



Leadership Tips & Tools

APRIL 2009

*“The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle of March.”*

—Robert Frost

April. Many of us are experiencing Frost’s “*Mud Time*.” And, not just in the weather! We bask in the good work of our colleagues and feel the warmth of the coming commencement of our dedicated students. We have served our colleges and communities well.

Yet, times are tough. Turbulent times will test our leadership. Challenges lie ahead. We wonder at the “*clouds*” that might come. How can we bring the best of ourselves to our leadership in these joyous, yet challenging times?

*“My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.”*

—Robert Frost

As post-secondary leaders we work for future’s sake! Ours is the delight of helping our colleges, colleagues, communities, and students achieve much! We toil in the enterprise of hope! Our “*love and need are one*.” As authentic leaders, our work is both avocation and vocation.

As authentic leaders we are anchored solidly in our talents and strengths. We are able to fuse the joy and the drudgery, an opportunity to make a difference as well as make a living. When we truly know and live out our talents “*love and need are one*” and “*work is play*” and we are at our best as leaders.

Leadership: Uniting Passion and Strengths in Challenging Times

Great Leadership! *“Without an awareness of your strengths, it’s almost impossible for you to lead effectively,”* write Tom Rath and Barry Conchie in their new book, *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow*. Get the book! Study its text! Take the Clifton StrengthFinder survey to discover your top 5 Signature Themes. Use the Leadership Domain guide to give you specific suggestions for leveraging your strengths and meeting the needs of those who look to you for leadership.

“Great leadership starts with a deep understanding of the strengths you bring to the table.”

—Rath and Conchie

The Bottom Line! Rath and Conchie make it clear that the most effective leaders are always investing in strengths – theirs and others. Leaders who focus on and invest in strengths increase engagement. From dismal (9%) to hopeful (73%), leaders who invest in strengths increase engagement eightfold on their teams and in their organizations. Eightfold for strengths! In post-secondary leadership we can do no less! Futures depend on us!

Maximize! Reaffirming that *“the best leaders are not well-rounded, the best teams are,”* Rath and Conchie point out that *“the most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team.”* In post-secondary education we do not lead in isolation. We lead on leadership teams. Those teams include our governing boards; executive, dean, and chair councils; faculty working groups; staff and operations teams. In learning colleges, we all lead. Some by position, some by passion.

Four Domains! What makes a great leadership team? Four distinct domains of leadership! Rath and Conchie point out that the 34 StrengthFinder themes from the Clifton StrengthFinder cluster naturally into four domains of leadership: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking. It serves our post-secondary teams well to have team members representing each of these four domains on our teams.

Executing! Are your signature themes – achiever, arranger, belief, consistency, deliberative, discipline, focus, responsibility, restorative? If so, your strengths are in the leadership domain of Executing. Leaders with strengths in the Executing domain know how to make things happen.

Influencing! If your signature themes are – activator, command, communication, competition, maximizer, self-assurance, significance, woo - Influencing is your leadership domain. Those who led by Influencing help their team reach out to other constituencies across departments, campuses and communities.

Relationship Building! Many of our conversations in the Academy are anchored in the essential nature of building relationships. With signature themes like adaptability, developer, connectedness, empathy, harmony, includer, individualization, positivity, and relator your strengths are in the leadership domain of Relationship Building. Those who lead through Relationship Building are the essential glue that holds a team and department together.

Strategic Thinking! Signature themes for the Strategic Thinking leadership domain are analytical, context, futuristic, ideation, input, intellection, learner, strategic. Leaders with Strategic Thinking strengths are the ones who keep us all focused on what could be. Strength in the Strategic Thinking leadership domain is critical as we seek to find the path forward in these challenging times of post-secondary leadership.

*“We tell stories to illuminate the paths we travel,
and to share humor, courage and wisdom . . .”*

—John James

It’s in the Stories! Rath and Conchie tell the stories of four leaders from very different organizations and show how these talented leaders use their strengths in pursuit of organizational goals. These stories bring to life the unique contributions and interactions of strengths within the four leadership domains. Wendy Kopp, Founder and CEO Teach for America; Simon Cooper, President, The Ritz-Carlton; Mervyn Davies, Chairman, Standard Chartered Bank; and Brad Anderson, CEO, Best Buy lead from different leadership domains. Each brings unique and powerful talents and strengths in pursuit of excellence. Robert Frost’s desire to unite “avocation and vocation” is well developed in these great leaders.

Worlds Apart? The four leaders profiled in *Strengths Based Leadership* may seem worlds apart from our world of post-secondary leadership. Look again. These leaders know and use their strengths. They leverage their dominant strengths for excellence in their organizations. They surround themselves with team members rich in diversity of strengths. They know who their best strengths partners are. They know how their strengths play out in the context of their organization and its current goals. We need to achieve this same clarity around our strengths in post-secondary leadership. After all, our colleges, communities, colleagues and students are counting on us!

*“You are a leader only if others follow . . .
we continue to focus on leaders and all but ignore their
impact on, and the opinions of, the people they lead.”*

—Rath and Conchie

Followers! While much of the leadership literature and research focuses on understanding great leadership by studying exemplary leaders or by interviewing outstanding leaders and determining what made them outstanding, less has been researched about what followers want from their leaders. Using their substantial data base, Gallup initiated a study of the “*average person’s opinion about leadership.*” Between 2005-2008, Gallup scientists asked followers to identify leaders with the most positive influence in their daily lives and to list three words that best described that person’s contribution to their life.

Just 4! With more than 540,000 words in the English language, Gallup researchers found that 4 words sum up what followers need from their leaders: Trust, Compassion, Stability and Hope! According to Gallup, followers have a very clear picture of what they want and need from the most influential leaders in their lives. While we do not often use the language of “leaders and followers” in post-secondary education, “followers needs” are what we all need and want from each other. These four descriptive words may be what our students want and need, too.

Trust! The key to building trust is to be authentic. Respect, integrity, and honesty are the outcomes of strong relationships built on trust. Trust is closely linked to engagement. The absence of trust creates an absence of engagement. One of Gallup’s studies found that *“the chances of employees being engaged at work when they do not trust the company’s leaders are just 1 in 12.”* Brad Anderson, CEO, Best Buy describes trust as *“the most cherished and valuable commodity in a work environment.”*

Compassion and Caring! According to the Gallup findings, people expect general positive energy and “compassion” from high-level organizational leaders. They expect “caring” from those of us who work more closely with them in the organization. Whether compassion or caring, organizational leaders must have a “positive bias” because people simply do not want to work with negative people.

Stability! It’s critical for organizations to evolve, change, and grow over time. Leaders must offer stability and confidence in turbulent times. Nothing creates stability as quickly as transparency. We must be clear and transparent with the challenges facing our colleges and universities. Clarity - facing the facts of our current reality - is the first step in being transparent. Create stability through honesty, clarity and transparency.

Hope! Our colleagues and students want stability in the moment *and* hope for the future. This makes the role of post-secondary leadership even more important during difficult times. While solving difficult problems is an essential part of effective leadership, identifying opportunities for the future plays an important role in creating hope and optimism. We are in the business of HOPE! Our students come to our colleges in hope of transforming their lives, achieving a brighter future, of having the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of their families, communities, and work places. We LIVE in HOPE! This need is so critical to our work as post-secondary leaders that we must be ever vigilant in its pursuit and articulation.

You have profound and powerful strengths! Your authentic self unites work and play; avocation and vocation. You lead for future’s sake! Yours is the joy of helping colleagues and students achieve much! Toil in the enterprise of hope! Let your love and need be one!

We want to hear from you! 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 feedback. We are listening!

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