

QUESTION #8:
**WHAT MANAGEMENT TOOLS MAY
BE USEFUL FOR THE SUCCESS OF
LAC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES?**

A conversation with David Gerkin

I prefer to use the term Learning Support Center or LSC in place of LAC. My campus just changed its name to be in line with national trends and to be more descriptive for students.

The question implies that there is a man-

ager of the LSC. I prefer to think of the person with ultimate responsibility for the LSC, regardless of title, as a leader rather than a manager, a leader of people rather than a manager of a department; this puts the focus on people who are your most valuable resource and the reason for the existence of the LSC.

All right then, to use your terminology, what leadership tools would be useful for the success of LSC programs and services?

One of the most effective leadership tools for many is the mission statement. I would suggest that you, as a leader of the center, begin with writing a personal mission statement. This will connect you to your personal values which can then lead you to reflecting on how these relate to the values of your LSC. This is where your staff come in. Ask each staff member to write a personal mission statement; then come together as a group to discuss LSC values and how they relate to each staff member's personal values. This process culminates in the creation of a mission statement for your center. Since it was written by the entire staff and flows out of personal values, each staff

member will have buy-in and feel a sense of ownership for the statement and for the center.

Your LSC mission statement can then be used by you and your staff to help you keep on track; and to reflect on it periodically to answer the question: "Are we doing what we said is important to us?" It is also helpful as a starting point for writing goals, objectives and activities. Another effective use of your mission statement is to put it in your publicity materials to let others know what your LSC stands for.

You seem to be suggesting that staff plays an important role in the leadership of the LSC, but I am the manager or leader. What roles does my staff play in leading the center?

The staff of your LSC can play a crucial role in the leadership of the center. I suggest that you, as a leader, do everything you can to develop the leadership ability of every one of your staff. The leader who is not afraid to hire staff who are smarter than he or she is and

who encourages and supports the staff's professional and personal development will be rewarded with a vital, successful, organization with dedicated, highly competent staff who work hard to achieve the goals of the center.

You mentioned goals, objectives, and activities, earlier. How do I use these effectively to run my center?

Virtually all management or leadership methods deal with goals and objectives in some form. I would suggest three keys to using them effectively. First, the entire staff must agree to the goals of the center so that all will work together enthusiastically to achieve the goals. Empower your staff to collaborate with you on the goals and objectives of the center. This must involve a genuine openness to staff ideas on your part; you must be looking for more than agreement with what you propose. If your goals and objectives flow from a mission

statement created by your staff team which embodies shared values, you will have staff buy-in.

A second key to utilizing goals and objectives effectively is to monitor progress toward achievement, reflect on the processes involved, and revise the processes or the goals themselves as needed. Finally, it is important to celebrate your team's success when goals are achieved.

You have talked quite a bit about collaborating with staff and working together as a team. This sounds nice; but frankly, some staff can be difficult to work with. How can I collaborate with a staff member to whom I have trouble relating to or getting along with?

I suggest researching several behavioral style instruments and using one or more with your staff to promote understanding of differences in behavioral, personality, work, and learning styles. This can enable you to work

well with and appreciate the talents of staff members who are very different from you and with whom you may find yourself often coming into conflict.

Here are three instruments I recommend: 1) the Personal Profile System: DiSC, which categorizes behavioral styles in four categories— dominance, influence, conscientiousness, and steadiness, rating each person’s level of behavioral tendency for each category; (2) the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which assesses preferences for four ways of relating to the environment: where you direct your energy, how you acquire information, how you make decisions, and how you deal with the outer world; and (3) the Learning Type Measure (LTM), which indicates four preferred

modes of learning—innovative, analytical, common sense, and dynamic—and incorporates right and left brain modalities as well.

Regardless of which instrument or instruments you use, I suggest you and each staff member complete it and discuss the results as a group. You will most likely discover that you can capitalize on each other’s strengths, compensate for and improve in weak areas, work better as a team, and learn to go beyond appreciation to celebration of differences.

There is so much to do when running a center, it seems that time management tools would be important. Which tools do you suggest?

There are many time management systems and methods available. I suggest trying several and discovering which works best for you. It may be a combination or modification of systems or approaches that is most effective for you. There are two approaches I would recommend as starting points.

The first is Stephen Covey’s idea that you must know what is important to you before you can decide how to most effectively spend

your time. Therefore, he emphasizes personal mission as a prerequisite to time management. The second approach is Carlson and Bailey’s suggestion that we must recognize our thought processes which tend to speed up our thinking and cause us to feel hurried and stressed. If we recognize these hurried, overly analytical thoughts, we can release them and free our minds to work in a more effective, less stressful, free flowing mode.

You seem to be suggesting management approaches that begin with thinking and learning about myself. Are there any tools for this reflective approach?

I’m glad you asked that! Reflective journaling is an excellent strategy for reflecting on your values, mission, goals, behavioral

styles, effectiveness, interpersonal communication skills, in fact, any thoughts and feelings about your work life.

Periodic reflective journaling, daily, weekly, or bi-weekly, allows you to slow down and think about what you have been so busy about. It creates the needed time and space to reflect on, evaluate, and gain insight into the processes and interactions of your daily work. Another way to practice reflection is to build it into staff meetings and retreats. Brief reviews

and discussions of mission, goals, objectives, progress, or conflicts can be placed on the agenda for weekly or monthly staff meetings. More in-depth reflective exercises such as journaling, structured discussion, and group brainstorming of accomplishments and challenges can be undertaken at department retreats.

You mention staff meetings. Are there some techniques that can make my staff meetings more effective?

Two techniques I have found to be effective for staff meetings come from the field of Total Quality Management (TQM). The first is to come to agreement, as a group, on a set of "Ground Rules" or guidelines for behavior at the meeting. These often deal with topics such as respectful communication, confidentiality, and the tone of the meeting. The second tech-

nique is the "Issue Bin." Items of discussion or ideas that occur during the meeting that may take the meeting off track or that can not be dealt with in the time allotted are written on a flip chart designated as the "Issue Bin." These issues are recognized as important and are captured to be dealt with at a more appropriate time.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

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