



## Professional Responsibility: Keys to Building Your Career

July 2004

By

**Janet Ward**, Associate Vice President for Information and Data Management, Seattle Pacific University. The author has over 20 years of experience in higher education administration and has held leadership roles at two-year public and four-year private institutions (admissions, registrar, enrollment management, and research), and in various professional associations in state, regional and national associations. Served as PACRAO President from 1995-96.

[jward@spu.edu](mailto:jward@spu.edu)

The world of higher education administration is multi-faceted and challenges its professionals to continually focus on the strategic priorities and operations to achieve goals, while remaining open to new ideas to maintain or obtain a competitive advantage in the market place. Having worked at both the community college and baccalaureate institutional level, the skills for success are the same, yet each campus has its own unique climate to which a professional must adapt. Effective leaders embrace the changing world around us by refining and building new skills. This article will focus on four skills – leadership, management, campus climate and ethics.

### Leadership

Simply stated, leaders know where they are going and demonstrate how to use information to influence others, including key decision makers, colleagues and/or staff. Effectiveness requires determining the goals and priorities, and then spending time achieving them through both an individual's personal effort as well as their teams. Leaders must first understand their own strengths and weaknesses and then build a team that will complement their gifts.

The following model provides one view of the various team skills. It is important to remember that most of us serve on multiple teams and may hold different roles on each. At times you may be the facilitator, while in others you may be the expert. Consider the various teams on which you serve and which functions you perform within each.



**Facilitator:** Gets it going & stays on task

**The Expert:** Provides specific knowledge -- technical, marketing, administrative, etc.

**The Sensor:** Senses “feelings” of the team and strives for group harmony.

**The Visionary:** Thinks “outside the box” and brings creative possibilities to the table

**The Detailer:** Provides follow through and constantly follows up on decisions made

A balanced team will have each function represented. A department with only experts may have great knowledge, yet be unable to achieve goals in a timely or efficient manner. As a leader, it is important to value and appreciate the unique gifts and contributions each member brings to the team.

### **Individual Leadership Traits:**

Creating and sustaining a vision provides meaning and purpose for your staff members. Hopefully, the admissions office's vision statement resonates with a strong and compelling institutional vision statement. The following characteristics apply to all leaders within the organization, whether a program manager or lead counselor or associate director or vice president.

**Ability to Forge Collaborations Across the Institution:** To achieve the goals within the enrollment plan requires many plans, with different areas of expertise, temperaments, and priorities. The keys to building effective collaborations require:

- **Taking the Time to Build Relationships** – While achieving tasks and assignments are important, it is just as important to spend time on building relationships. Identify those individuals who will help you achieve the goals in the enrollment plan, and take time to get to know them as individuals as well as what they hope to achieve on your campus. By understanding their hopes and aspirations, you may find a way to help them achieve their goals, and in the long run, they in turn may be more willing to support your goals.
- **Building your “Trust” Bank Account** – your track record will speak volumes and will be based on your integrity and the consistency of your actions. Ways to build trust may be helping others achieve their goals, giving away the credit for successes, meeting commitments and deadlines, that your actions support your words.
- **Being Proactive** – Take the initiative rather than waiting for things to come to you. In building collaborations, step out of your comfort zone and meet with a colleague to discuss a new idea, seek someone's support, or ask another to join you in a project.

**Holistic Perspective:** While understanding your operation is important, it is also important to understand the big picture and the long-term goals. Look for the inter-relationships among the goals and tactics, and strive to find ways where your operations support institutional aspirations.

**Communication Style – Become a Facilitator:** The challenge for many is that as we have progressed up the career ladder, we were promoted by pursuing our own ideas. However, to gain the respect and confidence across campus, a more collegial style needed.

- Instead of directing – ask probing questions to explore what is behind differing viewpoints or ideas.
- When listening to diverse views develop the ability to synthesize what has been stated and then re-state the key ideas in order to help others understand the salient points.
- When things are not going well, think of these as teachable moments where you can advance the teams or individual understanding or knowledge base. Become a transparent communicator by sharing information in all directions within the organization.
- The only information which is protected from being openly disclosed is connected to personnel actions and confidences.

**Energy Committed to Institutional Goals vs. Personal Advancement:** While career advancement is sought by many, in a wise organization, the person most likely to attain a new rung on the ladder is the one focused on understanding institutional priorities and spending the time and energy on their attainment. This is the person who willingly goes the

second mile for a student, or sees a problem and pursues a solution that permanently removes the difficulty.

- No one succeeds solely by their own efforts. True accomplishment requires the effort of a committed group of people toward a common and shared goal, otherwise known as a team. Building a winning team may take months or years, depending on the group of people you inherit when you move into a new leadership role. It is a rare experience to be able to create a team from scratch, so the initial challenge for a new leader is to allow the staff to understand who you (professionally and personally), and build their confidence in your abilities. Three factors will weigh heavily on your ability to win the hearts and minds of the staff. Are you:
  - Competent – you are the expert in your field and it will be expected that you know the answers to the questions or know how to obtain the answers.
  - Congruent – do your words and actions support one another? Do you walk the talk?
  - Consistent – are you steadfast to your purpose and approach to others? Are you genuine or do you change based on the situation or who is present?

## **Management for Success – Financial, Personnel, Change**

When I was in college, management skills were defined as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, evaluating, coordinating, reporting and budgeting. All are important skills to possess, yet being able to manage finances, personnel issues and change are essential in today's world.

### **Financial**

Financial management initially revolves around your departmental budget and insuring by year-end it is in the "black" (not in deficit). Early in your tenure begin building a positive working relationship with your budget officer and develop opportunities for you and other members of your staff to go through training. Once the fundamentals of your institution's budget process is understood, the next step may be submitting recommendations for increased funding to support a new initiative or strategy. Before you take pen to paper to draft a proposal, recall in the current economy most institutions are finding it difficult to support current operations. Even in good times, there never is enough money to go around. However, even in economically challenging times, some new ideas will be funded, so the question is, how to give your idea its best chance for success at the budget decision table?

First, creatively explore how to fund it within your existing budget. Should every function, project, activity or staff position be continued and/or funded to the same level? Creative leaders and managers learn redesign principles and continually assess operational effectiveness. A re-designed operations can free up funding within a budget by streamlining operations (get same or better results with less administrative cost) or re-directing staff FTE into new positions that support critical institutional goals. Check with your business or management faculty to learn more about assessing your operation.

If after the assessment you are unable to find a way to re-design the operation and re-channel existing funds, then a crisp proposal for new funding is merited. Provide a one page overview of the key elements an administrator would need to consider, followed by a detailed plan. Most administrators will focus on the one page overview and if compelling, will then look into a more detailed report. The one page over should contain:

- Need – what need is being met? What is to be accomplished? How does it fit with the institution's mission and/or priorities? What are the expected outcomes to be achieved?

- Cost – what are the start up costs and on-going costs? Is this a one-time only or a permanent cost to the budget?
- Benefits – who will benefit and how? Why is the cost worth the benefit?
- Outcome Assessment – what will determine if this newly funded effort is achieving the expressed outcomes?

Timing is critical in financial management and it is important to understand the cycle for the fiscal year on your campus. For instance, most institutions have a window of opportunity for submitting recommendations for new funding. This may include requests for new FTE and/or asking for promotions for your staff. If you miss the window, you may need to wait another year.

**Personnel**

The human resources department is an ally to be cultivated for working through personnel management issues. It is recommended that you develop an understanding of the process to hire, evaluate and discipline staff. While you may be hired to direct an operation, it will not be unusual that the majority of your time is involved working with people. In his book, Developing the Leader Within You, John C. Maxwell states the following principles for managing people

***Personnel Management -- Principles***

- **Value of People** .....this is an issue of my attitude
- **Commitment to People**...this is an issue of my time
- **Integrity with People**.....this is an issue of my character
- **Standard for People** .....this is an issue of my vision
- **Influence over People**.....this is an issue of my leadership

John C. Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You

There are specific tools that may be used for building and sustaining high performance teams. To build buy-in and acceptance, it is recommended that a supervisor work with employees to develop the job description and performance expectation. While the supervisor has the final say on what appears in a document, collaboration tends strengthen an employee’s sense of value by sharing in the process. .

- Job description -- Creating clear definition of the functional role and responsibilities
- Performance expectations -- During an initial orientation to the job description, it is important to clearly articulate your expectations. This should include what will be expected in order to pass the probationary period (usually one – three months) as well as annual review. It is beneficial to work with staff within similar classifications (e.g. admissions counselors, processing staff, etc.) to set reasonable standards of performance. Expectations may include: interpersonal skills, quality or quantity of work, etc.

In the event an employee is not performing up to your expectations, having both a well written job description and set of performance expectations will support you if there is a need for further disciplinary action.

When working with people, whether staff, colleagues or prospective students, there will be times when individuals will have differing points of view. An essential skill to develop is conflict resolution. When working through contentious issues, it is important to meet face-to-face. E-mail, while expedient should be avoided as e-mail tends to use stronger language than if you met together to discuss the issue. Other advice for managing conflict:

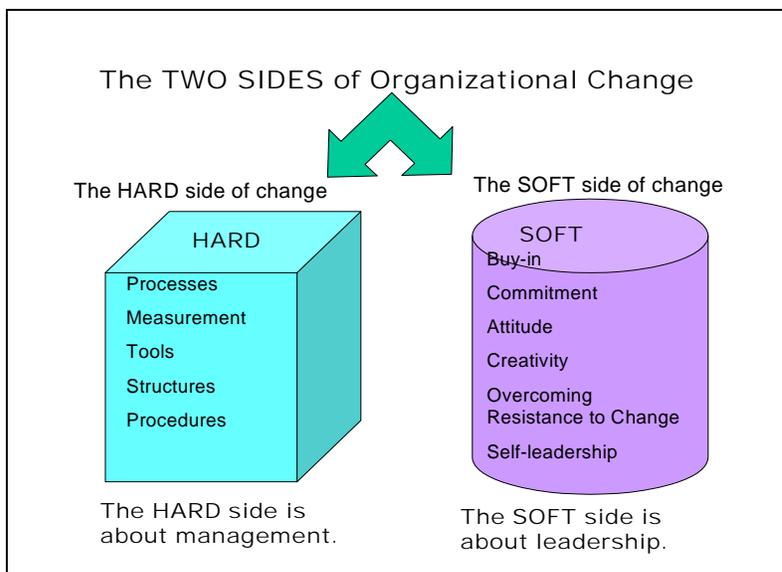
- o Do it privately, not publicly
- o Do it as soon as possible
- o Speak to one issue at a time
- o Deal only with actions the person can change
- o Avoid sarcasm
- o Don't apologize for the confrontational meeting

### Change

Each year that passes, the swifter change seems to occur. Organizations need to be poised to respond quickly to new opportunities and threats, and this is when leaders who are change-agents are highly prized. Before a team can embrace change, the leader must be willing to change. Change management is important when you realize that:

- o A change in leadership will change the priorities
- o Problems change requiring new strategies
- o New staff or staff in new roles will require heightened communication so the right hand knows what the left is doing; time to build up "trust" bank account.
- o New technologies on the horizon may change current policies, processes and/or staffing requirements.

The following picture illustrates to the two sides of organizational change, and a professional needs to become skilled at both.

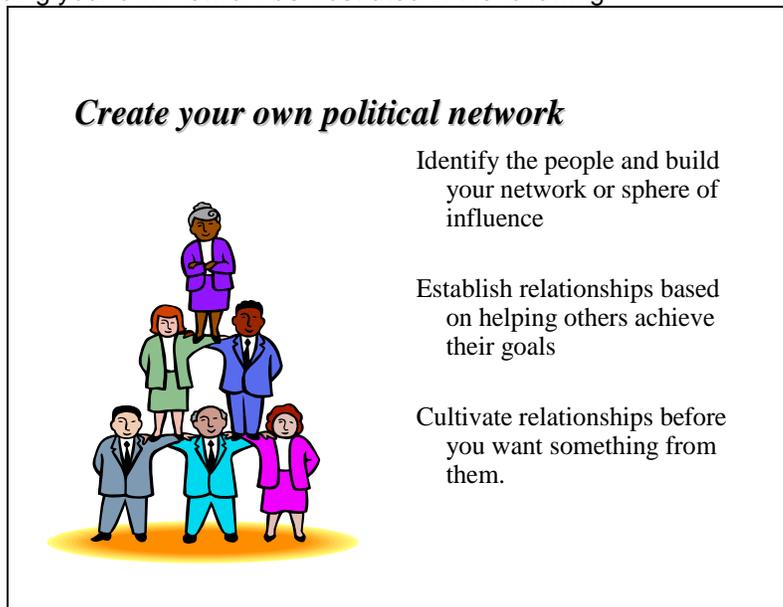


Change agents are only effective if they have developed a strong sense of trust among their staff and within their campus community. This does not come overnight, but is tied back to the leader's performance – competence, congruence, consistency. Leading change requires gaining the advice and support from key influencers both on your staff and in the community, developing a process for implementing the change, and demonstrating how change will benefit others. When

people have an opportunity to shape their own environment, they will be more willing to embrace change. It is a leader's responsibility to give staff an opportunity to help shape their new world.

## Campus Climate

**Structure, Responsibility & Authority:** The operational and political climate on a campus may either support or hinder your ability to achieve your goals. While no one administrative structure is superior to another, the key to success does depend on the clarity of the structure as well as the clarity of lines of authority. To understand the campus climate, find individuals with institutional longevity who may identify the key influencers. Sometimes a key influencer is not related to a title or position, but is based on a relationship with a leader in the community. Begin building your own network as illustrated in the following:



Every organization includes a level of politics, and word itself is neither good nor bad. Politics is about using influence to get something done. Politics is about understanding who will benefit (or not) from a decision. One way to maintain your professional integrity is to understand when the authority for a decision belongs to someone else, when it is shared (e.g. among team members), or when it belongs to you alone. As a leader have unique responsibilities to the organization. For example, behind closed doors I have the freedom to disagree with any position taken by my supervisor or the administration. However, once I have opened the office doors and have entered the public arena, I believe I am bound to support my supervisor's or the administration's position. If I cannot, then it is time for me to find another position or else jeopardize my personal integrity.

## Ethical and Legal Issues

Developing the ability to make sound and reasonable decisions is a learned skill. First, take the time to gather all the relevant facts from all parties involved. Be sure to understand any institutional procedures that must be followed. If a required process is unintentionally violated, then the petitioner would have grounds on which to appeal a decision.

While it is important to understand your organization's procedures, there are several principles that should be considered with each decision:

- o Will the decision prevent harm?
- o Will the decision do benefit others?

- Will the process and decision respect personal dignity?
- Will the process and decision be fair by treating everyone with equal concern and respect?
- Will the decision promote the common good?
- Will the decision encourage virtue?

Finally, understand what position on campus has the authority to seek advice from legal counsel. When unsure about the decision, ask that administrator for advice before rendering a decision.

### **Professional Responsibility: Your Choices**

No matter where you are on your path, I encourage you to keep these thoughts before you as you continue your work:

- Focus on what is important -- vision centered leadership
- Build strong working relationships with key leaders
- Develop your leadership style and encourage others to do the same
- Decisions based on principles of integrity
- Communicate successes to the community -- Share the Story
- Make a personal commitment to remain energized & open to change

### **Sources:**

Stephen R. Covey, Principle-Centered Leadership, Simon & Schuster, 1991

James m. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, Encouraging the Heart. A Leaders Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others, Jossey-Bass Inc., 1999

James M. Kouzes and Barry Posner, The Leadership Challenge, Jossey-Bass, 1995.

John C. Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1993

Ed Oakley and Doug Krug, Enlightened Leadership, Simon & Schuster Inc, 1991.

Max DePree, Leadership is an Art, Dell Publishing, 1989

Noel M. Tichy and Mary Anne Devanna, The Transformational Leader, John Wiley & Sons, 1990