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Leadership, Service, and Community: A Regional Focus

Stephanie R. Tweed
East Tennessee State University, tweeds@etsu.edu

Miriam S. Phillips
East Tennessee State University

Pamela Scott
East Tennessee State University, scottp@mail.etsu.edu

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Stephanie Renee Tweed
Doctoral Fellow
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee

Miriam Seyelene Phillips
Doctoral Fellow
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee

Dr. Pamela Scott
Department Chair
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee

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

Symposium was not an original idea to the ETSU ELPA department but one that Dr. Scott brought with her from another university. However, upon first entering the ELPA department as a faculty member and program coordinator organizing and executing this type of an event would have been difficult if not impossible. Dr. Scott recalled how she wanted to give the department an identity and a culture that would out last her time in the department. Dr. Scott also stated that "If we don't do this [Leadership Symposium] we are really in an ivory tower and we become meaningless."

As the ELPA Chair Dr. Scott went to the fellows who now all reported and interacted with her. The first year was challenging in that the department was entering into uncharted territory. Now, after only two Symposiums, the department has embraced and gained excitement for each Leadership Symposium. In the beginning, having members of the department break out of the status quo was a challenge. This was due to the various stages of professional development of the faculty with only one member with tenure. The rest of the faculty was still new and working towards obtaining tenure within the department. The other reason for an acceptance of the status quo was due to the strength of the department. Yet through the introduction of the Leadership Symposium, the exposure and the growth of the ELPA students has created an additional layer of strength within the department.

Currently the Chair serves as the main contact from the faculty assisting the fellows and other students in the development of sound researched material for the Symposium. Attendees include leaders in higher education, K-12 educators, business leaders, and non-profit leaders in the larger community. By providing a place for these various groups to interact, leaders are able to network

and share ideas and success stories with one another.

Review of Literature

Leadership is not a term that is easily defined, though much research exists on leadership and its implications to any organization. Billikopf (2003) saw leadership as the ability to get others on board with decision making through delegation or empowerment. Algase (2009) stated that the most successful leaders enable themselves, together with others, to change or transform the situation in a way that better answers to tomorrow's challenges to emerge. Covey (2004) defined leadership as communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves. Alternatively, Yukl (2002) identified leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, while Northouse (2007) argued that leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

In the context of schools, leadership is of the upmost importance. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. School leaders improve teaching and learning directly and most powerfully influence staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions (Leithwood, et al, 2006). At the pre-k through twelfth grade level, the principal holds the highest leadership role in the school. Many researchers have explored the relationship between principal behaviors and instructional effectiveness (Dufour, 2002; Glickman, 2002; O'Donnell & White, 2005). The principal's role has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and schools as organizations have changed (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Strong principals contribute to the success of their schools through instructional expertise,

management skills, and interpersonal skills (Ebmeier, 2003; Holland, 2004; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Walker & Slear, 2011). Schools whose principals have a high level of competency have achievement scores significantly higher than those whose principals have lower competency levels (Valentine & Pratner, 2011). O'Donnell and White (2005) supported the notion that principal leadership can have a meaningful effect on student achievement. There is a positive relationship between high levels of teacher efficacy and increased student achievement as well as a positive link between principal behavior and teacher efficacy (Walker & Slear, 2011).

At the university level, the college professor is expected to lead by engaging in a variety of activities necessary for the successful achievement of their professional goals and objectives, as well as the mission and goals of their department and institution (Arreola, Theall, & Aleamoni, 2003). The educational context created by the behaviors and attitudes of college professors has a dramatic effect on student learning and engagement. Professors who engage students in and out of the classroom and make enriching the educational experience a priority have students who feel supported and are active participants in their own learning (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Research suggests that interacting with faculty fosters academic integration, and has positive effects on success and persistence (Amelink, 2005; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2005). When faculty-student contacts outside of class are positive, students feel validated and establish a stronger institutional connection (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Combined, this suggests that college professors play an important role in student learning and academic success.

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 upmost 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 serious 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.

Conclusion

Result Findings

After the collection and comparison of both surveys there were some apparent themes and future areas for the Fellow team to focus. One of the first areas of concern is with the return of the survey. While only 23 surveys were returned, the attendance for the Symposium was recorded at 101 attendees. The survey also revealed a decrease in attendance by males who in 2010 accounted for 43% of the population but in 2011 only accounted for 39% .The number of returned surveys held constant at 23 for both years. During the analysis of the data, it became apparent that other measures of demographic diversity need to be included in future surveys. Race/ethnicity, age, and primary language are three additional elements that would allow for a more representative picture of the leaders in our community. Both surveys attempted to capture the relevant data concerning the leader demographics as well as perception on the effectiveness of the Symposium; however due to the lack of congruent answer selections it was not possible to accurately compare the two years on every variable. The following reflects the percentage of attendees who answered the survey and their leadership position in 2011: 46% Higher Education, 46% K-12, 4% Non-profit, 4% For-profit, and 4% Government/Community.

The second area of the survey that was directed at comparing the two events leaned towards its effectiveness and how the audience perceived the usefulness of the materials/topics. The following three questions were asked in both surveys using a Likert Scale and thus analyzed against one another:

1. The Leadership Forum enhanced my professional practice as a leader.

2. The materials provided supported my development as a leader.

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 overreaching 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 overreaching 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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