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Journal

of Information Communications Technology in Higher Education

Published by The Association for Information Communications Technology Professionals in Higher Education



This Issue: Leading Today's Technology Organization

What Kind of Leader Are You?

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As the world freefalls toward global recession, we are facing unprecedented challenges to make our businesses more resilient, efficient, and effective. Colleges and universities are not insulated from the pressures of inflation and recession; we, too, must find creative ways to improve the way we work in order to survive and succeed. Implementing wide-ranging changes, converting challenges into benefits, requires strong leaders who know how to inspire and motivate.

Creative thinking flourishes in an environment of effective leadership that is focused on a vision consistent with the mission of the institution. Every organization has a vision. Long-term plans will contribute to that vision, and leadership opportunities arise at all levels. Our institution may have a vision of being the premier university in the state in providing technology services to students and staff, and that may be an element in a five-year plan to attract the best faculty and increase enrollment. Specifics of our long-term plan may change with new and improved technology, but our vision will remain the same for a long time.

Innovative thinking that leads to success even in turbulent times comes from our chief assets—our own staff. A wise leader knows that investing in our staff will bring lucrative results in terms of productivity and employee satisfaction. We attract them to our organization by creating a brand image; enable them by providing continuous education (leadership by direction); connect them to others within the organization and industry (leadership by association); empower them by delegating more author-

ity (leadership by delegation); and retain them by rewarding and recognizing their contribution (leadership by attraction).

Leadership by Direction

Sometimes new staff are welcomed to our department with very little actual instruction or guidance. Properly training and guiding new staff enables them to understand our organization and its vision, strengths, and limitations as well as the roles and responsibilities of the department and the value additions expected from them as members of the team. Assigning a mentor may shorten the time between uncertainty and confidence for new employees. A certain amount of hand-holding may prevent costly mistakes and enable them to blend their career paths with the vision of the organization. The mentor could also identify education and training needs and encourage them to partake of opportunities for growth.

Leadership by Association

Connecting new staff with internal and external customers and industry experts presents the opportunity to identify changes that may benefit the department or the entire campus. Someone with a fresh perspective can often see something that isn't so obvious to those who have done things one way for a long time. If new staff recommend changes, make them more acceptable to existing staff with a report detailing possible methodologies and a cost-benefit analysis for incorporating changes into the system. Invite feedback from those who have known the business and worked with the customers for a long time. Emphasis

should be placed on meeting existing and future needs of the customers.

All staff should be encouraged to join appropriate technology groups and participate in external training or workshops to upgrade their knowledge on a continuous basis. A corporate culture of lifelong learning for staff at all levels has a positive impact on the work environment as well as professional development benefits.

Leadership by Delegation

Groom staff with potential for leadership by delegating as much authority as appropriate and monitoring their progress. It's best to give them a whole task of their own to complete. If that isn't realistic, make sure they know what the parameters of their task are and how it fits into the project of which it is one component. Connect them with the rest of the team, and provide clear directions. Explain what the expectations are and how results will be measured. (This will make performance more measurable and less subjective, too.)

Under certain circumstances, let new staff commit errors and learn from their own mistakes. Until you know someone's capabilities, you must, of course, review their progress regularly. Identify the key points of the project they're assigned to or dates when you want feedback about progress. You need assurance that the delegated task or project is on track. Knowing that others are depending on us and that we will be held accountable helps all of us meet deadlines.

Leadership by Attraction

Retention is a result of reward and recognition. Even with today's budget cuts, we can improve retention by providing a positive work environment and a variety of non-monetary benefits.

A positive environment is characterized by the free exchange of knowledge and ideas among staff. Ongoing communications, both formal and informal, encourage healthy relationships and teamwork. Everyone is congratulated for a job well

done and praised for his or her specific role. Everyone's contribution is recognized, even if it's just congratulations voiced at a staff meeting or a letter of commendation placed in a personnel file. Every employee comes away from a successful project feeling ownership for his or her particular tasks, and is proud to be an accepted part of something bigger than himself.

Other nonfinancial benefits include such things as extra time off, flexible hours, discounts, special parking spaces, occasional social events such as a pizza day, and so on. Making people feel valued will improve your staff retention rates.

Conclusion

What kind of leader are you? If you haven't looked at your department from the ground level lately, maybe these ideas will help you get a perspective on leadership that will improve your own effectiveness.

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