety policy. Speaking to the value of people, he includes a pearl of wisdom about relationships, “It isn’t what you say, it’s how you make them feel, that’s what they will remember.” Pete acknowledged how these people and moments in time made a difference in his life, teaching him what it takes to be a true leader. Through this personal story, students learn another leadership lesson: the value of ethics.

With a lively pace, George Manning, professor of Psychology and Business at Northern Kentucky University, begins his teaching magic. George brings a unique approach for connecting with people through humor, interesting facts, and practical applications. He takes the students on a journey exploring the qualities of leadership. They discover that integrity is the most valued quality. They experience the story of one young man who took a customer service lesson he learned in a class and applied it so the whole business benefited. They look at historic case studies which confirm the power of vision that leads individuals and civilizations to extraordinary accomplishments. Integrating theory and application, George guides students through the complex topics of leadership.

Blank posters are on the wall and colored markers are on the tables. It is time for students to turn their written self portrait stories into picture posters. Throughout the three-day opening session, the self portrait presentations are woven into the agenda. Beginning with Alan Burton, including all students and executive sponsors, one by one, each individual story is told. Through this activity, students learn another leadership lesson: the value of communication.

Have you ever wondered how your work behavior style relates to leadership? Are you more inclined to be independent, persuasive, agreeable, or accurate? Alan Burton engages the class in a new lesson. With laughter and smiles, the students start to “get it” as they open their minds to a new way of understanding human behavior. Next is the realization that today’s leaders are more successful when they understand and adapt to each style.

Moving into day two, the focus shifts to understanding how the human element unfolds in projects. The day begins with a lesson from George Manning about the importance of attitude: “You must adopt the belief that it is never too late to change your attitude and set your life on a new and positive course.” Studying the graph that outlines the stages of change, students begin to understand the myths and realities in helping people deal with change. This sets the stage for the leadership “stretch” project assignment. Pat Hinckley, Assistant Director of Professional Development, organizes the students into small teams and identifies a senior executive to coach each team. She says, “This is an opportunity for you to apply the leadership lessons you are learning in class to your everyday work. What would you change? Select a project where you can learn about the people side of leadership and can guide teams to work together toward a common goal.” Each executive coach leads a group of students through discussions about their project ideas to help them learn another leadership lesson: the value of persistence.

With a lesson on high performance teams from George, students explore how teams can contribute to organizations. This prepares students for an interactive lesson about the history of our organization. Charlie Cianchette, Vice President and General Manager of the Northern New England region, and Lynn Cianchette, Assistant Contracts Manager, describe this lesson: “We are here to learn about organizational leadership. Your assignment is to draw a *river of time* poster depicting the past, present, and future of our organization.” The teams dive into the assignment gathering their resources. When the posters are placed side by side, connecting each story, it reveals a picture of key moments in our organization’s past and present including creative ideas about the future. Following the student team presentations and using the posters, Charlie and Lynn weave together the student stories with our company leadership lessons. The stories are personal and include both solemn and humorous moments about our organization.

Day three of the opening session begins with the remaining self portrait presentations and moves into one more leadership lesson. Alan Burton invites students to participate in a team decision-making exercise. On the surface, the assignment sounds like an easy one. However, as the teams get started they begin to appreciate the complexity of leading groups to achieve a common goal. The team leader for each group moves her/his team through idea generation, discussion, and decision-making for ten topics.

Wrapping up the opening session, Alan and Pat review expectations and summarize lessons from the opening session before each student has an opportunity to acknowledge his or her personal leadership experience.

The journey continues. Armed with new knowledge, experience, resources, and a “stretch” project, students are ready to apply their leadership lessons back at their work locations. This is where class learning and job application come together.

After an eight week break, students return to class for the closing session. They are ready for two days of student project presentations combined with new leadership lessons. George Manning begins the day with lessons on diversity and ethics. George administers an interpersonal style questionnaire to discuss the role of personality in leadership. Through action and instruments, students learn another leadership lesson: the value of diversity.

Moving to the topic of ethics, George introduces a video that is a reenactment of a controversial experiment. Through this story, students are surprised by the human behavior and different levels of morality portrayed in the video. It opens their eyes to the complexity of human behavior and ethics in the work place. Through this story, students learn another leadership lesson: the value of moral decision making.

For two days, each student presents his or her “stretch” project. We see different styles of presentation including demonstrations, picture stories, Power Point discussion, music, charts, graphs, surveys, and more. Each student tells his/her project story and leadership lesson. The projects are diverse including: new technology, time management, commercial concrete efficiency, new employee on-boarding, and transportation worker identification credential card. Question and answer time gives students the opportunity to interact with the audience. At the conclusion of each student presentation, the audience offers a gift of learning to the presenter by delivering written notes about what the presenter did best and what the individual learned from the presentation. Through leading a project, delivering a presentation, and receiving feedback, students learn one more leadership lesson: the value of teamwork.

At the heart of every organization is the human spirit. Throughout three interactive days of class, an eight week “stretch” project, and two days of project presentations, students journeyed through the human side of leadership. They looked inward to understand themselves as leaders. They looked outward to understand the unique qualities of others. They learned how to help people through change while maintaining high standards of safety and integrity. They learned how to work as a team. For the future, they look forward to being one who leads by her/his own good example. To say thank you to our students, certificates of accomplishment are delivered. A special leadership jacket is presented to remind each student about Cianbro’s commitment to lead by example.

One important dimension of this course is our guest educator, George Manning. We extend gratitude and great appreciation for the experience, dedication, knowledge, and spirit that he brings to our team member students. It is a partnership that benefits students personally and professionally as well as the future of our organization.

We offer a special thank you to Kristin McCormick, Administration Specialist I, for her extraordinary support. With her positive attitude, attention to keeping details of all students in order, and being a master of finding solutions, she helps keep this course moving forward. From Alan, Pat, the senior management team, and the Cianbro Institute, thank you to our students for their commitment to learning and personal growth. We look forward to experiencing our ongoing leadership journey and seeing future leaders in class!