Building Efficacy: Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions for the 21st Century Leader

Dr. Donna W. Jorgensen, Associate Professor
Interim Dean, College of Education
Rowan University
Glassboro, NJ 08028

On the ladder of academic leadership, the department chair is generally the first rung and is often used as the first step to progress into upper level administrative positions including Associate Dean or Dean of a college and ever higher into the role of provost or even president of an institution. Clearly, this is a journey not to be undertaken by the faint of heart. The world of the 21st century has changed dramatically and radically in the very recent past. Institutions of higher education are no longer readily perceived as hallowed halls where ivory tower academics pursue teaching and research under the watchful and benevolent eye of a fellow academic who has become the administrator to whom they report. From the moment I became a department chair of a very large department of teacher education at a respected regional public university, I recognized that the job would be vastly different from what I thought it was going to be and it seemed to change almost from day to day. As our institutions are compelled to take a much harder look at who we are and where we are going, the department chair's role is redefining itself or being redefined for us. Logically then, the roles of higher level administrators is also changing. Has the line blurred between academic leadership models and management models? Some would say that it has, and that this is not a good thing. Others would say that it has, and they would cheer for this shift. Others would say that these administrative positions are the same as they have always been. Many in academia chafe at the very suggestion that we become 'managers,' a term from a business model that is simply not welcome in our hallowed halls. Even when a department chair must accept some administrative duties, he/she is most likely to continue to identify as a faculty member and not as an administrator. Certainly there are institutions where the department chairs are considered full-time administrators and perhaps they actually have the easier job. In fact, since I have been Interim Dean, many people have told me that it is much easier than being a department chair, perhaps because of the nature of being able to make demands on those "below" us. Removal from faculty status to administrative status tends to change the way a department chair perceives his/her role. Davies, Hides and Casey (2001) ask the pertinent question that hums in our minds: "Can an appropriate leadership style be adopted or developed by universities that can harness both collegiality and responsiveness to customers?" (p. 1026). Perhaps this is the fear that many who accept (if not embrace) the department chair position have—that we are compelled to view our students and colleagues from the perspective of the consumer lens. For many, a disconnect from faculty collegiality is simply not an acceptable price. If we want to be or have effective leaders, we must ask ourselves what it will require to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to lead in this rapidly changing world of higher education, one where there seems to be a move toward the for-profit model.

So, for us to build efficacy in ourselves and in those we lead, we need to think about exactly what that means. How exactly does one "build" an effect? The term efficacy seems to have been borrowed from the medical profession and is now used in the field of education as synonymous with effectiveness. In the medical sense, efficacy is used to

mean that there is some degree of measurable beneficial change as the result of an intervention. If what we do as leaders is the intervention in the lives of our faculties and staff, then we should be able to measure the beneficial change that results from what we do as leaders. In a more general sense, we are simply talking about the capacity of anyone or anything to produce a desired result.

Here we are, more than a decade into the 21st century and changes in our world compel us to take a much closer look at who we are as academic leaders and what our impact will be. We probably cannot choose to stay safely tucked in our ivory towers; the world of our institutions and the world at large are going to demand much more from us. Our call is to leadership, and it is a pretty sure bet that for some of us, particularly at the department chair's level, it is not a call-ing! In fact, were we to break it down, among those present at any gathering of department chairs, we would probably discover a significant number for whom the phenomenon of "it was my turn" or "nobody else would do it" kicked in and virtually overnight we found ourselves thrust into a job we never really wanted. Parker (2004) states that "many are reluctant managers who agree to become heads of department as a result of a sense of duty or because it is their turn (in Bryman & Lilley, 2009, p. 341). Clearly, as the 21st century marches onward, we will find ourselves challenged to be more *innovative* than ever before as we seek to leave a legacy, to have a positive *impact.* Whether we have held our position for some time, whether we have just begun our tenure as department chair, associate dean, dean or provost, or whether we are contemplating whether it might be a good career move for us, we are faced with sudden and startling changes virtually every day. As we look at the various levels of academic leadership, we are forced to confront our reasons why we have chosen this path or whether it has chosen us. Clearly, something in us moves us to accept ever higher leadership positions.

A review of some of the literature since the turn of this century suggests that many factors demand our attention as we craft our leadership platforms to ensure that we will be able to lead with innovation and impact, to build efficacy, to be effective as leaders. Kezar (2000) definitively states that we must ask ourselves "How can colleges and universities harness the leadership potential of the diverse individuals on campus and bring their collective wisdom and experience to bear in today's tough challenges?" (p. 6). She calls for a pluralistic model that would engage an entire campus in thinking about the culture necessary for strong leadership. The modern world is one in which attention to diversity and its many voices is essential.

What is it, then, that evidences itself in the bold, strong academic leaders in in our college and university departments and deans' offices around the nation and the world? Who are we and how do we define ourselves? How do we craft an identity as an academic leader that allows us to maintain our identity as an academician? Once we reach the level of associate dean or dean, must we leave that identity behind to become management? Given the challenges of the chair's position, how does one remain an academician? How do we learn to share the responsibilities and to emphasize the partnership that exists between the faculty and the administration? Amey (2006) offers some insights into the role of the academic leader. She describes academic leaders as people who are collaborative and they are ". . .skilled facilitators who encourage. . .collective

responsibility, cultural change, and an interest in the public good" (p. 56). Everyone who is a leader is a learner and it takes time to learn who we are and who we want to be academic leaders. The many facets of diversity are our constant companions and when we use them to our advantage, the demonstrated results in our organizations' function will be noticeable and powerful. As we accept the roles of department chairs in schools and colleges of education, we can position ourselves to have an impact on the achievement of any college or university's primary goal: academic success. Critically important to the success of any academic unit is to have the courage to ask ourselves what we *believe* about our organization. Our dispositions matter. In fact, Kylene Beers, past president of the National Council of Teachers of English, has stated "that leadership is a disposition, not a position" (in ELQ 2012).

As the 21st century unfolds, unprecedented change is presenting itself. Many of us face serious fiscal shortfalls that cannot be made up by tuition increases alone. Our institutions are calling upon us to help shape a different kind of future. At the same time the public demands more from us in preparing a workforce for today and for the future, positive support has declined. Rich (2006) warns us that we live in a market economy where we must respond or we will not succeed. "University administrators," he says, "are needed who can keep focused on core academic priorities while still responding effectively to the new political economy of higher education" (p. 38). While some department chairs would argue that they do not want to be grouped as administrators (that that is the domain of deans and above) there is no doubt that that institutions need partnerships that will foster a spirit of shared conversation, shared goals and shared success. This might suggest to some that the problems with universities today are business problems and that faculty are not prepared to deal with these business problems. Those thrust into positions of academic leadership cannot afford the luxury of ignoring this very real element in achieving the overarching goal of academic success for the institution. Rich continues, "…this conclusion reinforces the conventional wisdom among the professoriate that most faculty should avoid administrative positions, even academic leadership positions such as provosts, deans, or department chairs" (p. 40, 2006). Are these the reasons people are running away from and not towards positions as academic leaders? Do the negatives overwhelm the positives? The richness of time spent as department chair gives us insight into what it means to be a faculty leader in a way that no other role can. The department chair's office can often be a stop on the way to being a dean or even provost.

Before we even begin our tenure as academic leaders, we must assess certain things about the culture of our campus. We must ask ourselves what leadership looks like on our own campus. We must look critically in the mirror to determine how we see ourselves fitting into existing picture. Is it possible that we believe that we can live in our own little ivory towers and lead our own divisions separate from the overall picture of leadership on our campus? One of the most powerful things we need to know is whether there is recognition of capable and effective leaders in our institutions. How does an individual know what effective department leadership looks like, and how does the institution know? Survival will be very difficult without these answers. While his study was focused on leadership in K-12 schools, Wasicsko (2007) has come to believe that ". . .the leader's human qualities and disposition combined with his or her knowledge and skill enable that leader. . .to create a [school] culture that invites all to learn and grow (p. 27). As we think

about building efficacy, we need to think about what good leaders know, believe, and are able to do. Wasicsko takes the stance that good leaders pay attention to "caring for the needs of others. . .find good in everyone, and. . .commit random acts of kindness" (pp. 28-29). Unfortunately, this can sometimes mean that the leader runs out of time and motivation to take care of him/herself, and that can lead to problems that seem to become magnified, even insurmountable. While academic leaders may start with idealism firmly in place, as time progresses, we can become a bit jaded, and we need to ask ourselves what happens.

Headaches and heartaches

When good people become academic leaders, they accept that they are going to lead with their hearts and with their heads. A successful faculty member might have every intention of being successful only to discover that the headaches and the heartaches simply are not worth the return on the investment. Many have chosen the academic life simply because it provides the opportunity to think independently, to set one's own hours for research and service activities, to work outside many of the organizational demands of the institution as a whole (Rich, 2006). We have learned to focus our attention on our students and their success and on our individual scholarly activities, going to conferences when we find one that intrigues us, writing on topics near and dear to our hearts. When we become department chairs, we find that our autonomy is seriously threatened. We are held captive to meetings and more meetings, budget and staffing concerns, accreditation demands, and mountains of administrivia that threaten to overwhelm us, giving us both headaches and heartaches. We are compelled to deal with every heartbreaking story of every individual student and to make decisions based on policy we are sworn to uphold. Each day we move closer and closer to a breaking point where we can no longer find the academic 'self.' Many of us might even long for hours of grading student papers over hours poring over the budget and staffing reports, trying to determine how to accomplish our academic goals on a shoestring budget with far fewer full-time faculty than we need. It breaks our hearts to cancel classes, though cancel them we must; it breaks our hearts to tell yet another student that the rules are the rules for everyone for a reason; it breaks our hearts that we cannot share a cup of coffee after class because there is yet another committee or taskforce or department meeting for which we must prepare or at which our presence is expected. Is all of this valued?

So then, how do we balance the head and the heart? The need is to *find* the balance. When we step into the office of the chair or dean, there are certain structures that come with the office, yet there is a place for emotions. Essential to a comfortable transition is powerful mentoring. In some institutions, there really is not even a clear description of what the job or role actually is. Later we may discover that the upper levels of administration have well-defined job descriptions because they are on that separate administrative track, faculty who move into department chair positions sometimes have little that is tangible to tell them how to succeed in this new endeavor. In the best scenario, a chair's handbook or manual may be provided as a reference guide. Even better would be if the handbook came connected to a mentor! Maybe, those who have been there and done it, want nothing more than to be finished with the job and mentoring is not part of their agenda for moving on. In an ideal world, all new department chairs would have the opportunity to attend leadership institutes or academies not unlike those offered

by AACTE, ATE, and The Chair Academy On-the-job training is good for some things, but it is not the best way to feel comfortable taking over the reins of a department or entire division. Some things must be mastered through practice, but there is little margin for error or time for practice in being department chair. Everything 'counts' from the moment your term begins. Traditionally, then, the ascent to the chair's position is one that is not in sync with the preparation for a faculty role that includes teaching, research, scholarship and service of the type that is not administrative in nature.

Accepting the challenge; moving in and finally, moving on

It is evident that faculty members do frequently make the transition successfully. They recognize that change is inevitable. External changes necessitate internal change as well. Nobody stays department chair forever, but there comes a time when senior faculty must rise to this particular challenge of leadership. Strathe and Wilson (2006) noted that the ". . .faculty of the academy are aging and it is predicted that over the next decade a third or more will retire" (p. 6). That statistic alone suggests that we should be taking a look at exactly who is leading our departments and at what point in their careers. Junior faculty are firmly entrenched in the business of becoming tenured and establishing their credibility as teachers and as scholars. If individual institutions are very fortunate, some faculty members will show ". . .from the earliest point of their careers [that they] demonstrate characteristics that are more reflective of successful academic administrators and might be identified as potential next-generation academic leaders" (p. 8). Additionally, the evolving structures of the academy itself put additional demands on every faculty member. Many of those junior faculty members see themselves as chair at some point in their futures, but it does not appear to be something for which most faculty consciously prepare themselves. Suddenly, almost without warning, they reach the point in their careers where they channel their leadership into this second stage of their careers. Mills (2006) states that many higher education administrators (department chairs included) are in the "second half portion of life, roughly forty years of age or older, and, as a result, [are] undergoing great physical and psychological changes appropriate to this stage which can and will affect their work" (p. 294).

Mills (2006) cites Moore and Gillette (1980) as crafting a metaphor for what happens in this mid-life shift and provides us with some insight into what might be a driving force in the second half of life academic leaders. Moore and Gillette say that this is a journey that is one ". . .of moving from being a warrior and fighting to gain new territory to becoming a king/queen who guards his or her kingdom well and serves those around him or her in order to leave a better world for those who follow" (Mills, p. 297). It is devoutly to be hoped by each of us that we are able to do this when our tenure as department chair ends. One of the most powerful examples in Mills' work is that of the renowned psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Mills quotes Maslow's own journals as he makes his own second half of life journey, including some time as a department chair. He sums up a stage at which many of us find ourselves when we occupy the quasi-administrative position of chair or administrative positions as associate dean or dean. To be the best academic leader, one "must give up knowing everything, reading everything, doing everything. . .must disidentify with Brandeis with graduate department, with APA, with children, with students, with younger colleagues. Stop being a mother-father to everyone and start cultivating my own garden" (Maslow, p. 33 as cited in Mills, p. 299).

Being an academic leader requires us to tap into our warrior qualities. We must be willing to assess which battles or wars in which we wish to engage. While being academic leaders might mark us as a success in this second stage of life, we sometimes ask ourselves whether it is really worth it. We wonder when we will be able to cease being a warrior and settle in to being benevolent rulers of our domains. We wonder whether, in the course of being department chair, what defines meaning and success.

Knuth and Banks (2006 remind us that it is sometimes difficult to reconcile two leadership domains: management and instructional leadership. We want to be academic (instructional) leaders, but we have the constraints of management including our mission and mandates to evaluate, recontract, and even discipline faculty and staff. Most of the academic world, at times, sees a disconnect between being an instructional leader and being a manager. At the heart of all strong and effective leaders is an understanding of the organization, its members, and its needs as well as the ability to balance all of our myriad responsibilities to layers of constituents and higher managers. Knuth and Banks cite the late general Norman Schwarzkopf as saying, "Leadership is a combination of strategy and character. If you must be without one, be without the strategy" (p. 9). All academic leaders must certainly be aware of strategic planning, but basic character must underpin the decisions we make if we wish to have an effective leadership platform.

Knuth and Banks also note the Schwan and Spady (1998) study that "used the term *service leaders* to describe exemplary managers who remove obstacles and provide support for staff members" (Knuth & Banks, 2006, p. 9). Great academic leaders understand the reality that building efficacy begins with building strong relationships founded on principles of trust and caring. Shared purpose is a hallmark of the collaborative environment built by a dynamic academic leader.

Eventually, we may choose to leave the kingdom to someone else. Once we have championed our share of causes it is time for someone else to take up the lance. The 21st century academy continues to need us. What we gain from the experience of being chair must be cherished and used to move us into higher positions of leadership. In a modern world, it is true that there are too many variables and the lure of the academic world we envisioned for ourselves beckons us back. Most chairs would probably acknowledge that their vision of their own career history would be one of teaching, scholarship and service, but not administration. Funny how the chair's position can be separated from the other kinds of service with which a faculty member with sees him/herself engaged.

Having been in assorted positions of leadership from department chair to associate dean to dean, I offer some insights in the hope that when my term is finished, someone will want to take up the mantle and continue to blaze new trails through the miasma of academic leadership. Sometimes it is lonely; sometimes it is too busy for comfort. Sometimes it is fraught with difficulty and controversy; sometimes it is a joyful celebration of the power of shared thinking and shared responsibility. You will probably be given the biggest office because the big corner office is generally perceived as a symbol that you have "arrived" at some pinnacle point; if you are lucky, that office will open your eyes to a vista of possibilities.

Bryman and Lilley (2009) interviewed leadership researchers to discover their insights into leadership in higher education institutions. They sought to identify characteristics of effectiveness (efficacy) and ineffectiveness. They cite Gomes' and Knowles' work from 1999 in which those researchers state that 'although academic departments have been appointing heads for decades, little research exists concerning exactly how those leaders contribute to departmental culture, collaborative atmosphere, and departmental performance (in Bryman & Lilley, p. 332). They posed the question, "what styles of or approaches to leadership are associated with effective leadership in higher education?" (p. 333). Among their findings is that there is no single thing that is revealed as "especially significant in what is regarded as effective higher education leadership" (p. 333). Only one thing had even a strong showing and that was that the effective higher education leader is someone who "is trusted and has personal integrity" (p. 333). Another characteristic is that the effective leader is supportive and protects his/her staff. Many of those researchers interviewed noted that effective leaders consulted their faculties and others in the decision-making process.

New leadership approaches such as transformational and charismatic leadership were not in evidence as hallmarks of effective leaders; however, there was strong support for the belief that is inherent in these approaches that collegiality is central to successful academic leadership.

In fact, many of those interviewed likened managing university faculty and staff to 'herding cats.' The very nature of academia sets the stage for independent thinking and autonomy. Faculty is given choices about the work they do and the directions their research will go. In some instances, individual faculty members do not see loyalty to the institution as a primary goal. Faculty tend to demonstrate loyalty to their discipline and their work rather than to the administrative layers of the university. "Yet another factor that was identified was the tendency of academics to be trained to be highly questioning in their approach, something that is often if not invariably encouraged in their disciplines" (Bryman & Lilley, 2009, p. 340). There is great difficulty in retaining an identity as scholars and researchers at the same time one serves as a manager.

Others may put it more eloquently or have a stronger empirical research foundation, but this is the vista of possibilities of 21st century leadership in which I believe. Whom do we lead as we strive to build efficacy, utilizing all of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions we possess?

We lead our faculty, tenure-track, temporary, and adjunct.
We lead our candidates, undergraduate and graduate.
We lead our school partners.
We lead each other.
We lead the professional staff who support our work.
We lead our sister institutions across the world.
We lead the world.
We lead those who would be led as well as those who would prefer not to be led.

Having considered the body of the organization, those whom we lead, we must turn our attention to how we lead and what our leadership looks like.

We lead by listening.
We lead by serving.
We lead by finding meaning and by helping others to find meaning.
We lead by ensuring that no one's rights are violated.
We lead by knowing the law and enforcing it.
We lead by being fair and reasonable.
We lead by practicing tolerance, patience, and open-mindedness.
We lead by knowing what needs to be done and by finding the best people to help us get it done.
We lead by recognizing our limitations and our vulnerabilities.
We lead by being ethical.
We lead by taking calculated risk because there can be no growth without risk.
We lead by asking questions and by promoting means of finding answers.
We lead by providing professional development and by participating in it.

Is it sufficient just to get the job done without being cognizant of how others perceive us as leaders? How do we react to others' perceptions? Knowing this could be crucial to the success of our tenure as department chairs. Does it take time for department members and those above us in leadership positions to become accustomed to our leadership styles and platforms? Can that impact on how we act and react especially in our first year or even first term as department chairs? Absolutely!

Impacts can be huge or miniscule; they can be obvious to any who would look; they can be hidden from all but the most discerning eye. The world of the 21st century is new and evolving. Every moment of every day is a chance for us to challenge the status quo and to find opportunities for innovation. There is limitless potential in each of us. When we accept the call to lead, we demonstrate our belief that we can be the catalyst for change, renewal, growth and impact. Once we accept the call, it is incumbent on us to do the very best we can to build efficacy in our organizations by being mindful of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are valued and developed by stellar academic leaders.

References

Amey, M. J. (November/December 2006). Leadership in higher Education. *Change*, pp. 55-58.

Bryman, A. & Lilley, S. (2009). Leadership Researchers on Leadership in Higher Education. *Leadership 5*(3), pp. 331-346.

Davies, J., Hides, M. T. & Casey, S. (2001). Leadership in higher education. *Total Quality Management,* Vol. 12, No. 7 & 8, pp. 1025-1030.

Filan, G. L. & Seagren, A. T. (Winter 2003). Six critical issues for midlevel leadership in postsecondary settings. *New Directions for Higher Education,* no. 124, pp. 21-31.

Groenke, S. (2012). Leadership. *English Leadership Quarterly 35*(2), pp. 1-12.

Kezar, A. (Fall 2004). What is more important to effective governance: Relationships, trust and leadership, or structures and formal processes? *New Directions for Higher Education,* no. 127, pp. 35-46.

Kezar, A. (July-August 2000). Pluralistic leadership: Bringing diverse voices to the table. *About Campus,* pp. 6-11.

Knuth, R. K. & Banks, P. A. (2006). The essential leadership model. *NASSP Bulletin 90*(1), pp. 4-18.

Mills, R. (Winter 2006). Leadership in higher education and the second half of life. *Education* Vol. 127 Issue 2, pp. 294-302.

Practical implications for the leadership revolution. (2006). In *Rethinking the "L" Word in Higher Education.* ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol. 31 Issue 6, pp. 157-165. John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Rich, D. (Summer 2006). Academic leadership and the restructuring of higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education,* no. 134, pp. 37-48.

Strathe, M. I. & Wilson, V. W. (Summer 2006). Academic leadership: The pathway to and from. *New Directions for Higher Education,* no. 134, pp. 5-13.

Wasicsko, M. M. (2007). Recharging the disposition to lead. *Principal Leadership 7*(8), pp. 27-29.