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Credibility: The Crux of Faculty Development

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Credibility, the quality through which leaders earn the trust and confidence of their constituents, underlies effective faculty development. Drawing upon the work of Kouzes and Posner (1993), this paper examines six practices, or disciplines, by which faculty developers can increase their credibility.

The literature on faculty development does not generally address the leadership role of faculty developers, but leadership is an important part of our work and often makes the difference between success and failure. Works on management afford a much richer source of theoretical and practical information about leadership, and faculty developers might benefit by studying the principles contained therein. For example, in a recent book by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (1993), the authors make a strong case for *credibility* as a critical element of successful leadership. Faculty developers often talk about the problems of establishing and maintaining credibility, but the work of Kouzes and Posner places the issue firmly within the context of leadership and suggests approaches to building credibility as a func-

tion of leadership. We believe that their work has strong implications for faculty development programs and that credible leadership in faculty development can be achieved through the practice of six "disciplines" (Kouzes & Posner, 1993): 1) discovering your self; 2) appreciating constituents; 3) affirming shared values; 4) developing capacity; 5) serving a purpose; and 6) sustaining hope.

The Six Disciplines

Discipline 1: Discovering Your Self

As a practical exercise in self-discovery, suppose that you were to take an extended leave of absence and would be unable to communicate in any form with your faculty development colleagues. What guiding principles would you like your co-workers to use in your absence? What values and beliefs do you think should steer their decision-making and action-taking? The answer to these questions constitutes your credo, your "self," the principles you believe are important to live and work by.

The Latin word *credo* means "trust or believe," and the concept of credibility is firmly grounded in the notion of trust. However, trust is a two-way process. Credible faculty developers are those who are seen as trustworthy, but in order to be perceived as trustworthy, they must demonstrate their trust in others (Kouzes and Posner, 1987). They also need to trust and have confidence in themselves, to recognize their strengths and prejudices and to be aware of their own influence. Although self-examination is an important route to this goal, usually self-knowledge can be acquired more readily by constantly soliciting feedback from clients and peers. "Wise leaders understand their own strengths [and] work to expand them" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 445). When faculty developers have confidence in the importance of their work and believe that what they have to offer is important to others, their credibility is enhanced.

The process of earning credibility is a slow one, because it depends in part upon the establishment of a recognizable identity, a "self" of which others are aware. This identity, or image, develops over time as people become aware of who you are through acts of self-disclosure.

Research indicates that self-disclosure establishes trust, a major component of credibility (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Kanter, 1983). In faculty development, self-disclosure is often promoted through newsletters, listservs, informal discussion groups, and an easily accessible center, as well as through private messages and conversations.

Discipline 2: Appreciating Constituents

Faculty developers demonstrate their appreciation for their constituents by acknowledging the time and effort they contribute to development activities. Acknowledgment often takes the form of individual thank-you notes and participation certificates, but public recognition in award ceremonies is also important. Sending personal invitations to faculty, asking them to participate in various events, also shows appreciation by treating them as individuals.

Utilizing faculty as resources in programs allows faculty to practice their disciplines for the benefit of peers, shows that we appreciate their individual expertise, and provides a way to showcase their individual talents. A philosophy professor conducting a session on ethics in teaching or an accounting professor demonstrating how spreadsheets can be used to provide feedback to students are examples of this kind of activity.

Discipline 3: Affirming Shared Values

In the midst of both physical and disciplinary divisions in the academy, faculty are more likely to identify with those who are involved in faculty development if they see them as teachers as well. As critic Kenneth Burke (1969, p. 39) aptly states, "Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within." College faculty tend to define themselves by their disciplines, so it makes sense that their loyalty can best be gained by those who share a similar commitment to a discipline and who are perceived as *colleagues* who possess similar values. Giamatti (1988, p. 39) defines collegiality as "the shared sense of a shared set of values, values about open access to information, about open exchange of ideas, about academic freedom, about openness of communication and caring; collegiality is the shared belief, regardless of field or discipline, in a

generalized, coherent, communal set of attitudes that are collaborative and intellectual."

But because of the high value placed on autonomy among faculty in higher education, they may feel isolated from their colleagues and even fail to see the worth of what they do. Faculty development helps them overcome this sense of isolation and regain an appreciation of the importance of their work by providing opportunities for the affirmation of shared values: workshops, consultations, focus groups, and faculty retreats.

Affirming shared values also creates a foundation for appreciation of diversity in teaching and learning. As Giammati (1988, p. 39) observes, collegiality "does not imply unanimity of opinion; it implies commonality of assumption." By showing the strengths of different approaches to teaching, we not only emphasize that there is no one "best way" to teach, we can use these differences to explore tacit assumptions about learning and diversity and thereby stimulate growth. For example, sponsoring constructive controversies on such topics as political correctness, assessment, and tenure and promotion may provide an effective strategy for emphasizing both the commonality of assumptions as well as the strengths in diversity of opinion.

Discipline 4: Developing Capacity

Because they are already competent professionals in their fields, faculty members often fail to see the need to develop their capacities as teachers, so the challenge for faculty development is to help them perceive this need. One strategy for promoting this outcome is to make exemplary faculty members highly visible by involving them in workshops, retreats, and panels, thereby allowing others to see the potential for their own professional growth. The credibility of faculty development is also enhanced when we seek faculty advice and encourage their ownership of resources and programs. Another strategy is to build on the goodwill of faithful participants in these programs, who frequently pull in "unchurched" colleagues and provide testimonials to share with others. Of course, one of the most effective ways that faculty developers help teachers "develop capacity" is through individual consultations.

Faculty members also develop their capacity as teachers by using information from newsletters, books, videotapes, and research reports provided by faculty development programs. This "clearinghouse" function is fundamental to most successful programs.

Discipline 5: Serving a Purpose

The purpose of faculty development is to improve teaching, but we perform that function in the context of a service philosophy. Most faculty developers would probably agree with Pete Thigpen of Executive Reserves, who asserts, "Really believe in your heart of hearts that your fundamental purpose, the reason for being, is to enlarge the lives of others" (cited in Kouzes & Posner, p. 218). This service orientation is also an important element of leadership: "The leader [who is viewed as] a facilitator and catalyst . . . motivates and empowers others to perform at their best. The leader's power comes not from position or force but from talent, sensitivity, and service" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 430).

Within this service orientation, the power of faculty development is primarily moral rather than authoritarian—faculty developers essentially try to get people to *want* to do what they *ought* to do. As Kouzes and Posner (1987) point out, this too is a leadership function:

> with ... extrinsic rewards and pressures, we can get most people to do things. Managers have been proving this for years. But what of those who have no bonuses to give, no promotions to offer, and no performance reviews to write? What of those who cannot pay any compensation and yet ask us to contribute our time, our resources, our services, our energies, even our lives? What of those who must rely upon our willingness, our internal motivation, to give of ourselves for some just cause? Do they not lead? (p. 26)

Of course, our purpose is also shaped by (and serves) the institution's stated mission, as well as its traditions and unique culture. If a faculty development program is not clearly part of this larger entity, it may be perceived as self-serving and narrow, which will ultimately undermine its credibility.

Discipline 6: Sustaining Hope

In higher education today cynicism is unfortunately rampant. The optimism of faculty members is eroded by a variety of pressures: higher expectations for publications, demands for more accountability, the need to avoid litigation, shrinking budgets, and more complex tenure requirements. Faculty developers can help counteract these pressures (and "sustain hope") by providing activities that promote faculty renewal. For example, a well-designed faculty retreat helps remind faculty of the reasons they entered the profession and why they are still there. Through such activites, faculty developers can help both faculty and administrators maintain their belief in their central mission.

William Plater, in his keynote address at the 1994 POD conference, asserted that "faculty renewal is the engine that drives the campus mission" (p. 8). Faculty who engage in renewal activities typically share a commitment to lifelong learning, a commitment whose intrinsic rewards for both faculty and faculty developers outweigh any extrinsic returns, even though tangible benefits may also accrue (e.g., merit pay, recognition, and additional vitae entries). Renewal activities thereby help combat the cynicism that undermines morale, engenders apathy, and ultimately harms students by producing poor learning. It is important, therefore, for faculty development progams to focus on renewal as a way of fighting cynicism and sustaining hope.

Conclusion

Effective faculty development requires strong leadership, a driving vision, and a desire to implement that vision., but these things alone are not sufficient to insure success. We must focus on ways to build credibility. Based on the principles outlined above, we can enhance our credibility as faculty developers in four ways: being responsive to the needs of faculty, helping others find their strengths, exhibiting a willingness to listen to and credit others' ideas, and recognizing that our common purpose is to improve students' learning. Kouzes and Posner (1993) present the process of building credibility as a continuous cycle of clarifying meaning, unifying constituents, and intensify-

ing actions. We can apply this process by recognizing the importance of credibility and striving toward congruence between what we say we believe and what we do. However, in the last analysis, we must remember that the achievement of credibility depends less upon *what* we know than it does on *how* we are known. "Credibility is an elusive quality because our level of credibility always exists in other people's minds; it is a part of their thinking, not ours." (Robinson, 1994, p. 15)

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