Director’s Message

Leadership – Being Present and Being Productive

By Kathryn Carpenter

There are leaders and there is leadership and often they are fully intertwined. People in leadership roles find their way to those positions through desire to lead and aptitude for the work itself. Emerging leaders train themselves to prepare for leadership roles, learning from current leaders, teachers, mentors, peers, and their own professional practice.

Leadership is the quality that we seek everywhere and in everyone. We look for leadership in admission to university decisions, in units, departments, project teams and work groups, in organizations that serve our communities, even in committees organized to solve specific problems or address specific needs. Leadership is not restricted to formal leaders; all can participate.

Leadership by and for all has two essential characteristics, among many other components that we can identify. Leadership means being present and being productive.

Being present means being engaged, even immersed, in the initiatives and arenas in which a person chooses to function – their work, their family, their community, and all the activities and interests in which people participate. When a colleague “goes the extra mile,” that is leadership and it is reflected in the quality, the timeliness, and the resolution of problems in the work of the unit or organization. Staying calm, setting a good example, and continuing the effort despite obstacles are the essence of being present.

Being present during emergencies or crises is key to recovery and rebuilding, in both a material and emotional sense. Two weeks after she began work as dean of libraries at Colorado State University, Camila Alire found herself as the leader of a library half-destroyed by a major flood. In response to the demands, she said that she “…developed a ‘persona,’ an image that [she] projected to the staff, to
the community, and to the world. [She] never showed how upset [she] was and this attitude convinced the others around [her] that they would get through this disaster too.”

Being productive means completing tasks and implementing plans, and despite the potential for operational bottlenecks in the typically collaborative, collegial, and bureaucratic academic environment, making use of a variety of strategies to avoid at all cost being an obstacle as a leader. Strategies such as delegating, prioritizing, managing information flows, and communicating freely help keep the workflow flowing. More creative approaches, such as reorganizing, using consultants, seizing opportunities to develop project areas with interns, visiting faculty, or part-time staff and learning through the literature help leaders in all parts of an organization do whatever it takes to get things done. To quote Shrek, an ogre with significant leadership acumen, “Hey, I’m nobody’s messenger boy, all right? I’m a delivery boy!,” leaders deliver results.

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References
