



Leadership Tips & Tools

SEPTEMBER 2006

“Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. . . . Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.”

—Henry David Thoreau, *The Succession of Forest Trees*

The advent of autumn; we are in the closing cycle of the year’s calendar. Yet for those of us in education, this is our Spring...first days...fresh starts...new beginnings...a hopeful season! As we begin again, we find renewed faith and abundant expectations.

This issue of Leadership Tips and Tools is devoted to:

Leadership & the Seeds of Change

Be a Friend! No friends, bellyache buddies, or vital relationships? It is our choice according to Tom Rath. The co-author of *How Full is Your Bucket?* has just published a new, must-read book, *Vital Friends*. Rath invites us into the Gallup organization’s continuing research on friendships at work.

First Break All the Rules, by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, gave us our initial look at this Gallup research. We learned that a variety of performance outcomes—productivity, retention, and engagement—are linked to friendships at work. On a first reading these findings seemed counter-intuitive. How could having a “best friend” at work contribute to productivity? Conventional wisdom would have us think that a productive work environment was not a place for “best friends.” A supervisor, leader, or manager as a friend would seem to cloud the professional distance between co-workers and subordinates and have a potentially negative effort on a supervisor’s ability to maintain control, use clear judgment, and engage in honest appraisals.

Vital Friends! In his book, Rath shares years of ongoing research. Here we learn that Vital Friends at work are essential to our development. A Vital Friend—*“someone who measurably improves your life”* and *“a person at work or in your personal life whom you can’t afford to live without”*—increases our engagement and achievement at work, as well as our overall satisfaction with life.

The research is clear and compelling. Friends at work contribute meaningfully to retention, productivity, service, and satisfaction. On closer examination, we see evidence to support the Gallup research in our own lives. When we have someone at work who cares about us as a friend—as a person first and a worker second—we feel more engaged, connected, and committed to our jobs.

Leaders as Friends. As leaders, we need to do better than the reports from Gallup. Only 17% of respondents in a recent Gallup poll claim that their supervisor invested in their relationship in the past month. Only 17%, in a month?! In a Princeton study, respondents reported that their supervisors were the people they least enjoyed being with at work.

Rath's book affirms James Kouzes and Barry Posner's finding in *The Leadership Challenge* that "leadership is a relationship." Lee Boleman and Terrence Deal's *Leading with Soul* elaboration, "leadership is a relationship in community," is at the heart of this newly published research. It is clear: we need Vital Friends. As post-secondary leaders, we must help our colleagues and teams forge personal ties to form Vital Friendships. We must, ourselves, be a Vital Friend.

Vital Roles! Gallup measures and describes the roles that Vital Friends play. Testing hundreds of ideas and questions, Gallup has identified eight Vital Roles that differentiate positive and productive friendships at work. The Vital Roles—Builders, Collaborators, Connectors, Mind Openers, Champions, Companions, Energizers, and Navigators—make our work more productive, our jobs more meaningful, and our lives more satisfying.

These roles may be our most Vital Roles as leaders. As leaders we connect our colleagues, staff, and students in Vital Friendships. We become the Vital Friends our colleagues, staff, and students seek and need. We fill these important, vital roles as we mentor and coach, teach and guide, recognize and celebrate. This reminds me of an important passage from one of my favorite stories by Robert Fulghum. You might recognize it if you have participated in a Leadership Academy. The passage is from Fulghum's essay, *The Barber*. "We all fill important places in each other's lives.... You may never have proof of your importance, but you are far more important than you think."

As leaders, we must be Vital Friends. We must fill Vital Roles. Our investments in relationship-building are as crucial as any other function of our leadership.

Secrets! The secret is out! In *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, Bill George helps us understand and accept the authentic nature of our leadership. Using his experience as a respected and beloved CEO and leader, George tells the story of his journey to authenticity. As he shares, we find that the capacity to develop close and enduring relationships is the mark of an authentic leader.

According to George, today's employees demand more personal relationships with their leaders before they will give themselves fully to their jobs. They insist on having access to their leaders, knowing that it is in the openness and the depth of the relationship with their leader that trust and commitment are built.

"Authentic leaders establish trusting relationships with people throughout the organization as well as in their personal lives. The rewards of these relationships, both tangible and intangible, are long lasting. . . . Enduring relationships are built on connectedness and a shared purpose of working together toward a common goal. Every person has a life story and wants to share it with you, if you are open to hearing the story and sharing in return. It is in sharing our life stories that we develop trust and intimacy with our colleagues."

—Bill George, *Authentic Leadership*

Again, we find stories to be at the center of our leadership. Can we find our authentic selves and be open to sharing and listening in community? How will you establish trusting relationships with your colleagues, teams, and others throughout your college? The secret is out!

It's Jazz! Recently a friend from Kwantlen University College reported her progress as a post-secondary leader and likened leadership to playing jazz. Her metaphor lingers with me. She mused that leadership is complex in the way that playing jazz is complex. Sharing the Miles Davis quote, "*It takes 20 years to learn which notes not to play,*" she reminisced that the complexity of leadership comes from interactions with others. Sometimes we need to act immediately. Sometimes we need to be quiet. Sometimes we need to enable someone else to act. Sometimes we need to ask questions. Sometimes we need to do something completely different that we cannot imagine or describe at the moment. "*We always need to listen and reflect on what we hear, see, and experience,*" she wisely says.

Miles Davis offers significant leadership advice. As we begin anew, what have we learned? Whether we are leaders with years of experience or new leaders in post-secondary education, have we learned which "*notes not to play?*" Can we use our past experiences as leadership lessons to inform new, more vibrant, engaged, and authentic leadership?

"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."

—Robert Collier, *The Secret of the Ages*

The Rule of 5. Jack Canfield, best-selling co-creator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books, shares one of the secrets to his publishing success in his latest book, *The Success Principle*. He reports that he and Mark Hansen, his co-author, developed what they called The Rule of 5 in an effort capture attention for their first publication. According to Canfield, The Rule of 5 simply means that every day, we need to do five specific things that will move our goal toward completion. In their case, Canfield and Hansen did five interviews about the book, gave away five free copies of the book to influential celebrities, or called five network marketing companies to promote the book. They practiced The Rule of 5.

In the complex role of leadership we need to practice The Rule of 5. We can use this simple rule to plant the seeds of change. By taking five specific steps each day to foster friendships and create enduring relationships, we can demonstrate faith in the seeds of change and reap wonders. We can help our colleagues and teams forge new Vital Friendships at work. We can be mindful to play our Vital Role as a Vital Friend each day. We can trust the secret of authentic leadership and invest in our work relationships. We can listen to other's stories and be willing to tell ours with honesty. We can be mindful of which notes "not to play."

Plant the seeds of change—and experience wonders!

We want to hear from you! Please email us with your suggestions for *Leadership Tips and Tools*. We would love to hear your suggestions, experiences, stories, discoveries, and successes with putting these tips and tools to work. What topics would be most helpful to you for up-coming issues of *Leadership Tips and Tools*? We value your suggestions and feedback. We are listening!

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