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A Personal Philosophy of Administration and Leadership

The Faculty Guidebook, A Comprehensive Tool for Improving Faculty Performance suggests that there are five roles that an effective administrator must play in cultivating an enriched learning environment that empowers those under supervision. An administrator must be a **manager** that oversees the mission, values, and integrity of the institution. S/he must be a **decider**, capable of making decisions that clearly align those values and goals. An effective administrator must be a **builder** to ensure the expansion of student learning and respond effectively to the needs of internal and external constituents. A **leader** embraces diversity, fosters an attitude of humility, values the contributions of others, must be accountable to self and others, cultivates bridges of trust, possess strong listening skills, and understand the importance of risk-taking. Finally, an effective administrator must be able to serve as a **mentor** to students, faculty, and staff. In this collaborative age, administrators must be able to share the depth of their personal experience, empathize with others, understand often-conflicting perspectives, and facilitate a pleasant and empowering workplace.

A management theorist might characterize my leadership style as a combination of “hierarchical/consultative.” This paradoxical appellation describes a relationship that is neither management by consensus alone, a method that may become paralyzed with indecision, nor an authoritarian approach that embraces a “stovepipe” style. Hierarchical leadership is based on applying the judgment needed to make decisions and act decisively when appropriate. This requires reflective decision-making skills, the ability to analyze information, a pleasant and positive relationship with personnel, and the willingness to take personal responsibility for outcomes. Consultative leadership requires patience and forbearance, the self-confidence to give credit to others for good ideas, the integrity to lead by example, and the courage to recognize mistakes and correct them without playing the “blame game.” It promotes the satisfaction of the community through involvement of shared interests in outcomes and the promotion of the mission, values and goals of the institution.

Such a dual-organizational model endeavors to empower faculty and staff to contribute to decisions that impact them. The contributive model assumes that collaborative effort will lead to better solutions because those who are involved in defining the problem, in weighing a variety of solutions, in determining the implications of various proposals, and in crafting and implementing a plan will persuade others to participate in the process. Successful collaboration requires that the participants have a shared commitment to the mission, values, and goals of the organization, and are willing to take personal responsibility for it. However, there are times when an administrator has the responsibility to carry it out an unpopular decision. In this situation it is essential for the administrator to exercise leadership on the basis of a relationship of trust and respect with employees. This is best achieved through the promotion of a collegial, pleasant, positive, sharing, and empowering workplace.

Administration requires the cultivation of an important set of competencies that are based on a lifestyle dedicated to lifelong learning and personal improvement. These skill sets include the following:

My personal vision of the educational mission: I believe that the mission of an educational institution is to provide accessible and affordable education of very high quality to all types of college students with a strong commitment to lifelong learning and community service. It is our role to provide an inspiring and supportive learning environment designed to facilitate creativity and innovation through the thoughtful application of knowledge and skills throughout life. We must prepare our students to responsibly and adaptively pursue an ongoing process of life long learning thereby exemplifying the qualities of an engaged and well-educated citizen that successfully responds to the challenges of their personal life, their work, their community, and the world itself. In this effort it is my mission and goal to provide leadership in the transformation of our local community into a global entity.

Foster a creative vision: An effective administrator must be able to communicate the mission of the institution, embrace its values, and should have a thorough knowledge of its goals. This requires an understanding of the vertical and horizontal structures and the culture of the college. An administrator must be able to facilitate the establishment of short-term and long-range goals and objectives through the collaborative development of effective strategies, policies, programs, and procedures. Therefore, such a leader must be willing to think creatively, even “out of the box,” in a world of rapid change and technological advance. It requires courage to recognize and foster creativity when it would be easier to simply hand down an edict. It is my belief that creativity at the top inevitably inspires creativity throughout the organization.

A management style that empowers personnel: An administrator must be able to attract, select, and retain high quality people. Evaluation must be based on a history of accurate record keeping, establishing performance expectations that are clear, rewarding excellent work, and mentoring those who need improvement. Such leadership endeavors to inspire others to willingly and enthusiastically strive to accomplish individual and institutional goals. He or she delegates responsibility, recognizes creative effort, and facilitates the implementation of the good ideas of all levels of workers.

Possess strong analytical skills: An effective administrator must have the ability to monitor and evaluate operational tasks to ensure that institutional goals, objectives, and plans are accomplished. This analytical skill includes the management of the budget, the prioritization of financial plans, and the acquisition of funds for projects through effective financial management, resource development, and progressive building of human capacity over a prolonged period of time.

Facilitate proactive public relations: Administrators are important spokespersons for the institution and must have a good understanding of the art of marketing. Though advertising may not be a part of the job description, a leader must be willing to have a personal stake in the development and support of the public image of the

college. That leadership goes well beyond the commercial marketing to the college. Fostering positive and professional relationships to on and off campus constituencies is essential in this competitive age of aggressive online recruitment and paper-mill education.

Be able to demonstrate professionalism: An administrative leader must have a strong working knowledge of the topics and issues related to education in our contemporary economic climate. As promoting professional growth and development of the faculty and staff is central to the health of any academic organization, an administrator is obligated to be an advocate of continuing education for life long learning at all levels of the college within the fiscal realities of the college.

Have strong decision-making skills: The delegation of responsibility requires the ability to know when and when not to assign tasks, grant authority, and hold others accountable. This requires the integrity to recognize and take responsibility for mistakes. Rather than seeking the assignment of blame when a problem occurs, a good decision maker is interested in understanding the problem, learning lessons contained therein, implementing corrective change, and evaluating the effectiveness of the resultant policies and procedures. This is best accomplished in a collegial supportive atmosphere.

Additional personal characteristics: A modern creative administrator fosters respect for the dignity of self and of others in the application of a strong sense of social justice. This leader has the integrity to command respect, the persistence to be creative, and the independence to act with confidence. A modern administrator understands the importance of informed change based on the self-assurance that empowers and rewards the contributions of others. A creative leader must be able to inspire trust in one's words and actions, exercise good judgment, possess a good understanding of group dynamics, and reflect a positive attitude. Such administrative leadership will be committed to the institution, embrace diversity, inspire trust and loyalty, and encourage and support the productivity of faculty and staff.

The bottom line: The strongest indicator of an effective administrator is the empowerment of faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders through the cultivation and fostering of a pleasant workplace based on a proactive vision of customer service. This is absolutely necessary in the creation of an atmosphere that fosters a culture of learning, collegiality, collaboration, empowerment, and mutual respect for all.

I believe that human life is neither easy nor fair. The modern reality of college level administration is that it is an inherently busy position requiring very long hours, strong multi-tasking skills, and the "wearing of many hats." Successful administration in a world deeply engaged in a renaissance of unparalleled scope and an economy in severe distress requires a creative and proactive approach to learning and living that necessitates a willingness to work hard, a desire to lead by example, and a refusal to give up in the face of adversity and defeat. I have found that to truly engage in lifelong learning requires the honesty to examine oneself, the backbone to apply consistent effort to try

new things, the fortitude to seek the wisdom of others, and the courage to learn from failure and disappointment. Though no human being has the “perfect” answer to all questions nor access to “the absolute truth,” developing a lifestyle founded on actively seeking truth in learning, thereby cultivating personal growth and continuous development, appears to me to be the primary objective of human life and the core mission of academia.

Through this philosophy I challenge students and colleagues to become active seekers of truth no matter what stage of life they are in. I am convinced that learning is truly a lifelong pilgrimage. Seeking knowledge is a matter of personal responsibility. Though there may be times when the comforts of tradition may offer easy solutions to the problems of life, the greatest truths are discovered through creative imagination, the application of hard work and personal effort, and learning the hard lessons of failure. To my colleagues and students I say the following:

“As a teacher I may be able to inform and inspire you, as a friend I may be able to guide and lead you, but I cannot give you the desire for learning – that must come from inside you.”

At the very heart of this philosophy is the concept of “Service.” The idea of servanthood tends to be little understood in our modern culture because it is founded on spiritual rather than secular principles. I believe that service to others is the essence of the meaning of life itself as we learn, grow, and ascend through our mortal careers. Founded on the Golden Rule, a human life based on the spiritual principle of service contains the essential ingredients necessary for the development of an eternal perspective that promotes an ascendant mortal life filled with adventure, experience, progress, optimism, and enthusiasm. Thus, a life centered on selfless service is able to experience the highest levels of faith, hope, and love.

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