

# Leadership Tips & Tools

JANUARY 2008

*"I learned this, at least, by my experiment [at Walden]: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. . . . If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."*

Henry David Thoreau

Rodd Wagner and James Harter teach us how to advance confidently in the direction of our dreams to be strengths-based leaders. In their book, *12 The Elements of Great Managing*, they provide research and insights into the daily interactions that positively affect performance.

The Elements in *12* work in concert to help us understand the unwritten social contract between leader-manager and colleague. With the 12 Elements we can work to achieve engagement for individual, department, college, and student success. Starting with clear expectations and the right materials and equipment, understanding and maximizing strengths, building a culture of recognition and praise, caring about each other, nurturing growth and development through timely strengths-based feedback on performance while fostering learning opportunities --we will achieve success as long as we remember . . .

## The Foundations of Strengths-Based Leadership

**The First Element!** "I know what is expected of me at work." Of course, we do. Or, do we? Are we crystal clear on the expectations of our leaders and supervisors? Do those who report to us or work with us in our department have "crystal clear" expectations of what is expected of them at work? Or, do we get so busy and caught up in the day-to-day "administrivia" that the "real" expectations . . . Ours and others' . . . get lost in shuffle?

**The Basics!** Being on time, getting the basic work done . . . managing, teaching, serving. Roles with goals and clearly defined expectations! Job descriptions and conversations about the details of the work expected of each individual and the department as a team. Basic! Wagner and Harter point out that achieving excellence on the first element of great managing requires leader-managers who "expand the goal from executing a process to achieving an outcome." We must work to expand definitions from process to outcome if we are to achieve excellence.

**And Other Duties as Assigned!** Most of us in post-secondary education have signed contracts with this line included. “When employees talk about what they do best, they rarely frame the discussion in terms of a job description. People can form attachments to their professions to the point that it becomes a part of their self-image,” report Wagner and Harter. Isn’t that the truth! Think of a devoted professor on your campus. The assistant that stays late to make sure the copies are “just right” for your session tomorrow . . . the leader or manager who mentors and coaches the leaders around them. Teaching is not what they do. Serving others is not what they do. Developing others is not what they do. It is who they are! It is their “calling in life.” That thing they were born to do!

**Chemistry Sport!** Knowing what is expected of us at work goes far beyond our job description. When we first join a post-secondary department we learn our role and “explicit knowledge” about what is expected of us at our colleges and universities. To be successful, we must do more. We must learn hundreds of nuances about our system, our department, our colleagues and students. This “tacit knowledge,” report Wagner and Harter is learned through experience. The experience, they report, is like the synchronicity achieved with high performing basketball teams. “It is only through actually playing together – through cumulative playing experience – that each member of the team accumulates the stock of tacit knowledge about the game play of other members of the team.”

**Playing Together!** “Chemistry sport” is the term to describe this “tacit knowledge” and synchronicity. Working together over time and engaging in conversations about our talents, strengths, and challenges helps develop “tacit knowledge.” So, start conversations with your team. Share your talents and strengths. Align your work as a team around what each person does best. Instead of assigning tasks by role, assign them by talent and strengths. Use your strengths to achieve excellence.

**Marble Duty!** Beyond the basics! One of the ways we can expand our goal from simple execution of our jobs to achieving excellence is to work together as colleagues, teams, departments and perform . . . Marble Duty! One of my favorite passages from *12* is the discussion of Marble Duty. Marble Duty is operationally defined as the willingness to “roll” where you are needed to help achieve an outcome. “Rolling” in to help students as they arrive on campus, helping colleagues when a deadline is too quickly approaching, caring about each other and “showing up” to help whatever the task! That’s Marble Duty! Now we have a name for it! And we know that it is one of the ways we achieve engagement and excellence.

*“The current evidence points to the conclusion that individuals are not born the same and not infinitely capable. Instead, the research says any given person is a unique combination of talents who will succeed to the degree these essential traits are employed.”*

Wagner and Harter

**The Science of Talents!** In 1969, a group of Gallup scientists led by Dr. Donald O. Clifton began investigating a series of questions that could differentiate the various ways of naturally thinking, feeling, and acting that make someone uniquely successful. Gallup brought its research to bear in 2001 with the publication of the Clifton StrengthsFinder. Since 2001 the Clifton StrengthsFinder (CSF) has been administered to millions of people world-wide. With this research Dr. Clifton and Gallup provide a way of assessing innate talents organized around 34 Signature Themes.

*"Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises."*

Demosthenes

**You are One in 33.4 Million!** Take the CSF and you will receive a report on your Top Five Signature Themes. You may be surprised, delighted, affirmed. With the report you will discover you are 1 in 33.4 million. This is a "gee whiz stat" according to our Academy "buddy" and co-facilitator, Dr. Richard Strand! Dick is right, Gee Whiz! Dick is referring to the probability that someone else will have the same order in his or her Signature Themes on the Clifton StrengthsFinder. This "stat" helps us understand the unique talents we bring to work! Only 250 people on the whole planet will have the same themes in the same order! Gee whiz!

**High Five on the Top Five!** The CSF is available at: [www.strengthsquest.com](http://www.strengthsquest.com). Take it. Share your Top Five Signature Themes with your team. Invite your team and colleagues to complete the CSF. Plan a staff meeting and invite conversation about the Top Five Themes across your team. Encourage your staff to recognize ways they use their Top Five Signature Themes each day at work. Celebrate discoveries, learning, personal and professional growth. Take advantage of opportunities to celebrate strengths deployment for department outcomes.

**Facilitate! Integrate! Celebrate!** Our good friend, Irene Burklund at Gallup Higher Education, encourages us to "facilitate, integrate, and celebrate" our strengths. Facilitate discovery and understanding by getting people talking about strengths! Integrate conversations on strengths into staff meetings, professional development, teambuilding, and the work we are already doing. Celebrate strengths when we see them! Thus, building a department culture of praise and recognition around strengths! Facilitate, integrate, and celebrate! Irene is right! These are essential in building a solid foundation of strengths-based leadership.

**The Universe is Made of Stories, Not Atoms!** Listen to people's stories as they talk about their strengths and Signature Themes. What is important to them? What do they value? What do they feel deeply passionate about? What are their challenges? Create a symphony of themes in your department beginning with each member of the team telling a story about a time when . . . they felt strong, enlivened by their work, engaged . . . successful!

*"You get the best out of others when you give the best of yourself."*

Harry Firestone

**30-Second Principle!** Use this principle of interpersonal engagement in strengths conversations. Within the first thirty seconds of the conversation, say something encouraging to the other person. Forget about yourself! Focus on the other! Most of us are too concerned about ourselves, how will we look, and what we will say. Reverse the practice! The key is the 30-Second Principle. Within the first 30-seconds of interaction find ways to make others look and feel good about themselves and their strengths. Begin conversations with the 30-Second Principle!

**Attention, Affirmation, Appreciation!** These are keys to engagement and these are the positive attributes of the 30-Second Principle. What kind of relationships could you build if you focus your attention, affirmed, and share your appreciation when you first came in contact with others? Just think of the positive energy and motivation that would follow in the conversation?

*“When I go into the garden with a spade, and dig a bed, I feel such an exhilaration and health that I discover that I have been defrauding myself all this time in letting others do for me what I should have done with my own hands.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

**It Has to be You!** Do you realize how important your opinion is to your colleagues? You might not realize how much influence you actually have. Here’s a great fact! Did you know that to employees, your opinion matters more than the CEO’s? Incentive Magazine reports that when asked from whom they would rather receive praise, 57 percent of respondents chose their direct supervisor, with only 21 percent saying they would rather be praised by the company president.

**Peanut, Lou and You!** Leading and managing our teams and departments somewhere in the “middle” of our post-secondary organizations has its challenges . . . and joy! If you have any doubts about the importance of what you do everyday to make a difference in the lives of those you serve and those with whom you work, read the opening paragraphs of *12: The Elements of Great Managing*. Wagner and Harter capture our attention by telling us one of the great stories from the Gallup data base. At first glance the characters and story bear little resemblance to our lives in higher education. Take a closer look. The story of “Peanut,” a veteran employee, and his hard-working manager, Lou, is the story of each of us as we work to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Build a solid foundation and continue to advance confidently in the direction of your goal to be a strengths-based leader!

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*We want to hear from you! Please email us with your suggestions for Leadership Tips and Tools. We would love to hear your suggestions, experiences, stories, discoveries, and successes with putting these tips and tools to work. What topics would be most helpful to you for up-coming issues of Leadership Tips and Tools? We value your suggestions and feedback. We are listening!*

*E-mail: idahlynnkarre@aol.com or The Chair Academy at chair.academy@mcmil.maricopa.edu. Leadership Tips and Tools is published three times a year by the Chair Academy and is available only through membership to the Chair Academy.*

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