

Leadership Experiential Project: Karma-Yoga

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Overview

Success in every walk of life depends the most on how well you can interact with others. "Few people consider their lives failures if they have not mastered the calculus, memorized Chinese ideograms, or learned how to play chess at a championship level. Instead, what we all struggle with -- and gut-wrenchingly so -- are our relationships with other people" (O'Toole, 1999, "Leadership A to Z," p. 54). You could of course acquire interpersonal skill through trial and error by learning from your own experiences in life. However, this could involve a huge cost for you and others. For example, learning through trial and error how to build a harmonious relationship with one's spouse or one's boss may be expensive for the person as well as for others in terms of emotional energy drained, career failure, or broken relationships. This experiential course will help enhance your interpersonal skill.

Leadership is the most challenging of all relationships. Trying to learn leadership in a classroom is like trying to learn swimming in a classroom. Just as a swimming pool is required to learn swimming, a live setting with actual potential followers is needed to learn leadership. [Great Lakes Institute of Management incorporates a Leadership Experiential Project \(LEP\)](#) as an integral part of its 1-year Post-Graduate Program in Management (PGPM) and 2-year Post-Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM). This experiential project at Great Lakes is called Karma-Yoga.

Creating followers is the essence of leadership, and transforming those followers is the most potent form of leadership. "The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (Burns, 1978, "Leadership," p. 4). The LEP is an exercise in transformational leadership.

There are [20 panchayat villages surrounding the institute's campus](#) that have been adopted by Great Lakes for the LEP. Students visit these Karma-Yoga villages every week. The mission is to enhance the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the villagers (i.e., to empower them), so that they are able to lead a better quality life. The motto is not to give them fish, but to teach them how to fish. "That people can be lifted into their better selves is the secret of transforming leadership" (Burns, 1978, "Leadership," p. 462).

The Karma-Yoga project is a unique medium for students to connect with ground realities and experientially learn transformational leadership. The LEP creates a mutual win-win situation for

both the students and the villages. While the villages get budding managers to enable the villagers to lift themselves into their better selves, the students acquire a first-hand understanding of what it means to create followers and transform them. The project provides an experiential learning of transformational leadership.

Being totally devoted to our duties toward others and being really concerned about others are the foundations of authentic leadership. Hence, the LEP has been named Karma-Yoga. "Karma-Yoga is the attaining through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature" (Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 110).

There is a [closed group on Facebook for past and present Karma-Yoga students of Great Lakes](#). You can make use of it to discuss with your seniors.

There is a closed group on Facebook for each of the 20 Karma-Yoga panchayat villages. All coordination regarding the project activities in a village will be done using the Facebook group for the village.

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Amanambakkam>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Echankaranai>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Echur>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Kadambadi>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Kothimangalam>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Kunnathur>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Kuzhipanthandalam>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Manamai>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Mullikolathur>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Naduvakkarai>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Nallur>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Nathamkariacheri>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Neikuppi>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Pattikkadu>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Pudupattinam>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Vasuvamudram>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Vayalur>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Veerapuram>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Vengampakkam>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Karmayoga.Vittilapuram>

Experiential Learning Process

The class will be divided into teams and each team will be assigned one village or a part of a village. The project will involve each student visiting the assigned village and spending time in building a relationship with a group of people in the assigned village. The objective will be to enhance their self-efficacy and self-esteem (i.e., empower them) and to bring about enduring change in their lives by addressing their real needs. Every village will have one PGPM student as Village Coordinator (VC), one PGDM first year student as Village Associate (VA), and one PGDM second year student as Village Representative (VR).

(1) All PGPM and PGDM students are required to do the LEP during their first term and get one credit for Karma-Yoga. In other words, all PGPM and PGDM students are required to get at least one credit for Karma-Yoga in order to successfully complete their programs.

(2) Starting from Term 2, the experiential project is optional. Students have to choose one of the following three options: (1) Be a core member of the Karma-Yoga village team, by being a part of the Karma-Yoga committee for the assigned village, and get 5 additional credits for Karma-Yoga. This requires visiting the assigned village every week and spending at least 10 hours per month till the end of PGPM or PGDM. Those who successfully complete all the 5 additional credits will get a separate certificate of holistic development along with their PGPM or PGDM completion certificate. (2) Be a non-core affiliate member of the Karma-Yoga village team (but not the village committee), and get some additional credit for Karma-Yoga. This requires visiting the assigned village at least once a month. 1 credit requires 20 hours of input for PGPM and 30 hours for PGDM.

(3) Totally opt out of the project. A student who opts out of the project cannot come back and resume the project. A decision to opt out of the project is irrevocable.

(3) This experiential project is an integral part of the two leadership electives ("Leadership, Influence, and Power" and "Upanishads and Transformational Leadership"). Hence, anyone who is not a core member of the Karma-Yoga village team (i.e., those who did not choose option 1 above) cannot do those electives. VCs and VRs will get preference in selection of students for these electives.

Grading

(1) Each team is responsible for keeping the summary of its village [Karma-Yoga activities on our website](#) regularly and continuously updated. Your village activities summary page should include your village name, names of all core members of the village team in alphabetical order, and a brief summary of all past and intended future activities in less than 500 words. Each village page should also include some photos as links from its page.

(2) At least 48 hours before going on every village visit, the team members planning the visit should post the plan of action on their village's Facebook group. The posting should necessarily include the

names of the members planning to visit, besides date, time, and description of intended activities. Non-core affiliate members of a village team can visit their village only along with at least one core member. Within 24 hours after completing the village visit, the team members who visited the village should “comment” on their earlier Facebook “plan of action” posting, and provide a detailed description of the completed activities. Relevant photos highlighting the activities done should be included. Short videos of significant activities should also be included.

(3) There is a [blog on this experiential project](#) to which students contribute. Students who wish to contribute an entry to this blog should send the complete entry, after thoroughly proofreading it, to ky@greatlakes.edu.in as an attachment in Microsoft Word format. The students whose entries are posted on the blog will get bonus points in grading. At least one blog entry per village per year is expected.

(4) The final output expected from the year-long Karma-Yoga project is a good quality video on the work done in the village during the entire academic year. The video for every village should be between 4 and 6 minutes in duration. English subtitles should be included for all speech in any language. Speech from any one person should not exceed 30 seconds. Converting a collection of photos into a video will not be good enough. You should remember to create videos of all significant activities as and when they take place during the year, so that they can be edited and included in the final video. This final video will be for public consumption and should not include anything that negatively affects the image of the institute. This video will be a joint submission of all the PGPM and PGDM student members (both core and non-core) of a Karma-Yoga village team. This final video should be posted on the respective Facebook group of the village on or before 31 Mar, and a high-quality copy of the same should be submitted to the course facilitator on 1 April.