This year’s essay contributors had the unique chance to debate current global topics and challenges in the digital era of today’s leaders. Almost 400 students took part in Aarhus Symposium Challenge, but only 13 were offered the chance to discuss the topics on an even closer hold in Leaders’ Forum.

Rasmus Bach, Louise Birch Biede, and Lasse Thorbøll Juhl were among the 13 students, who contributed with the best and most inspiring Challenge essays. Not only did they secure a seat for Aarhus Symposium 2015, but they also qualified for an exclusive session with one of today’s top leaders.

We met up with all three of them after Aarhus Symposium 2015 to hear about their experiences and key takeaways from Leaders’ Forum.
TO LEAD IN THE DIGITAL AGE
For Rasmus Bach, BSc Economics and Management at Aarhus University, it was his third time participating in Aarhus Symposium. But this time was indeed different. Rasmus challenged Robert Uggla, CEO at Svitzer, and qualified for an informal session to discuss the challenges of being a “Leader in the Digital Age”. In his essay, he addressed the importance of not only accepting new technologies, but also incorporate them as a core part of the business. He discussed how DHL, the market leader in the logistics industry, could benefit from sharing economy initiatives.

“It was a great opportunity to spend so much time with a top leader, and he was extremely intelligent”, Rasmus said, stressing how inspirational the session was for him. He further adds: “Aarhus Symposium is great because you get to hear a lot of speakers’ takes on a specific topic – but to actually engage with them is something special. You can ask any question you want, which is a chance that most students should not miss out on”.

HOW TO SECURE THE FUTURE
The qualification for the exclusive session in Leaders’ Forum was Louise Birch Biede’s, BSc Political Science at Aarhus University, very first encounter with Aarhus Symposium. In her Challenge essay, Louise addressed the topic of “Initiatives Securing our Future”. With a thorough and interesting discussion on the global issue of food waste and food losses, she qualified for the informal session with Connie Hedegaard, Chairman of the Board at KR Foundation.
“I was really nervous, but I quickly realised how relaxed it was – even when sitting in front of the former Commissioner for Climate Action, someone so experienced! Of course, to hear the perspectives of the other participants was also very interesting and insightful”, Louise said about the experience.

Louise also adds that it is not just about asking questions to the top leaders: “They want to hear what we, as students, think. Connie wanted a dialogue, and she was very interested in our perspectives as well”.

TO HAVE THE RIGHT MINDSET
Lasse Thorbøll Juhl, MA Corporate Communication at Aarhus University, was certain that he wanted more than just to secure a seat. He chose to take on the Challenge “Ensuring the Success of a Startup” proposed by Christian Stadil, CEO at Thornico: “The Challenge topic was of high interest to me, because I work with entrepreneurs on a daily basis, and I saw Leaders’ Forum as a great opportunity to share my perspectives on entrepreneurship with Christian Stadil, who is an experienced entrepreneur himself”. In Lasse’s essay, he discussed how services and experiences should be the core of entrepreneurship.

“It was fantastic to meet one of Denmark’s most visionary entrepreneurs. He was sincerely interested in our opinions, and he also advised us on how to shape our careers if we want to become successful”, Lasse said with a clear feeling of excitement.

Besides the valuable knowledge Christian Stadil shared with the participants, Lasse also pointed out another interesting key takeaway: To have the right mindset - especially when it comes to entrepreneurship. “With the right mindset, you can most likely succeed no matter the issue at hand”, he said.

SEIZE THE CHALLENGE
As a final note, we asked the three students to bring up their best advice for future participants in Leaders’ Forum. “Select the topic that interests you the most and dig deeper into it. I actually wrote two essays before realising what perspective and recommendations I wanted to write about”, Rasmus said with a smile. Louise recommends participants to seize the opportunity: “Don’t be afraid to engage in the dialogue. Even though they are top leaders with a lot of experience and knowledge, they are also just interested in learning new perspectives”. Lasse has taken this experience concretely to heart and brought it into a more general context that can be used in many situations during life: “You can overcome almost all obstacles, if you believe that you can” he said as a final conclusion.

As such, Aarhus Symposium 2015 has brought inspiring and memorable moments, and from these three participants’ experiences, there is no doubt that Leaders’ Forum is an extraordinary opportunity if you wish to engage with and learn from today’s top leaders.