



# Leadership Tips and Tools

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Running on empty and need to refuel?

Feel as though you don't have the time or means to refresh yourself – not to mention the energy and passion to lead your colleagues, department, or college?

We long for the mental and emotional equivalents of a stimulating breath of fresh air and a reviving splash of cool water! We can barely muster the personal resources to get through the day, let alone lead. We may be having more days when our personal energy and productivity are waning. We wish for abundant energy, contagious passion, and a truly fulfilling, balanced life.

This issue of Leadership Tips and Tools offers a stream of ideas for refueling our lives and our work. The goal of this issue is to offer some ideas for renewing our creative energy, passionate performance, and a heightened sense of well-being.

## Tips & Tools for Renewing Energy, Passion, and Well-Being

**Rose-Colored Glasses!** The old saying, “She sees the world through rose-colored glasses,” is usually discounting. While it may not be “rose-colored glasses thinking,” the current wave of strength-based philosophy and practice invites us to rethink our lenses. Positive lenses help us renew by inviting strength-based philosophies and practices to become a part of our everyday lives.

***The One Thing You Need to Know!*** Marcus Buckingham's new book is compelling! Leaders have learned much from Buckingham and his co-authors by reading and using the philosophies and practices in *First, Break All the Rules* and *Now, Discover Your Strengths*.

In his previous book, Buckingham offered the StrengthsQuest™ program built on decades of research into the most common human talents and their application to success in the workplace. He encourages us to help people focus on their talent, instead of weakness, and to then develop those talents and leverage them in pursuit of excellence. This strengths-based approach for enhancing self-understanding and performance, building teams, and managing conflict, has become an important tool for many post-secondary faculty, staff, students, and leaders.

In his new book, *The One Thing You Need to Know*, Buckingham tells us that the one thing we need to know as a leader is that we can sustain individual and organizational success when we change our perspective. Again, an invitation to change our lenses! He says we need to discover the unique talents of each person with whom we work and create an environment to capitalize on those talents.

Furthermore, through our words, actions, images, and pictures, we can tap shared stories that get us excited about our work. The one thing we need to know is that our perspectives create confidence in a better, more positive future. This book refuels our passion for leading and managing in ways that honors and respects individual talents and creates teams dedicated to a common vision. Buckingham shares solid research and gives lots of examples. He renews our spirit and energy in the process!

**Sharing Our Stories!** In the recent issue of *Leadership*, The Academy Journal, Carl Haynes and his colleagues share their journey with strength-based initiatives at Tompkins Cortland Community College. Using Appreciative Inquiry as a process to bring together stakeholders from all levels and functions in the organization, the authors of *Leadership Matters!* help us understand that power lies in beginning not with traditional data, but by asking questions that draw out our most positive experiences and shared stories about the conditions that have created our most exceptional, energizing moments.

From stories, common themes are identified and used to develop an image of how the organization can function when those key themes are fully alive within it. The appreciative process advances a learning culture and a sense of a shared vision. Using our stories and the energy found within them provides strengths. These strengths become the building blocks to reframe our perspective and create a positive vision. College leaders who create a culture within their colleges where colleagues listen thoroughly to each other's stories and engage in collective reflection model the way! Finding excellence within the academy renews our spirit, energy, and informs our own abilities. Look around you, what are your colleagues doing that gives you great pride! Share the story! Find the energy!

**Collect and Celebrate "Good News."** This is the time of year that we schedule our honors ceremonies, award luncheons, and many of our recognitions. How often have you been on your way to an event and heard disparaging remarks about taking time away from "work?" This is the joyful work! See the event through new lenses! What's here to renew spirit, passion, and excellence?

Go beyond participation in the celebration, use it to renew and foster inspiration. Search for the strengths, passions, and life-giving forces that are found in the ceremony. Celebrate them as a way to renew yourself and your college. Attend to and affirm the best and highest qualities in individuals, teams, departments, and your college. Empower individuals, teams, and your campus to reach beyond the moment of celebration to an understanding of what gives life, passion, achievement in the "Good News" of the moment! Celebrate now! Leverage the celebration for renewed passion and inspiration.

**Your Job is Bigger Than You Are!** Whatever your job description says you are supposed to be doing – leading, managing, teaching – your job is bigger than you are! We serve in the field of hope and futures! One of the keys to staying in love with our work is to continue to see the wonder available to us at work, to always see the noble possibilities in our role. One leader sees his job as student retention and another sees himself creating magnetic learning environments. One manager sees her job as scheduling classes and another sees herself as creating connections and communities for growth. The way we see our work will profoundly affect our energy, passion, and well-being. It is worth reflecting on the way you see your work right now. There are "life-giving" forces in reframing our work as "bigger" than we are.

**Thinking Chair!** I recently read a note from John Maxwell, author of many fine books on leadership, in which he describes his strategy for daily renewal. John reported that he keeps a special chair in his office. He never sits in the chair when in meetings or consultations. He does not sit in the chair for relaxing, reading, writing, responding to emails, or talking on the telephone. The chair serves one purpose and one purpose alone. The chair is a Thinking Chair. “This chair doesn’t think for me, but it does speak to me every now and then. If I’ve gone a few days without sitting in it, its presence subtly reminds me that I’m not devoting enough time to the all-important task of thinking,” he says.

As leaders in educational organizations, we can get caught in the multiple demands, roles, and responsibilities of our jobs. It’s hard to take time to think with all the competing demands for our time and energy. The good news is that it doesn’t take hours of thinking time each day to renew, refresh, and re-energize. We can accomplish a great deal in a few moments of concentrated, intentional thought. We can begin each morning by taking a few moments to look over our schedule for the entire day. We can ask ourselves, “What’s the main event?” This “big picture thinking” provides an opportunity for us to prioritize our day, time, and energy.

At the end of the day, we can spend another five to 10 minutes engaged in “reflective thinking.” We can spend time reviewing the whole day, reflecting on lessons learned and people appreciated. Maxwell reminds us that “reflective thinking doesn’t take long, but it’s an incredibly valuable exercise because it turns experience into insight.”

Give yourself the gift of a Thinking Chair! Kouzes and Posner tell us that “forward-looking” is one of the most admired traits in leaders. Be forward-looking each day as you mentally and emotionally organize your day around the “main event.” Give yourself the gift of time and learning! Take a few minutes at the end of the day to sit in your Thinking Chair. Reflect! Renew your spirit! Refuel your energy!

*“To the quiet minute between two noisy minutes*

*It is always waiting, ready to welcome us—*

*Tucked under the wing of the day.”*

—Naomi Shihab Nye, *Come With Me*

**Reclaim Awe and Wonder!** A friend recently sent me the most beautiful post card with a photograph of “Spring at Walden.” I have found myself returning to the post card repeatedly during these last few weeks. It refuels my soul, captures my imagination, and awakens an interest in places set aside. I am mindful that the gentle gifts we give each other have profound renewing effects. A welcoming smile and hello, a kind note, a phone call to chat, an email just to check in—our relationships are at the center of our ability to renew our creative energy, engage in passionate performance, and achieve a heightened sense of well-being. When we become overwhelmed with work, our relationships tend to suffer. Adjusting our focus—changing our lenses—we look to our relationships as a source of renewal.

My friend’s gift reminded me that Walden – the book and the place – are all about possibilities. Henry David Thoreau took up residence on the shore of Walden Pond from 1845 to 1847. He stayed there for two years, two months and two days, reading, writing, hoeing beans and developing his philosophy of life. In the conclusion of his book, Thoreau wrote, “*Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.*”

We reclaim awe and wonder when we are willing to see through new lenses; listen thoughtfully to each other’s stories; engage in collective reflection and dialogue; and take time to think, reflect, and renew.