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Leadership, Service, and Community: A Regional Focus

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Leadership, Service, and Community: A Regional Focus

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Abstract

The ability to train and share updated information on leadership with our community and education leaders are a missing component of most leadership programs. The interaction and communication between institutions of higher education, K-12 education, and the business worlds tend to be an area of constant struggle. The Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department (ELPA) at East Tennessee State University are stepping out to serve the leaders of their region with an annual Leadership Symposium. The Doctoral Fellows and other ELPA students have been hosting this symposium for two years and through continued research and growth want to create a model to allow other programs the ability to connect with their surrounding communities.

Introduction

The Leadership Symposium hosted by the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) Department is an event aimed at serving the various leaders in our local community. The event is developed by the ELPA Chair, Doctoral Fellows and other ELPA students who research and share current leadership research, studies, and activities with the attendees. The Leadership

Regarding the world of business, leadership is the catalyst that enables organizations to achieve successful business results (DeFeo & Bar-el, 2002; Smith & Blakeslee, 2002; Dafna, 2008; Jong and Hartog, 2007). When effective leadership traits are present, organizations observe increased employee satisfaction that positively influence productivity and profits (Johnson, 2009). Strong relationships between leaders and employees are the key that leads to high performance (Oliver, 2009; Chiang, 2008; Durrani, Ullah, & Ullah, 2011). Conversely, leaders who are passive in their relationships with workers create employees who exhibit emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and burnout on the job (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2010).

In conclusion, leadership is an important factor for effectiveness and change in any organization (Stodgill, 1974). Leadership is of the utmost importance in the education sector, as well as the business sector. Students who have strong leaders produce higher achievement scores, feel supported, and take part in their own learning. Employees who have strong leaders show higher levels of performance and productivity, thus creating a successful business environment.

Methodology

Data Collection

During the Symposium, the ELPA department collects updated email information from all attendees. Surveys are then sent out and data is collected anonymously regarding identified areas

of interest. This data is then used to analyze the effectiveness of the Symposium, modify the content and organization of the Symposium, and use the data as a focus for research.

Data Analysis

After the Symposium, participants received a survey addressing the effectiveness, material, and future areas of interest for the Symposium. The survey results revealed that the attendees would prefer the symposium be lengthened in order to allow more information to be shared.

Taking the findings from the 2010 Symposium, the Fellows and faculty decided to remain with the three sessions but add a panel event after lunch. The focus of the 2011 Symposium was Daniel Pink's *Drive* with three breakout sessions: Role of the Leader in the 21st Century, Leadership & Engagement in the 21st Century, and Motivation in the 21st Century. The breakout sessions were then followed by a panel discussion with leaders from the four different represented areas: higher education (Business Dean), K-12 (Superintendent of Schools), non-profit (local founder), and business (corporate franchise manager). The panel, through the direction of a moderator first addressed their personal and professional areas of interest. The panel was then asked a series of questions from the audience to highlight some of the material and themes of the day.

After the insight gained from the first survey the fellows, students and department chair permanently connected the follow up survey as the concluding part of the Symposium. It is through those surveys that we examine the overall effectiveness and areas of improvement for the Symposium.

3. The presentations promoted important leadership skills.

While all three prompts received overwhelming positive responses, there was a marked increase in the perception for the first statement. In 2010 only 44% of the respondents strongly agreed that the Forum enhanced their professional practice as a leader, while in 2011 that number increased to 63%. There was also a decrease in the number of respondents who disagreed with that statement. In 2010, 8% disagreed that the Symposium enhanced their professional practice while in 2011 the percent registered at 0%.

The response to the second statement regarding the materials provided showed a slight increase in the strongly agree category. In 2010, 64% strongly agreed while in 2011 the number increased to 67%. However, there was also an increase in the strongly disagree category in 2011 concerning the materials provided. In 2010 no survey was returned with a strongly disagree, while in 2011 4% (1 respondent) strongly disagreed that the materials provided supported their development as a leader. There was a marked difference in the method of distribution and types of materials used from 2010 to 2011. In 2010 the Symposium featured three books- two of which were distributed before the Symposium and one that was handed out after the presentation on that material. While in 2011, the Symposium only used one book, additional outside research, and the book was distributed after the last presentation of the day. The change in method and quantity of material in the 2011 Symposium could account for the one occurrence of strongly disagree.

The third statement reflects the participants overall perception on the effectiveness of the Symposium in assisting their development as a leader. The results here remained consistent with very little variation with 92% supporting this statement in 2010 and 96% supporting in 2011. There was one respondent both years who strongly disagreed with this statement.

The remaining sections of the survey used open ended statements to allow the respondents to share any additional insights on the material, future directions, and overall thoughts. While this data is qualitative in nature, due to the limited amount of responses picking out strong reoccurring themes was difficult .Thus, the choice was made to highlight a few of the responses that seemed to capture the overall theme and that have helped shape our decisions on future symposiums to the below prompt.

1. What specifically about this Leadership Symposium has inspired or caused a change in your thinking?

The overarching themes found in the responses to this question in the 2010 survey had to deal with the positive response to the content on Emotional Intelligence and the work of Maxwell. One of the respondents states, “The Maxwell book was wonderful!!! I plan on doing training with all of the principals on their emotional IQ.” The goal of the Symposium is to provide leaders with the tools and information necessary to go out and practice at an increased level of effectiveness and awareness. Through the positive responses and the motivation to use the material in their own organizations the work of the 2010 Symposium was successful. However, that does not mean there was no room for improvement. One of the themes found in the responses was that the material was strong but it may have been a bit too basic for some of the

seasoned leaders in attendance. The following statement best captures this theme, “The event was well organized, and the presenters were well prepared. The topics were not new to me. It seemed that the material was more appropriate for aspiring leaders rather than those currently practicing.”

Taking these considerations into account the format and type of material covered in the 2011 Symposium was modified with a more direct and focused approach on current leaders and current research. The overarching theme that surfaced from the above statement was the importance of motivation and autonomy in leadership. The responses were overwhelming positive and many reflect how the information caused them to stop and reconsider how they motivate and structure their organizational environments, “I have changed my way of thinking on how others might perceive the work environment that I find the most motivating.” Similar to the 2010 survey, we were pleased to see someone taking the ideas from the presentation and immediately applying them to their organization, “I obtained an idea for our annual School Board retreat. The concepts of *DRIVE* will be shared with all administrators & school board members.”

Recommendations

Currently the Leadership Symposium is hosted annually as a service to the community. The goal is to bring current leadership research and practices to the surrounding communities at no charge. In the future the Symposium may turn into a 1 ½ day conferences similar to a commuter

conference where the same format is kept, but there is also a section opened for the submission of proposals that match the leadership theme.

The ELPA department has increased the attendance yearly to the event; however, reaching out to some of the local four year colleges, community colleges, nonprofit organizations and other local business will bring a greater deal of diversity to the Symposium. There needs to be a focus on creating relationships with other organizations who may not see the Symposium as something they can benefit from due to the association of the ELPA department being solely connected and focused on education. This will be an ongoing focus for the department to break the stereotype that the only leadership ELPA focuses on is educational leadership, which is not an accurate representation of the material and research within the department.

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