

## **Practicing What We Preach: How Leadership Skills Can Change the Quality of a College Education**

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Over the years, the management discipline has harbored a rather tenuous relationship with the emerging field of leadership. Is leadership merely one function of management, or does it deserve its own lofty perch? For the most part, in Management programs, leadership is thought of as something students should have or develop if they hope to be very successful in their chosen careers. So, most management programs now preach, at least to some extent, from the “gospel of leadership.”

In recent years, however, the business model has been extended to the college classroom. Many scholars, like Bailey (2000) or Hassell and Lourey (2005), have argued for the business metaphor in their classrooms by arguing that students should be viewed as clients or customers as they “manage” student learning. In fact, the clear language in the current authors’ departmental annual evaluation rubric is the admonition that professors should effectively “manage” their classroom efforts. In response, Franz (1998) has warned of the danger of viewing students as passive consumers of the instructor’s quest for customer satisfaction. That contention portrays the student as a passive participant on the education assembly line being fashioned as a quality product for external business organization customers. There is concern about the lack of the student’s responsibility for his or her own development.

Gillespie and Parry (2009) propose that students should be viewed as “employees” and college professors as “managers” and that they should apply performance management (PM) techniques to maximizing this valuable resource. As such, they are well-advised to understand and to continue developing the psychological contract with regard to mutual expectations for student performance. This, then, creates a system of shared responsibilities. Consequently, they focus on such topics as: “knowledge of the organization’s mission and goals,” “knowledge of the job,” and “KSA’s” to identify and to improve effort-performance gaps for students.

This “student-as-employee” metaphor represents an improvement over the student as client or customer model implicitly accepted for so many years (centuries?) in college education. It is our contention, however, that it does not go far enough. Therefore, we present the professor as leader metaphor as an improvement over the classroom management analogy.

Leadership theories offer several aphorisms that may provide insight. Among them are “managers do things right, but leaders do the right things;” “you manage things, but you lead people;” or “leaders promote change, while managers promote the status quo.” We take the position that establishing a psychological contract of mutual expectations will

merely tend to promote the status quo, but it should be the professoriate's goal to promote change or improvement in the classroom.

We use Kouzes and Posner (2010) as one leadership model that informs our thinking. In their book on *The Truth About Leadership*, they provide ten fundamental truths about leadership that might be used to guide the professor as well as the business manager. These are: You Make a Difference, Credibility is the Foundation of Leadership, Values Drive Commitment, Focusing on the Future Sets Leaders Apart, You Can't Do It Alone, Trust Rules, Challenge Is the Crucible for Greatness, You Either Lead by Example or You Don't Lead at All, Best Leaders Are the Best Learners, and Leadership Is an Affair of the Heart.

What we propose to do in this paper is to apply leadership desiderata and values, like change, difference, commitment, trust, credibility and learning as an important addition to the college classroom manager-performer metaphor. We believe that professors should be leaders in their classrooms. Professors should practice what they preach.