



LeadYoung Institute to Develop the Leaders of Tomorrow, Today

by Susan Pascal



The 2048 US Presidential candidate is living among us as a fourth grade Conejo Valley student. At least that's what new resident, Alan E. Nelson, believes, which is why he's launching LeadYoung Institute, a community-based strategy to identify and develop 10 to 18-year-old students who are gifted in organizational leadership.

Nelson has dedicated his adult life to the study and teaching of leadership. He received his doctorate (EdD) in leadership from the University of San Diego in 1994 and went on to teach at Pepperdine University, the USC Marshall School of Business and related topics at the Naval Postgraduate School. He has authored 20 books and over 200 small and feature-length articles.

In 2006, Nelson came to the conclusion that the best strategy for developing successful leaders is to get them while they're still young. His landmark books, *The O Factor*, *How to Bring Out the Leader in Your Child*, *LeadYoung* and *KiddieLead*, reveal this pioneering work. According to Nelson, there are currently 15,000 students between the ages of 10 to 18 in the Conejo Valley. Nelson hopes to target the 5-10 percent who demonstrate high leadership ability, inviting them into an accelerated training program.

Conejo365: Why did you decide to develop a leadership program for youth?

Alan E. Nelson: It was a midlife realization that we use the best leadership energies on adults after their ways have already been set. It makes more sense to develop effective and ethical leaders when they're still moldable, not moldy.

365: What makes your program unique?

Nelson: In 1972, the U.S. Department of Education recognized leadership in its definition of gifted and talented education. California also adopted this recognition. Unfortunately, our schools focus more on academics and sports. What we're doing is focusing on organizational leadership giftedness. Currently, there are no other programs like this in the Conejo Valley or the United State.

365: How did you develop your curricula?

Nelson: I took a lot of what's out there for adults and modified it for youth and pre-teens ... We also studied classic developmental psychology research. From this, we figured out how to appropriately age-size the training.

365: Not everyone will get into the program?

Nelson: No. This will be like other programs for students who are gifted in academics, the arts or athletics. There will be an assessment and tryout of sorts. Bringing students with lower aptitudes into the program will overwhelm them and potentially decrease their confidence and self-esteem, as well as slowing the others from developing their potential.

365: How do you define a child who is "leadership gifted?"

Nelson: We're looking for preteens and teens who possess a superior ability to learn organizational leadership skills at an accelerated pace and who demonstrate emerging leader characteristics.

365: How young can you begin to see leadership giftedness?

Nelson: Believe it or not, some children will begin to show leadership aptitude in preschool. They are often called 'precocious' or 'pistols.' Even bossy students typically have leadership aptitude. They are trying to be leaders but haven't learned the finesse of leading yet.

365: Explain the application and acceptance process?

Nelson: The initial assessment is a free, 25-question survey completed by an adult, like a parent, who's seen the child in social settings. If a student passes this phase, we ask the parent to submit another one

or two referrals from adults outside the family, such as a teacher or a coach. Then, we will invite the applicant to a workshop to participate in fun, project-based activities where they can be observed by our trainers. If they receive high scores, they will be readily accepted.

365: How do you train a young leader?

Nelson: The curricula are broken by age and stages. It's a combination of cognitive, moral, social and emotional development. The training is project-based. The kids participate in micro projects of 10 to 20 minutes. Each group is assigned a team leader, along with three to five peers. The group has an adult trainer or coach who utilizes a Socratic method, but won't give explicit direction. There is a debrief following each exercise. A typical program consists of eight, 90-minute sessions per semester.

365: How will this help the students once they graduate?

Nelson: We will hand out certificates as well as write recommendations for college. These days, universities are looking beyond SAT and ACT scores. They want holistic applicants who demonstrate 21st century skills that includes leadership abilities.

365: When do you hope to launch the sessions and what is the cost?

Nelson: We are currently accepting applications and will most likely start training this coming January. Costs will vary, depending on whether a student is involved in the main community program or in school/civic group sponsored ones. A typical module will range from \$200 to \$400 and include training, workbook, T-shirt, personalized coaching, and materials. Yet a sponsoring organization could offer low or no-cost programs to its members.

