



Leadership Tips and Tools

September 2005

“Begin With the End In Mind is the endowment of imagination and conscience Decide what you're going to do with the time, talent, and tools you have to work with.”
— Stephen R. Covey

Covey’s words provide inspiration as we begin a new academic year! What will you do with the “time, talent, and tools you have to work with” during this year?

While his recent bestseller, *The 8th Habit*, is getting much of our leadership attention, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* still resonates with leadership truths. Both books provide insight into our leadership journey and our on-going efforts to understand ourselves and our relationships. They encourage us to find our voice and help others find theirs. Both books provide valuable lessons for personal and professional growth through reflection, interaction, feedback, assessment, and action.

As we begin the new academic year, we recognize that a significant amount of our time as leaders is devoted to feedback and appraisals. Feedback and appraisals give us an opportunity to develop the talent of those around us, and our talent, as well. Our campuses have many resources designed to facilitate the growth and development of faculty, staff, and students. Are we using our time, talent, and tools to develop individuals, teams, departments, and colleges?

We begin with the end in mind in this issue of Leadership Tips and Tools and focus on feedback and appraisal as endowments of time, talent, and tools.

Feedback & Appraisals with Imagination and Conscience

Minute-by-Minute, Day-by-Day – A few years ago, top executives at Glenroy Inc., a privately held manufacturer of packaging materials outside of Milwaukee, held a retreat at which they reviewed key company policies. A week later, Glenroy held a rally in the company parking lot where employees built a bonfire and burned its policy manuals.

As you read this story you might be thinking, “Oh, no! How could they survive!” Or, “What a great idea! Start the bonfire!”

Glenroy, like our colleges, had well-established policies, procedures, and paperwork for performance review of employees. These well-established policies literally went up in smoke.

Unlike other policies, which Glenroy refined or reinvented, formal reviews were never re-instated. "When people find out that we don't have formal reviews, it drives them crazy," says Michael Dean, Glenroy's executive vice president. "They don't understand how we can run the business. Leaders here provide people with feedback. But the way for it to be effective is on a day-by-day, minute-by-minute basis - not twice a year."

This issue of Tips and Tools is not advocating parking lot rallies and bonfires! Glenroy's decision, however, invites us to think about our methods for giving and receiving feedback and performance appraisals in our departments and on our campuses. Do we wait until the “performance review” to give feedback on performance? Or, do we give and receive feedback on an on-going basis?

Annual Piece of Paper (APOP) – Consider the example of Parkview Medical Center in Pueblo, Colorado. Parkview spent years looking at ways to improve feedback and appraisal procedures. They began by exploring how best to modify the hospital's existing checklist-based reviews: Which ratings made the most sense? Which scoring systems worked best? No amount of tinkering satisfied Parkview's leaders and staff.

Finally, Parkview decided that if there wasn't a better way to do reviews, they would just stop doing them. So they did. They had no idea what they were going to do instead. Eventually the leaders and staff of Parkview came up with an idea. They call it APOP - Annual Piece of Paper.

The medium for the review is conversation, not written evaluation. There is a form — the APOP. The only role of the APOP is to confirm that a conversation took place. There are no listed standards, no scores, no written goals for the next year. It's literally a piece of paper, signed by the employee and the manager that records the date, place, and agenda of the meeting.

The APOP process also takes performance reviews and turns them around. Directors don't tell employees how they're doing. They ask open-ended questions to see what will help employees do a better job. Leaders are not doing top-down appraisals. They are providing a conversation for bottom-up requests for assistance. What can the leader do to make the employee's job more meaningful? What gets in the way of accomplishing the job?

The APOP is an interesting idea. While we may not be able to implement this tool in post-secondary education, it can help us focus on feedback and appraisals as a conversation and as a two-way street.

Spotters – Take into account the story of LeRoy Pingho, a Vice President at Fannie Mae, the mortgage giant as an example of receiving feedback and 360-degree appraisal as a leader. LeRoy Pingho has been doing 360-degree reviews since the mid-1980's. He selects a cross-section of colleagues - a boss, a subordinate, a customer - and asks them each to assess his performance. "Some things are 'flat spots' for me," he says. "I can struggle with them alone or get help."

Recently, Pingho took his review process a step further by writing an assessment based on the feedback he received and distributing copies to 50 people: bosses, peers, and direct reports. He sent everyone the same message: "You work with me, so you should know my strengths and weaknesses. Also, I'm going to ask four of you to help me work on the things I'm not good at."

These four people became his "spotters." Choosing two at his level, one above him, and one below him, he meets with each of the spotters to review the "flat spots" he has identified. He asks his spotters to alert him when they see behavior related to his improvement goals. He encourages them to share immediate feedback when they see a success or a concern. "It's like being on the high bar. Just knowing that there's somebody to make sure you don't fall helps you become more self-confident."

We all need "spotters." This kind of trust, feedback, and support between a leader and co-workers captures the imagination and is truly an endowment of time, talent, and tools.

Feedback and Appraisal Tips and Tools

Feedback matters — The only way for people to get better at what they do is for the people they work with to provide candid, timely feedback and performance appraisals. Focusing all our energy, time, and resources on annual appraisals is like dieting only on our birthday and wondering why we're not losing weight.

You Don't Have to Be Sick — Recently, a friend at Niagara College reminded me that "You don't need to be sick to get better!" She is right! Talented people need feedback to get "better." Jim Collins, in his bestseller, *Good to Great*, discovered that, "... the good-to-great companies continually refined the path to greatness with the brutal facts of reality." I am not suggesting that feedback and appraisals need to be "brutal facts of reality." They need to be caring conversations anchored in honest appraisals of performance. We all want to get better – feedback and appraisals are the only way!

Feedback Delayed Is Feedback Denied — Bruce Tuglan interviewed hundreds of managers and employees for his book, *FAST Feedback* (the acronym stands for "frequent, accurate, specific, timely"). One of the most common complaints, he says, is that feedback and reviews take place too long after the behavior being critiqued. The once-or twice-a-year performance appraisal common in many post-secondary institutions can be challenging because by the time the feedback is delivered through the formal appraisal process the behavior is forgotten or so routine that interventions are time and resource intensive.

Distinguish between feedback and formal performance appraisals. Set the annual performance appraisal conversation up for success by giving and receiving feedback on a daily basis — minute-by-minute, day-by-day.

Drive-by Feedback — There's a difference between timely feedback and rushed feedback. Avoid “Drive-by Feedback”, whether praise or concern. Feedback without specifics or an honest underpinning does little to honor the achievement or mediate the challenge. “Great job!” sounds good, and is not effective feedback. It's recognition, praise — not feedback. Make it a point to support your praise with specifics so that the behavior is repeatable. Support your concerns with actionable steps forward toward improvement.

Invoke the 24-Hour Rule — If you're providing feedback around an emotionally charged behavior or event, wait a day or two (but never more than a week). Use your EQ (Emotional Intelligence) to understand and manage yourself while understanding and managing social interactions with others. If your feedback involves a big issue, something the person you're working with really needs to take seriously, find an appropriate time and place. Schedule an appointment and have a conversation.

Truth or Consequences! In his recent autobiography, *Winning*, Jack Welch, former chairman and CEO of General Electric, reports that he spent about half of his time on people: recruiting new talent, picking the right people for particular positions, grooming young stars, developing managers, dealing with under performers, and reviewing the entire talent pool. We may not be leading a Fortune 500 company; we lead in an environment that is far more critical — the development, growth, and future of our communities through education. We need to spend our time developing talent! We develop talent by providing honest feedback and appraisals. We must care enough to confront — with kindness, caring, and honest appraisals.

The Bottom Line — Job satisfaction and employee retention are directly linked to the quality of an employee's relationships, especially their relationship with their supervisor. Empathetic and available leaders are in a unique position to develop talented faculty and staff, and also to empower them to solve personal and professional challenges through caring conversations — feedback and appraisals.

Always Get Feedback on Your Feedback — Feedback is a two-way street. We need to get feedback on our feedback if we are to develop as leaders. Think about the three most recent times you offered feedback to one of your faculty or staff. Write down brief answers to these four questions about those sessions: What prompted you to give feedback on that matter at that time? Did you check your facts first? What was the substance of the feedback? Was there any concrete action as a result? Next ask the employee to write down brief answers to the same questions. Invite a conversation—feedback on the feedback.

Begin the academic year with the end of developing faculty and staff in mind. Use your leadership time, talent, and tools as endowments for helping others find and use their talents and strengths. Remember to provide feedback and appraisals with imagination and conscience! Have a great year!