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A Technical College Grow-Your-Own Leadership Program

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EXCHANGE

A Technical College Grow-Your-Own Leadership Program

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With the retirement of baby boomers (born 1946–1964) looming, considerable discussion and research has been conducted into succession planning and the educational impact from the loss of these leadership skills and experiences in community colleges. To prepare for this eventuality, many community colleges have begun Grow-Your-Own (GYO) leadership development programs (Reille & Kezar, 2010; Robinson, Sugar, & Miller, 2010). This article describes the experiences of two individuals who participated in a GYO leadership development program and offers practical considerations for community colleges that have or are planning GYO leadership programs.

RELEVANCE OF A GROW-YOUR-OWN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (GYOLDP)

As noted by VanWagoner, Bowman, and Spraggs (2005, p. 50), “community colleges have long attracted leaders within their organizations who want to make a difference, who rise above the traditional culture, and who share a vision for the future.” Moreover, institutional significance is explicitly dependent upon administrators who value and promote employee leadership development (Cohen, 2005; Romero, Purdy, Rodriquez, & Richards, 2005). As indicated by Miller (2009, p. 28), a “strong, committed leadership is critical to the process of institutional

This is a summarized version of a longer report. For the full-text version of this report, please contact the author.

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transformation,” and positive institutional transformation is synonymous with significance, e.g., likely to have influence or effect.

GROW-YOUR-OWN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS (GYOLDP): OUR EXPERIENCE

In the two years that we participated in our GYOLDP, first as participants to assess how the program functioned, and then as co-chairs in year two, five fundamental principles became self-evident. It is our contention that these principles have far-reaching application to other GYOLDPs in community colleges across the nation.

Principle I: College Administrative Support Promotes a Significant GYOLDP Outcome

A leadership development program for employees is not typical professional development—it is an institutional force multiplier—and requires the full support of institutional administration. This statement illuminates the core purpose for asking employees to voluntarily participate in a GYOLDP. Participation is not intended to only improve an employee’s method of dealing with students or retention or improved curricula. The GYOLDP is about motivated people searching for opportunities to promote institutional significance; that is, having, or being likely to have, influence or effect throughout the institution such that the college increases retention, builds a better curricula, and improves its organizational-wide outcomes.

Principle II: Never Consider the GYOLDP a “Class”

It may be difficult for certain leaders in the college to consider that a GYOLDP is more than a formal class for employees to attend. If this occurs, the goals of the program have been institutionalized and will never be attained. For a program that is in session for an academic year, we suggest that you dedicate outside “class time” to nonclassroom-based learning activities. A structured and planned GYOLDP is needed; but do not reduce the GYOLDP to a formal class that must have 20 hours of classroom discussion of leadership styles, or five group exercises, for example. Rather, allow the group to identify a problem they want to investigate as motivated leaders and active problem-solvers.

Principle III: Avoid the In-house Crowd

The GYOLDP is an opportunity to focus a different set of eyes on real and current issues and problems the college is facing for both the learning of the participants and improved institutional problem-solving. Solicit outside experts in the areas of leadership, problem-solving, entrepreneurship, or budget analysis to help identify problems, develop solutions with the GYOLDP participants, and create mentoring partnerships between participants and experts.

Principle IV: Form a Team in Deed, Not in Word

What is required for the GYOLDP members to be successful—along with valued mentors, support from administration, and other factors—is that your team functions in a maximized participatory process. Members of a dynamic, collaborative team find satisfaction in the work accomplished and the outcomes realized, not in certificates of completion. The team will accept institutional challenges and research the issues or problems to a degree that they comprehend the problem and are permitted to decisively seek solutions of significance.

Principle V: Challenge Your Administration to Implement as Feasible

Our suggestion here is to encourage your administration to implement recommendations of the GYOLDP participants as much as is feasible. There are two key factors at work here: (a) the participants' recommendations are welcomed, accepted in a formal presentation, yet the suggestion(s) vaporizes; or, (b) the participants' recommendations are heartily welcomed and become policy or practice. The latter of these factors is a potentially huge motivator, particularly for subsequent classes of the GYOLDP.

IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

The implication that we would like to share is a simple premise. Our experiences in the GYOLDP have taught us that without a vision to improve the institution in ways that are significant, the organization reaches a level of status quo. Our first recommendation, therefore, is that the GYOLDP be implemented to surpass a status-quo vision and move to a level of significant impact in your service area.

The second recommendation we offer is based on leadership commitment. For a GYOLDP to be successful, individuals in the program must be dedicated to the requirements needed for the GYOLDP to be a significant success. To maximize the benefit to the college and future employee-leaders, the GYOLDP must be seen as a value-added program that participants will commit their time and energies to. Consequently, the GYOLDP must be perceived as a critical asset of the college. The program will falter if potential participants view it as simply a line item on their curriculum vitae.

The third recommendation is to have the GYOLDP team produce two tangible products: (a) prepare a formal presentation program at your college and invite a diverse range of guests; (b) as time permits, prepare two documents that have the same level of qualitative and quantitative content as a peer-reviewed journal submission. Document one is for the college for internal use; the second document is for possible publication.

Finally, this article recommends analysis of leadership-development-program outcomes to extract insight and applicability to the other community colleges. Published research of GYOLDP outcomes may very well suggest the methods, materials, and manpower needed to achieve leadership significance in community colleges nationwide.

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