

Perspectives

Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

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It has increasingly become apparent that merely identifying values and ethical principles and influencing others to follow them is insufficient if the leader is not authentic and genuine in the articulation and enactment of values.

- Joseph B. Berger

Two recurring themes that experienced leaders describe when explaining what traits are required to be a strong leader in the 21st century are adaptability and authenticity; both result from leaders drawing on inner courage.

- Michael Rivera

Resiliency and Change

Sanford C. Shugart, PhD

President

Valencia College
Orlando, Florida

It has become a cliché to note the constancy of change in the environments in which we lead, but it is anything but a cliché to experience as a leader the unpredictability, contingency, and constant sense that something for which you could not have been prepared is about to blindside you. I have been in senior level leadership in higher education for 35 years, 24 as a president, and can assure you that this experience is real. Year to year shifts in funding priorities, unstable governance and rogue board members, intrusive state mandates, bizarre and embarrassing personnel issues, litigious students and employees, instant infamy on the internet, refractory organizations with deep fault lines between different constituents, unintended consequences of policy decisions made far from the college experience, and all manner of human foolishness threatens the capacity of the leader to guide the ship without foundering.

More than twenty years ago, Peter Vaill described the situation as "permanent whitewater" (Vaill, 1996). We used to think of navigating our organizations through occasional periods of turbulence into the calm and predictable waters beyond – a bit like whitewater rafting. But the reality is that there are no calm waters, only whitewater, and like a skilled kayaker we must turn into the current and learn not just to survive it, but to flourish in and love

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the constantly changing environment. Peter asked us to see in our mind's eye the beautiful dance of the boat and boatman becoming one as they joyfully ride the turbulent water, now hovering in one place, then darting across the hydraulics to another wave. And his guidance for the would-be kayaker-leader was to take on the attitude of a constant learner, a perpetual beginner in the work of leadership. I can't tell you how many times his counsel has been life-shaping to me.

More recent works on this same topic of change have focused on the quality of resilience. Resilience is "the ability of a system to cope with change." The modern concept of resilience arose from the psychological sciences, studies of how people endure and prevail in the

midst of overwhelming grief, conflict, and despair. But it has come to be applied to many fields, from child development to supply chain management, and in recent years has made its way into the leadership literature.

Our places of work can become crucibles where we experience the heat, pressure, reactivity, and occasionally dangerous by-products of leadership.

Resilience can be a quality of an entire organization, its ability to cope with, learn from, adapt to, and capitalize on change. It can also be a very personal quality, a part of the character of a leader that can and should be consciously cultivated. It is a quality that others come to count on in exceptional leaders, manifesting as a calm and consistent sense of purpose, a clear and principled framework for making decisions, a focus on the next decisions rather than past mistakes, an ability to adapt strategy to the moment without compromising core values, and finally a quality that Robert K. Greenleaf called "entheos," a sort of "sustaining spirit" to the team and enterprise one is leading. It is upon the sources of these qualities in the character of leaders that I want to reflect.

Many things can be taught and learned, including the techniques of leadership, the tools one handles in the course of shaping a future for one's organization. There is, in fact, a huge industry in books on this subject, and I have benefitted from reading many of them. Still, there must be more "how to" books in leadership and management than there are people to read them, and resilience isn't technique, but a manifestation of character, and character isn't taught, it is formed over an extended period of time by deep reflection on experience.

How, then, can one cultivate this deep character trait, the virtue of resilience in the midst of potentially overwhelming change?

The first step is to understand that your work, what you do every day and the tools you use to do it, is forming you more powerfully than you form it. This is true of all of us, and especially for leaders, those who take on a heightened responsibility for others. Our places of work can become crucibles where we experience the

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

For the past decade, community college leaders have struggled to address a myriad of concurrent and often conflicting challenges, including such issues as an evolving student population, declining funding support, growing accountability expectations, and increased student outcomes measures. As a result, expectations of our leaders have shifted. Today's new leaders must possess the necessary characteristics and skills to develop realistic responses to the complex issues that their colleges need to address. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

Phillip King, MS

Dean of Academic Foundations and Connections
Clackamas Community College
Oregon City, Oregon

Authenticity in leadership is a prized and yet somewhat elusive characteristic. As this nation ponders the great leadership dearth in community colleges, each of us may or may not consciously be building a set of leadership skills. Through our early work years we might have begun our careers as just a low level director, one of many directors, part of a larger system, and possibly even possessed varying levels of support and supervision. These positions may not have overly tasked individuals to truly show themselves. However, rising in the ranks whereby it becomes necessary to stick one's neck out for an agenda ultimately may place that individual in a position of vulnerability unlike any other.

In these new moments many may have held a belief about what the leader should be like, act like – and frankly, look like. And what others often revere most in us is truly showing and being our authentic selves – especially in our decisive moments. Thus, it is incumbent upon each of us to question and reveal our authentic selves more deeply as we rise through the ranks.

However, the task ahead is one in which there must also exist a balance between the known agenda for leadership – that of a commitment to students, the willingness to take risks, the ability and knowledge to create change that lasts, the ability to build strong internal and external partnerships, and the ability to know how and when to realign resources for student success – and the key authentic personal characteristics to lead that agenda (Achieving the Dream, 2013).

This balance of everyday management and authenticity leadership is often filled with, "...heat, pressure, and reactivity" in a tightly enclosed environment (Shugart, 2013). Communication within that environment cannot be just about aligning, describing, and clarifying, but must truly be about creating a deep and fundamental connection with our co-workers.

Clearly, there are many challenges ahead that require balancing difficult leadership decisions whilst gaining the confidence and trust of others. And it is in these moments that each us hopes to lead in ways that include not just the endurances and strife of leadership and followership, but also create positive, interactive, and creative outcomes in a formative environment.

References:

Achieving the Dream, Inc., & The Aspen Institute. (2013, June). *Crisis and opportunity: Aligning the community college presidency with student success*. Retrieved from http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/upload/CEP_Final_Report.pdf
Shugart, S. C. (2013). *Leadership in the crucible of work: Discovering the interior life of an authentic leader*. Maitland, FL: Florida Hospital.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What are the most important competencies for today's authentic and effective community college leaders?

And what others often revere most in us is truly showing and being our authentic selves - especially in our decisive moments. ~ Phillip King

Paige Vanderhyden, MS

Educational Outreach Consultant
Detroit, Michigan

Perhaps William Shakespeare stated it best in Hamlet, "To thine own self be true." To be genuine and authentic as a leader, you must reflect on who you are, what your values are, and what your guiding principles are. Taking time to touch base with your internal self is not always easy, but necessary in order to understand how your work, your crucible, has formed you into the person you are, and more

importantly, how you form the workplace around you and connect your leadership skills externally. Writing this perspective has forced me to pause and review who I am as a leader and what skills I draw on, not only in the crucible of the workplace, but also outside the crucible in my personal life.

A key leadership competency is separating from the work, or "engaged detachment." Yes, leaders need to be present in the moment and engaged; however, the work should not define who we are ultimately. Leaders who have a connection to their internal values, will align those values externally for the work at hand. Criticism, constructive to the work, should not affect the leader to a point where it is taken personally. Leaders will fail to grow or learn from their mistakes if every criticism is taken to heart. That is not to say that some will miss hitting the heart, but a leader who is authentic and genuine will be able to bounce back and forge forward.

Leaders set the stage for the crucible as well. How we handle and cope with failure and forgiveness by our own actions speaks volumes to those who surround us – professionally and personally. Failure is inevitable and without it, there would be no growth or change. Allowing failure in the crucible and using it as a tool for learning sets a tone of safety and empowerment for the crucible and opens the door for forgiveness. Forgiveness allows for forward movement and further strengthens relationships. Authentic leaders who positively allow for failure and promote forgiveness will form the work to be productive, engaging, and innovative.

As community college leaders, we must live up to our mission of being accessible, flexible, and all things to all people. Realizing our internal values, principles, beliefs and what forms us, sets a strong external foundation upon which to form and lead the organization to make this vision a reality.

As community college leaders, we must live up to our mission of being accessible, flexible, and all things to all people. ~ Paige Vanderhyden

Phillip King is the Dean of Academic Foundations and Connections at Clackamas Community College in Oregon City, Oregon. Since 1991 he has worked in higher education as both an administrator and adjunct instructor at Mt. Hood Community College, The George Washington University, Florida International University, and Portland State University. He earned his MS from Portland State University and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



Paige Vanderhyden is an educational outreach consultant in Detroit, Michigan, working with both profit and non-profit organizations. Previously she served as the Director of Workforce Development at Joliet Junior College, overseeing \$1.6 million in grant initiatives. Paige is a newly elected board member for the National Council for Continuing Education & Training (NCCET). She earned her MS from the University of St. Francis and is enrolled in the Ferris DCCL program.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

For the past decade, community college leaders have struggled to address a myriad of concurrent and often conflicting challenges, including such issues as an evolving student population, declining funding support, growing accountability expectations, and increased student outcomes measures. As a result, expectations of our leaders have shifted. Today's new leaders must possess the necessary characteristics and skills to develop realistic responses to the complex issues that their colleges need to address. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

Stan Jensen, PhD

President
Henry Ford College
Dearborn, Michigan

In today's complex and hectic college leadership world, the demands can be overwhelming. For that reason, it is critical for an effective leader to focus on "the vital few." While it is true there are scores of leadership principles that merit some attention, I believe we need to emphasize the 20% that give us 80% of our success. In this article I will focus on the vital few competencies that I believe are most important for authentic and effective community college leaders today.

Visioning. It is of great value to have a clear and detailed vision, one derived from listening to a wide variety of students, board members, community and national stakeholders, as well as faculty, staff, and administration. Since wisdom is often found in a multitude of counselors and advisors, it is wise for leaders to lead with their ears. In the process of listening, it is important to discern between those who are speaking only on behalf of their selfish ambitions and those who are truly interested in the lasting results of student success. There is a great difference between the shrill and loud voices of selfish curmudgeons and the quiet dedicated voices of those who authentically care about student success.

A chief component of visioning is anticipating short and long-term future needs. Leaders must think ahead, while also predicting where the next megatrends will develop. Anticipation leadership is dedicated to the use of predictive analytics and involves heavy utilization of data, as well as a keen sense as to where future transformational opportunities will develop. Then we must move! We must move leadership and resources toward that transformational opportunity in order to maximize its benefits for our students. Remember, there is a cost of doing nothing.

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Partnerships. I have found it extremely beneficial to build wise and mutually beneficial partnerships. As a consultant, I spent over 20 years helping colleges and businesses build such partnerships. While president of Colorado Mountain College, we doubled the number of community partnerships and created five times more partnerships with other educational institutions, all within 4 ½ years. In the past two years as President of HFC, we have worked diligently in the creation of a university center with area universities and established 3 +1 partnerships for our students. Our university partners will also bring their masters degrees right to our campus.

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Additionally, we have enhanced and grown a vibrant partnership between our college and the local P-12 district, resulting in the largest dual-credit program in Michigan and an effective Henry Ford Collegiate Academy program. Also established is the nationally-ranked Henry Ford Early College, an alliance between the Henry Ford Health Systems, P- 12, and HFC.

I also believe strongly in community partnerships and have demonstrated the power of such partnerships with county and city government, as well as through significant partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and Development Authorities. All of these alliances have resulted in excellent opportunities for our students and in the saving of taxpayer money.

Leaders must think ahead, while also predicting where the next megatrends will develop.

Team Building. One of the most effective ways to develop the many strengths of college faculty, staff, and administration is to build what I call Continuous Process Improvement Teams. I have built over 850 of these teams in more than 30 colleges and universities and scores of businesses. In the first two years of my presidency at HFC, we have built 28 continuous process improvement teams. Over 200 faculty, staff, and administrators have been involved and the teams have produced over 200 improvement ideas. Nearly every idea has been - or is being - implemented at HFC. The inclusiveness of teams is powerful. Each team typically includes faculty, staff, and administrators serving on the same team and is focused on processes and systems that are of high priority to the college. The processes that are addressed are those that have been prioritized by a cross-section of the entire college. Teams all report out to the president, the cabinet, and a cross-section of the entire college. Anyone is welcome to attend the report-out sessions. Further, the teams and their reports are all posted on the HFC website.

This pattern has been repeated in many colleges and universities that I have worked with over the last 25 years. Continuous process improvement teams are effective in breaking down silos within the institution, as well as providing real answers to real process problems that will create more efficiencies and ultimately, more student success.



Dr. Stan Jensen has been a higher education leader for the past 43 years in a variety of capacities, founding and leading his own consulting company, and currently serving as president of Henry Ford College in Dearborn, Michigan. He earned his PhD at the University of Iowa and also holds a MDiv degree. In his first two years as HFC President, he coordinated a \$25 million turnaround in finances, a cash flow increase of over \$16 million, the passage of a new mill levy by over 60%, and the addition of baccalaureate degrees.

QUICK TAKES

Highlights from the Field

Leadership: A Concise, Conceptual Overview

by Joseph B. Berger

Given the multiple theories and models of leadership in existence, a great deal of confusion exists about how best to define and understand this extremely important concept, especially as it relates to higher education. This article provides a comprehensive understanding of leadership by introducing a conceptual map of the major approaches to leadership with a discussion of each approach. These major categories focus on three foundational aspects of leadership – achievement, relationships, and values. Read the full article here:

<http://bit.ly/1L2EvHs>

Adaptability and Authenticity as a Product of Courage

by Michael Rivera

Rivera posits that current definitions of good leadership must evolve just as quickly as the shifting 21st century landscape, suggesting that we begin thinking about leadership in a more situational manner, or “one in which good leadership is defined as much by the character of the leader ... as by the possibilities and realities that create this new situational context.” The recurring traits of adaptability and authenticity, both resulting from leaders drawing on inner courage, are explored.

<http://bit.ly/1LXVn0K>

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Resiliency and Change

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heat, pressure, reactivity, and occasionally dangerous by-products of leadership. It is amazing how few leaders are constantly aware of this truth. We think we are in charge, we think we are in control. But we are also “in the mix” with the rest of the re-agents of work and are being formed deep in our characters by what we do. We’ve all met leaders who clearly showed the negative side of this experience, who, over time, had been deformed by their work and become difficult, even destructive influences. Perhaps you have also met leaders who seemed to have grown, matured, become wiser and more powerfully influential because this same crucible of work had become a place of transformation for them.

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...[T]o cultivate a character that is resilient, one must step out of the fray regularly, and honestly engage the interior conversation that alone has the power to positively shape character.

What’s the difference in their experiences? Certainly, these very different leaders may have brought very different “raw material” into the crucible of work, including their motivations to lead. This is why Greenleaf wrote so persuasively on the idea of the “servant leader,” one whose natural character is that of a servant who is called, almost reluctantly, into leadership because the job has to be done. If one brings, instead, a character of ego-centrism, ambition, a love of power, entitlement, and any other of the many plagues of broken leadership into the crucible of leadership, the likelihood of transformation rather than deformation is greatly reduced.

In either case, however, there is another essential ingredient in the crucible that determines whether the experience will be deforming or transforming. One might call it the “philosopher’s stone.” (Remember, the crucible is an instrument of the alchemist’s laboratory and it was this rarest of all substances that enabled the crucible to transform base metals into noble.) The real magic of transformation only occurs in the presence of this ingredient, the constant attention to one’s interior work.

The further one goes in leadership, the more essential are the disciplines of one’s interior life. Unfortunately, they are also easily neglected in the moment as they compete with many other urgent matters. But to cultivate a character that is resilient, one must step out of the fray regularly, and honestly engage the interior conversation that alone has the power to positively shape character. Some do this in a journal, others reflect on long solitary walks, some on their knees, still others with a close partner. Each has to discover her own interior workshop and take the raw material of every day’s work-experience there to be examined, tested, re-shaped. It is this constant dialog flowing from self to work and back again that forges an intentional and authentic connection between who you are becoming and what you are doing in the world every day, connecting your interior work to your exterior work. It is this connection that gives the leader

both the humility and the fortitude to lead in the midst of turbulence and change.

The second step in cultivating resilience as a leader is to know what you believe. Perhaps this sounds trite, but far too many leaders are ungrounded and simply cannot answer the most important question, which is “why,” not “what” or “how.”

Every leadership decision implies an anthropology. What’s yours? Without a deep understanding of what one believes it means to be human, what our obligations are to one another, what the essential human challenges are, etc., one cannot lead from principle because the principles are always grounded in these essential beliefs. And leading from principle is the first and essential sign of a resilient leader.

It is our principles, especially our shared principles, which enable us to endure and capitalize on change. Threats can become opportunities when we know our deep principles are secure. Collective effort can be summoned even against great challenges or long odds, when the basis of the calling is shared principles. And leaders can take their followers through difficult passages when the followers are confident that their deepest shared principles are genuinely a part of the leader’s character and not just a political tool to be used toward some personal or organizational end.

These shared principles are known to the organization in ordinary ways. What does the budget say about our principles? How have tough personnel decisions been made? How has failure, especially that of the leader, been handled? How well are the leaders listening? For what are the leaders willing to suffer?

Resilience is an essential strength for leaders in higher education and many other fields experiencing “permanent whitewater.” If the leader has cultivated resilience by attending to her interior work, grounding her leadership in principles that are lived and not just spoken, there is a much greater chance that the organization will also become more resilient, learn to turn into the current and dance with the waves.

Reference

Vaill, P. (1996). *Learning as a way of Being: Strategies for surviving in a world of permanent whitewater*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dr. Sanford “Sandy” Shugart has served since 2000 as the fourth president of Valencia College in greater Orlando, Florida. As winner of the first Aspen Prize for Excellence, Valencia, serves some 70,000 students per year, is known for high rates of graduation, transfer, and job placement, and has become something of a national laboratory for best practices in learning-centered education. Prior to Valencia, Sandy served as president of North Harris College and as Vice President and Chief Academic Officer of the North Carolina Community College System. He earned his PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In addition to his career in education, Dr. Shugart is a published poet and songwriter and author of *Leadership in the Crucible of Work: Discovering the Interior Life of an Authentic Leader*.

