



# Leadership Tips and Tools

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College leaders are called upon to have vision, develop a strategic plan, secure financial resources, and evaluate programs and staff. Above all college leaders are Leaders Leading Learning.

Learning is our core business. For most of the 1990s, our colleges worked on being “student-centered.” In the late 90s, we realized the need to be “learner-centered.” Today, we know that colleges must be “learning-centered” in order to meet the educational, professional, and life-long learning goals of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Learning IS our core business!!

This edition of *Leadership Tips and Tools* is devoted to Leaders Leading Learning. These tips and tools will reaffirm what you already know and believe about learning. You will be able to add many of your own tips and tools to the list. Some of the tips and tools relate directly to the classroom and student learning. Most serve as a reminder that colleges are places of learning for all members of the community. As college leaders, we have a big responsibility to be learning-centered. As classroom teachers, academic chairs, deans of student services, and managers of support staff...we are all...Leaders Leading Learning.

## Leaders Leading Learning

### Tip #1: Learning must be active!

Learners are not “receptacles!” As tempting as it is to believe, we can not just take off the “lid” and pour in the “stuff.” Just because we say something does not mean that others learn it or know it! Whether we are lecturing to a class or to our office staff, we need to remember that just because we tell someone something they may not KNOW it!

We are often under time pressures to “deliver” the academic content or the organizational initiative. Our “just tell them what they need to know” impulse is strong! As leaders—as teachers in the classroom, as organizational administrators, as staff who facilitate the growth of others—we need to consciously reduce our impulsivity toward lecturing and remember that learners are not “receptacles” of our information.

- ◆ Use lectures sparingly! When we must lecture or share information, make it effective!
- ◆ The adult attention span is about 8 to 10 minutes in length. Manage it wisely.

- ◆ We can keep 5–7 pieces of information in our short-term memory before we need to do something with it to make it our own. We must DO something with information to learn.
- ◆ Take “lecture breaks” to provide opportunities to clarify key ideas, provide feedback on understanding, and help to keep learners engaged with the process of learning.
- ◆ The temptation to “cover the material” is seductive! Good teaching and learning, whether in the classroom or office, is NOT about covering the material—it’s about “uncovering” it!
- ◆ Some of us learn best if we can use our interpersonal intelligence and “talk things through” with others. Give time!
- ◆ Most of us benefit from hearing multiple perspectives, examples, and applications in order to create or construct our own meaning from information shared. Small group discussions provide a framework to “make meaning” of information and lecture materials.
- ◆ Hands-on! Stress application of concepts and skills as they are presented. If learners can “touch” and manipulate the concepts or skills they are trying to learn they will be more likely to construct meaning for themselves and integrate the concept or skill into their learned behaviors and cognition.
- ◆ Minds-on! Focus the learner’s attention! Engage in minds-on activities by using critical thinking and application strategies. Begin classes or meetings with a thought-provoking quotation, startling statement, or statistic. Use this statement to drive forward the lecture or meeting.
- ◆ Let students and staff choose their own learning options. Encourage repeated learning opportunities until demonstrated proficiency.
- ◆ Use reflection journals where students and staff can personalize content and skills.
- ◆ When introducing a new concept, skill, or initiative begin by first asking/assessing learners’ prior understanding, conceptions, and misconceptions of the new learning to occur.
- ◆ Encourage the use of student and professional portfolios where students and staff can record and review their learning.
- ◆ Develop learning families, learning teams, and learning communities to connect students and staff with each other and their learning.
- ◆ Invite students and staff to participate in project and problem-based teams where they can construct meaning collaboratively, solve organizational issues, manage their continued learning, and contribute to the community that they serve.
- ◆ Provide field and other observation experiences to give application meaning to learning.
- ◆ Design learning exercises that allow each student or staff member to experience concepts and skills in a personal way that suits their learning style and multiple intelligences.
- ◆ Students and staff need choices! Provide multiple ways to present learning, assess learning, and celebrate learning.

**Tip #2: Learning must be engaging!**

Stimulating environments increase engagement and cognitive activity! Most of us strive to engage faculty, staff, and students during the opening days of school. We plan and attend the faculty and staff orientations. We encourage faculty to use “getting acquainted activities” during the first few days of class. These are important engagement strategies. Engagement, however, is not just for fall start-up!

As leaders leading learning, we need to engage faculty, staff, and students throughout the year! Faculty need to engage students every day in class. Engagement strategies can provide the important “need to know” step for learning. Faculty and staff need to be engaged with department tasks, each other, and student learning. Working with others on important learning tasks is engaging. Learning takes place best when learners are engaged with each other in significant performance challenges and presented with compelling problems worthy of their efforts.

- ◆ Plan and attend an “engaging” orientation for students, faculty, and staff. AND don’t stop there!
- ◆ Be mindful of connecting new and continuing students, faculty, and staff in meaningful ways. Mentoring programs, supplemental instruction, and buddy systems all provide important engagement.
- ◆ Use learners’ life experiences as learning tools.
- ◆ Have second-year students provide first-year student tutorials. Ask returning faculty to “adopt” a new or part-time faculty member.
- ◆ Be willing to learn FROM your students and staff.
- ◆ Provide many opportunities for all students, faculty, staff, and administrators to learn new and different things.
- ◆ Provide job-shadowing opportunities for students and staff.
- ◆ Use peer appraisal teams to assess learning in the field, on the job, and during clinical experiences.
- ◆ Link faculty, students, staff, courses, and initiatives to create learning communities.
- ◆ Coach students and staff to success. Provide repeated learning opportunities until learners can demonstrate proficiency.
- ◆ Encourage faculty, staff, and students to spend time getting to know each other as people.
- ◆ Use icebreakers, name games, and team-building activities to connect faculty, staff, and students.
- ◆ Use case studies to help learners learn key concepts and learn to solve problems.
- ◆ Begin classes or staff meetings with a problem and engage everyone.
- ◆ Assign students and staff to problem-based learning teams. Provide individual and team challenge projects. Invite learners to share their progress with their team.
- ◆ Simulate situations in class or in the office allowing students or staff to learn together and deal with critical issues associated with learning.
- ◆ Partner with local businesses as “learning clients” for authentic learning problems and applications.

**Tip #3: Learning is both individual and social**

Learning requires individual reflection. Lasting cognitive connections require personal insight and reflection. Learners need time to think! They need time to “construct” their own understanding based on their past experiences. Learners need time to find the personal, intellectual, and emotional connections with the learning!

Learning is social and occurs in a cultural context. Each classroom or office has its own culture. Leaders must establish and maintain healthy learning environments and build a culture of learning. Learning environments that support all learners, appreciate and value diversity, and recognize and celebrate achievement are the hallmark of healthy learning environments. Whether you are leading a college, department, or classroom, create a positive learning culture and support it with diligence!

- ◆ Encourage faculty, staff, and students to journal about their learning experiences.
- ◆ Give students, staff, and faculty time to think and process before they are asked to share their points of view or ideas. Build thinking time into classes and meetings!
- ◆ Provide time at the end of class, lab, or meeting for learners to “recap” and summarize in their own words.
- ◆ Have learners complete “one minute” summary statements or papers on their learning. Do this with staff as well as students.
- ◆ Engage learners in thinking through and identify the “muddiest points” of the content or initiative before moving forward with more information.
- ◆ Summarize the previous class or meeting at the start of the next class or meeting. This gives learners a chance to think back and connect the new content or conversation to previous learning.
- ◆ Learn the names of your students, staff, and faculty. Know and use names in learning interactions!
- ◆ Build a warm, accepting classroom, office, department, and college climate.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for learners to work together during class. The social nature of learning is a powerful motivator for many learners. Whether in the office or the classroom, interpersonal interactions trigger the social connection critical for most learners.
- ◆ Establish a learning culture that is emotionally “safe.” Honor and reward forward movement on learning. Coach learners as necessary. Always allow learners to “save face” while learning.
- ◆ Take a few moments of a class or meeting to encourage learners to socialize and share “good news” about their lives. Powerful personal connections will translate into learning.
- ◆ Have a “no new business allowed” faculty, staff, or class meeting where the conversation is all about learning.
- ◆ Foster cultural awareness and appreciation in your class, office, department, and across your college.
- ◆ Value differences! Recognize and celebrate the uniqueness of learners! Ask learners to share books and other resources about their culture.
- ◆ Begin traditions that will build cultural bonds with your students, faculty, staff, and administration.

**Tip #4: Learning is a “construction” project!**

Learning is a “do-it-yourself-project!” Learning is a “creative” act! Each of us must create or construct our own meaning using our unique “mental models” anchored in our past experiences, previous learning, expectations, and diverse learning styles.

We must construct our learning linking new concepts and skills to established ones. Metaphors, examples, and experience promote learning through linking new ideas to past experiences and emotive contexts. Interpersonal collaboration provides personal links to help us support, question, and affirm our learning.

Give students, staff, and faculty opportunities to practice what they are learning as they are learning it! Learning takes immediate practice and personal application! Break down the barrier between “academic” and “real-world” practices. Promote learning by offering concrete applications of concepts and skills. Model the learning process with your students and staff. Show them how you are learning, applying, and experiencing knowledge and skills. Be a model of life-long learning!

- ◆ Inspire and motivate learning! Prepare lessons rich with applications for student and staff learning.
- ◆ Connect information in your class or office to the content in another class or office on your campus. Help students and staff see the connections between content and initiatives as a way to promote learning.
- ◆ Form classroom and office teams with well-defined roles for each member.
- ◆ Use electronic communication to connect students and staff. Send out thought-provoking questions prior to class or meeting.
- ◆ Develop learning experiences to help students, faculty, staff, and administrators understand that others are different and how they are different. Empower learners to develop strategies to help themselves be successful learners.
- ◆ Provide internships. Great for students – equally valuable for faculty, staff, and administrators.
- ◆ Share stories of learning success. Tell stories to instill learning values and celebrate learning success! Share your life and learning experiences as appropriate.
- ◆ Invite former students to class to share their successes and challenges. Invite retired staff, faculty, and administrators back to the office or department to honor their contributions to the department.
- ◆ Take field trips! Class field trips!! Office field trips!! Department field trips!!!
- ◆ Attend conferences as a team – a student team, a faculty team, or a department team!
- ◆ Use the learning formula: Theory + field placement + integration seminar = learning.
- ◆ Encourage service-learning projects. Take on a service project as a department. Involve students, faculty, and staff working and learning together toward a common community service goal.
- ◆ Show that it’s OK to make mistakes. Show students and staff that you are still learning and admit you don’t know it all.
- ◆ Take risks.
- ◆ Be a model of life-long learning by taking classes on your own campus. Encourage faculty, staff, and administrators to do the same.

**Tip #5: Learning needs feedback**

Emphasize rich and frequent feedback on performance! Too often we “serve” up large helpings of information with little opportunity to receive corrective feedback on learning. Have you ever been in a learning situation where you received instruction, thought you knew what you were doing, moved ahead with the “learned” behavior, only to discover that you were missing a piece of critical information, didn’t understand as well as you thought you did, or were just plain lost? It happens every day!

As leaders leading learning, we need to use, and encourage others to use, frequent feedback loops to correct, clarify, and celebrate learning. Give benchmarks for success. Recognize incremental success. Give lots of supportive and considered feedback. Provide coaching and feedback for learning and growth. Recognize and celebrate learning!

- ◆ Acknowledge students, faculty, and staff every week for special achievements. Use personal and electronic messages to acknowledge contributions in class, the department, and the college. Publish successes of students, faculty, staff, and administrators.
- ◆ Publish standards, goals, and objectives in your department and on course outlines. Make sure faculty, staff, and students know the learning target!
- ◆ Provide repeated and multiple ways to demonstrate learning success.
- ◆ Don’t wait for the “big test” to see if faculty, staff, or students have learned.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for students to critique each other’s projects.
- ◆ Use classroom assessment techniques in department meetings as well as classrooms.
- ◆ Encourage multiple methods of assessment like papers, case studies, problems, field work, creative arts, role-play, 3-D essays, debates, discussions, gallery walks, self-assessment, peer assessment, clinical assessment, service-learning . . .
- ◆ Provide support for students, faculty, and staff to attend useful conferences, seminars, and classes.
- ◆ Ask members of your industry advisory board to mentor and coach faculty, staff, and students on important developments in your field.
- ◆ Use cross-functional teams to implement changes.
- ◆ Give incentives when students, faculty, and staff attend seminars, institutes, and conferences.
- ◆ Provide a forum for those who have attended conferences and seminars to share with colleagues and students.
- ◆ Mentor and coach learners to success.
- ◆ Provide supportive feedback.
- ◆ Expect incremental success.
- ◆ Recognize achievements!
- ◆ Celebrate learning success!

**Tip # 6: Leading learning requires vision**

Leaders who lead learning know that focusing on learning within our organizations, departments, and classrooms requires vision. Our vision of a learning-centered environment must be comprehensive and detailed. We must inspire and motivate others to share and support a learning-centered vision. Being learning-centered may require some of us to relearn our roles. As we relearn our roles to be more learning-centered, we need mentoring, coaching, safe environments, and positive affirmations for our risk-taking and success. Leaders leading learning model the way by motivating, supporting, and celebrating others in the learning environment!

- ◆ Model the way!
- ◆ Expect change! Create change!
- ◆ Be a facilitator, coach, and advocate of learning.
- ◆ Use focus groups to get feedback on curriculum, learning experiences, and assessments from stakeholders.
- ◆ Develop a department strategic plan with learning at the center of the plan. Partner for excellence in accordance with your strategic plan.
- ◆ Recognize that all students, faculty, and staff can be leaders, not just the designated “leaders.”
- ◆ Take time to talk about the future of your class, department, and college.
- ◆ Focus your vision so others can understand and support that vision.
- ◆ Focus on learning. Learning is our core business.
- ◆ Foster interdisciplinary collaboration.
- ◆ Be available.
- ◆ Develop a student, staff, and faculty mentoring program.
- ◆ Encourage new faculty and staff to visit faculty and staff in other departments and disciplines.
- ◆ Build teaching communities! Build learning communities!!
- ◆ Encourage peer evaluation, coaching, and recognition.
- ◆ Provide incentives and rewards for faculty, students, and staff to learn new teaching, learning, and support strategies.
- ◆ Reward students, faculty, and staff for risk-taking, innovation, and collaboration.
- ◆ Have staff teams define their work as a commitment to teaching and learning.
- ◆ Foster a change in teaching and learning environments from lecturing and direct instruction to active learning and collaboration.
- ◆ Think role reversal! Encourage faculty and staff to become students. Find out what students have to teach!
- ◆ Provide staff development on teaching and learning.
- ◆ Support participation at professional conferences.
- ◆ Encourage part-time staff and adjunct faculty every time you see them.

- ◆ Teach a class. Invite other faculty to visit and offer feedback on your teaching and learning practices.
- ◆ Be open to “one quick question” about teaching and learning.
- ◆ Ask faculty and staff to mentor each other even if they have been working for your college for years and years and years and . . .
- ◆ Exchange teaching and learning stories.
- ◆ Provide informal peer support in classrooms, offices, departments, and across the college.
- ◆ Have an open mind policy.
- ◆ Practice an open door policy.
- ◆ Develop a course for distance delivery. Re-purposing a course forces re-visioning.
- ◆ Invite faculty and staff to your home for food and fun.
- ◆ Hold faculty and staff meetings in different locations – technology center, language lab, specialized classroom, local restaurant, or outside in the campus commons.
- ◆ Give faculty and staff extrinsic rewards to learn new strategies or roles that contribute to learning success, student success, and organizational success.
- ◆ Socialize together.
- ◆ Learn together.
- ◆ Celebrate together.

Have a wonderful year  
leading learning!

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