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Following the earlier Enron and MCI scandals continued fraud and greed by highly educated leaders and followers brought about the economic recession starting in 2007. This suggests that the management of our large institutions missed something in the quest for greater profits gained faster and faster. Central difficulty of the problem resides in a lack of conscience applied to daily activities in the workplace. What are missing are the soft skills and ethical values of leadership that should be embedded in university classes as a continuation of what expectedly has been learned at home. [*Krishna Dhir, Feature Editor*]

A Challenge to Leadership Education

by Richard Perego, University of Dallas

Soft skills basic to leadership—particularly personal values, communication skills such as listening, teamwork, decision making, and giving and receiving feedback—plus developing relationships enhance the specific functional skills required of current MBA students.

Based on my years of experience working with organizations, including a Deming Prize winner and companies found on “*Fortune’s* list of 100 best companies to work for” (Levering & Moskowitz, 2009), the real but intangible difference in high-performing organizations lies in the really hard work required in the implementation of these basics. Well-established and practiced foundations in soft skills allow managers to apply the marketing, operations, and financial skills of the business as the building blocks necessary for successful economic performance.

Therefore, preparing students to understand the *spirit* of organization requires participative leadership and intelligent followership in the classroom as preparation for daily living and working is a challenge to leadership education.

Teaching Strategy and Leadership

Transformational leaders reflect clarity of vision in their personal values. Followers see the actions of leaders, reflect upon them, assess them against their personal values, gain insight, and focus on “getting the job done.” Leaders lead by example. And followers make leaders. Much change

occurred in the practice of management as work evolved through the mechanical era, the information era, and into today’s knowledge-based era.

Old-style autocratic leadership needs to be updated to the world-wide and virtual-team orientation with an understanding that the acceptance of congruent values allows for individuality and team performance. Students in the classroom benefit when experienced faculty competently guide discussion by bringing in real life business practices to illustrate difficult to quantify issues. Nowhere is this need for personal values more evident than in the failure of values revealed in the exposure of the quantitative models driving the business decisions of the financial industry. A values-driven classroom provides students with the opportunity to jointly learn, develop, and practice soft skills as well as functional skills.

A very real question is *how can the human life be best lived?* This cannot take place in isolation for it involves the community in which one works. Plato tasks the leader to search for universally valid truths which if applied to governance leads to individual and organization success. Gandhi supposedly applied this analogously in his dictum “to be the change that you want to see.”

In order to facilitate this change, students require a demonstrated ability in oral and written communications. Today students want more than “edutainment” in the educational process. They want to



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participate in the learning process by doing. Having students present pre-assigned articles and opening themselves to commentary and questioning reveals a depth of knowledge of concepts and provides an exercise in empowerment that is useful as a base for feedback and continued development.

Writing personal experience applications related to the study topics with reference to the readings and discussions, together with demonstrated reflection on what took place in the past, provides for contemplations of actions that can be improved. The teacher and the leader become *a guide on the side* as opposed to *a sage on the stage*. Students learn to manage themselves and to provide for the growth of others in the quest to make personal and organizational change.

Exercises enhance student learning through the practice of decision making, team problem solving, and listening. I was exposed to the New Truck Dilemma decades ago, and continue to find similar exercises in delegation and decision making invaluable. In a New Truck dilemma exercise (similar to what I learned in a training session using Norman R. F. Maier's technique) (Maier & Zeffoss, 1970), participants in a service organization within a company are told that a new truck will arrive. In the past,

management decided who received the new truck. To understand delegation and team decision making, participants self-select case roles. In the role play, a description of the existing trucks and the drivers' years of service is made common knowledge.

The participants make the decision as to who gets the new truck, while the manager remains outside of the decision-making process. Emphasis is placed upon the quality of the decision by determining whether the worst truck was replaced and whether the decision is acceptable to management *and* satisfies the workers as well. Students in self-selected teams study the situation, role play, make a decision, and report out. What is important is the emphasis on making a team quality decision that is also acceptable to management. Debriefing reaffirms the values of delegation, values of the organization, and the beautiful view of people doing for themselves what they can do best... that is what most involves them in their daily work.

A simulation exercise allows role-playing in the resolution of a typical operations problem. Students attempt to resolve an operations process bottleneck problem, for which they provide data on their current work efforts. I draw from the students' work experience to set up the simulation.

Self-assigned groups select roles from a previously prepared set of criteria, meet with the manager, and resolve the issue. Typically the issue is one of work assignment, overtime allocations, or weak performance by a team member that is harming group output. When they report out, I place emphasis on not only getting the problem solved for organizational efficiency, but also on providing for the human effects of dedicated, hard-working employees who may be caught in a dysfunctional system.

In a shortened version of a modified "Abilene Paradox" (Harvey, 1974) type exercise, self-selected groups are asked to agree on a trip destination within a limited time for discussion. As the group reports out, it is usual to find that there is limited agreement as to the destination and the way of travel. Some groups simply agree to get the assignment completed. Some are driven by the "alpha dog," and some do not reach agreement. The students participate in this type of exercise to demonstrate through the discussion the need to listen and to communicate feelings, emotions, and rational argument. It is not just *going along to get along* that is important, but doing what is right for self and others that is important.

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The Dean's perspective
Krishna S. Dhir, Editor

A publication of the Decision Sciences Institute

This book shares the perspectives and insights of an impressive array of current and former deans, as well as faculty members, about the role of a business school dean in all its dimensions. The book is appropriate for sitting deans as well as for aspiring deans, and is an important addition to the literature on business school leadership.

**Jerry E. Trapnell, Ph.D, CPA,
Executive Vice President &
Chief Accreditation Officer**

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The Dean's perspective

Most of the skills and knowledge needed to support a successful dean can be learned and improved and in that spirit, a business school dean must continuously seek to enhance his/her skills. This book shares the perspectives and insights of an impressive array of current and former deans, as well as faculty members, about the role of a business school dean in all its dimensions. The book is appropriate for sitting deans as well as for aspiring deans, and is an important addition to the literature on business school leadership.

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AACSB International

This book brings together various essays published in the Dean's Perspective column of the Decision Sciences Institute's newsletter, Decision Line, from its inception in July 2003 to January 2008.

The Decision Sciences Institute (DSI) is a professional organization of academicians and practitioners interested in the application of quantitative and behavioral methods to the problems of society. Through national, international and regional conferences, competitions, and publications, the Institute provides an international forum for presenting and sharing research in the study of decision processes across disciplines. The Institute also plays a vital role in the academic community by offering professional development activities and job placement services.

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member in your new department and a good instructor. If I had known before leaving my previous institution what I know now (regarding how hard it is to balance a dissertation and new job), I would not have stayed another year (because it wasn't really necessary in my case), but I would have worked ten times as hard as I did to get done before leaving."

Finally, a student noted that not all students leave because they have secured an academic job. She suggested that students leave (and don't finish their Ph.D.'s) for a variety of reasons.

"Generally speaking, PhD students here leave the degree because they have a critical situation that does not allow them to continue; e.g., critical illness, family problems, relocation overseas, financial constraints, etc. . . ."

Caveat: While there is strong agreement that leaving too early is indeed a mistake, there are exigencies that might "force the hand." This is where the advisor and student must carefully evaluate tradeoffs (there are always tradeoffs) that give weightage to work remaining, the nature of the exigency, the nature of the student, potential work demands in the job, and particularly high weightage to the downside risk.

Conclusion

The 10 "mistakes" identified seem to be largely endorsed by the panel. Doctoral students who create synergy, are proactive in their approach, evaluate opportunities carefully, avoid a deep lull period, manage the interaction with their advisor, seek help and criticism of their work, build a particular skill set, temper ambitious projects with reasoned reality, consider political realities, and don't leave the program prematurely tend to be successful in the program.

However, while identifying mistakes is easy, our respondents seemed to indicate that addressing them is easier said than done. There are extenuating circumstances that are unique to individuals and their context that could make it difficult not to commit certain mistakes. These unique factors could pertain to the institution, the advisor or the doctoral student. For instance, mistake 6 (don't ask for help) could result from certain programs where faculty are not readily accessible, the advisor forces the student to "look within" for assistance, and the student hates any kind of obligation. Collectively, these factors might

interact and promulgate the mistake across groups of graduate students. Further, certain institutions could mandate post-comp requirements that prevent the lull period (mistake 4). Also, certain doctoral students may come in with little knowledge of the field and would like to spend time exploring various research areas before creating synergies (mistake 1).

Such contingencies might be prevalent for all mistakes—raising or lowering their incidence and intensity. However, what the panel seems to be saying is that a heightened sensitivity to the possibility of such mistakes can help the doctoral student work to minimize their occurrence or impact. Competent and motivated students, with the skills of "mistake management and minimization" in the context of the institution, advisor and their innate personality, will dramatically increase their chances of success in the doctoral program. ■

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Feedback somewhat similar to a 360-degree appraisal emphasizes the human value system integrated with the functional performance. In an effort to improve in both their individual presentations and their team participation, students have the opportunity to give and receive feedback on the effectiveness of their performance. Assessment in the feedback allows for an examination of an individual's personal sense of meaning. One of the more important elements is the development of relationships. Networks evolve through close contact. Trust is essential. And students who are evaluating the leader in the group based upon actions and then giving and receiving group feedback realize the strength of doing quality work contributing to the well-being of all.

Conclusion

This approach is neither a particular ethical nor value structure. Rather it is the develop-

ment of the kinds of customs and conduct that the individuals and the group find desirable or appropriate. It is not relativistic, but virtues driven and concerned with what leaders do, how they do it, and why they do it. And it is integrated with the functional skills of daily work experience. It is through the discussions, the readings, the role plays, the constant communication, the feedback, and the exercises that students recognize their own need to grow and develop.

The incremental value is that of exhibiting and enhancing the values currently necessary for success that are so often lacking in modern organizations. Leadership involves values, and one cannot be a successful leader without being aware of one's own values, and the values of one's followers. By implementing the leadership teaching strategy, students have the opportunity to learn and practice theory and "what works" in becoming transformational leaders. Rel-

evant articles, presentations, and exercises help in the development of customs and culture appropriate for leading an effective organization. ■

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