

SEE

and BE SEEN

Thoughts on Leadership



By Gary L. Reynolds, APPA Fellow



As I wrap up a 36-year career in higher education facilities management (FM), I have begun to reflect upon my survival during the sometimes turbulent times of the past three-plus decades. Certainly with the changing expectations in FM for accountability, sustainability, budget reductions, human resource issues, political correctness, and more, it seems a wonder that I've lasted this long. So what have I done to survive these interesting times? How has the campus view of the department been positively transformed? What are some of the things that have guided me? How could I summarize them in simple terms? It struck me that "See and Be Seen" is an apt description. Let me explain.

To set the stage, let me first offer a few thoughts on "pathfinding." Stephen Covey's books *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership* have been influential in shaping my management philosophy. As a leader, I have used his ideas to help us find the right path for the organization, then aligned the department with that path, and modeled the behavior that reinforces it, while empowering the staff with ownership of the path.

For me, pathfinding meant doing an assessment that helped me see the department's strengths and weaknesses as they related to the university's expectations of the facilities department. This analysis set the direction of the path. Next we identified the specifics of the path. In other words, alignment was obtained with new systems, changes to processes, new equipment, new staff skills and new communication processes, to name a few things. With alignment underway, the desired behaviors were modeled by championing for and installing a new, user-friendly work order system, purchasing safety equipment, streamlining the design and construction processes, funding training opportunities for the staff, and personally modeling communication with our "customers."

As we worked toward our "end in mind," we examined our progress to determine what mid-course changes were needed and, in most cases, adjusted the systems, provided additional staff training, and modified our communication processes. Sometimes it took courage to ease a person out of the organization that could not adapt, and to change the hiring criteria to get the skills that we needed. As I saw the staff gaining confidence in the direction of the department, I started to let go and trust the staff to stay on the path we had set together.

SEE, FOCUS, MOVE

All that being said, in order to lead an organization, it is necessary to see the important issues, to focus, and to move forward along the path to success. It is easy in this day and age to become bogged down in the minutiae of our business problems, such as

no-value-added paperwork, unproductive meetings, and meaningless emails. These things can block our view of what's really important. So how can we know what is so important that we need to see it, and what should we be seen doing about it?

The answer is to see the principles that are driving your "ship," and to be seen making your decisions based on those principles. For me, fairness and consistency have been my two main driving principles. These principles are built on integrity, trustworthiness, the Golden Rule, maintaining evenness in demeanor, and meeting commitments. You only get where you are going if you do what it takes to get there—that means "put first things first" and letting your key principles guide you to those first things. If your decisions are principle-based, you will never be caught trying to explain one decision over another. A principle-based path is one that organically integrates your principles with your observations and experiences, and translates them into a cohesive and consistent set of decisions. Principle-based decisions create the consistency that is fundamental to being seen as trustworthy. Being seen as trustworthy leads to trust, which leads to empowerment within and outside the organization. You will get powerful, sustainable results from principle-based decisions.

The leader needs to grasp the institution's vision and mission, understand the leadership's challenges, and see the underlying principles guiding them. To help do that, meet with the leadership for a casual, relationship-building conversation. Sometimes the best understanding of issues comes while eating a hotdog alongside a member of the university leadership at a basketball game. Also, read the local paper, student newspaper, and the local business journal. Be seen extrapolating from them and providing organizational guidance from them. Try to see beyond just the institutional level, and be seen guiding the department through the eyes of the institution's board, community and state-level organizations, and other groups.

Perhaps most importantly, see the issues before your supervisor sees them. This level of insight requires a deep understanding of the issues and what is important. During meetings with your supervisor listen carefully. See and reflect upon what is *not* being said. As your supervisor develops trust with you, he or she will share concerns that are not necessarily for public consumption, providing greater insight into what is truly important to them.

BE TUNED IN

While it is essential to be tuned into the leadership of your institution and to those that can have an impact on your organization, it is even more essential to be tuned into your own department and staff. See the staff doing good things, and then be seen acknowledging their good work. See the uniqueness in each individual, and be seen uniquely addressing it in that individual. Be seen caring and

listening, truly listening with empathy to what they are experiencing, and work to understand what motivates them—and conversely, what turns them off. Public praise for one may be an embarrassment to another. As the vice president for people at Southwest Airlines noted at an APPA presentation I attended a number of years ago, “Treating everyone the same is not the same as treating everyone fairly.” This thought is fundamental to my guiding principle of fairness. Also, remember to “be loyal to the absent.” Disloyalty to the absent—those who aren’t present to defend themselves against your criticism—is a cancer that will eat at the organization.

See the staff putting in their time, and be seen putting in your time. Adjust your schedule so that you overlap with all staff. That may mean coming in early and staying late. In other words, spend time with the staff. You need to be seen at university events, supporting the university by attending sporting events, recognition ceremonies, commencements, etc. As Stephen Covey noted, “What you do has far greater impact than what you say.” If you are not out and about, you will not be seen modeling the behaviors you’d like to

yourself. As Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, summarizes, “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.” Remaining insular to the constantly changing environment around you will only lead to stagnation and failure. By supporting staff improvement, you will invigorate the staff as they will see that you value them by investing in them. As Covey notes, the staff need to “sharpen the saw.” In Seven Habits vernacular, this is “Quadrant II” work, the process of putting things that will have the most positive impact first.

See the needs of the customer, and be seen meeting the customer’s needs. The success of a great organization is its customer service culture. In the FM business we have many masters, including policies, regulations, laws, codes, and budgets we must balance while resolving issues. Many times our customers bring us their problem in the form of their solution. And often we tell them it won’t work because it does not meet code or policy. Instead, try asking, “Why?” several times, to really see what the customer wants. Often, we try to solve a problem before completely comprehending its cause or the customer’s true desired outcome. After all,

“Treating everyone the same is not the same as treating everyone fairly.”

see in your staff. Albert Schweitzer noted, “Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.”

One of my favorite sayings is, “Hire for character, train for skills.” When interviewing, ask the questions that will help you see the character of the candidate, and then be seen hiring the type of people that will fit the organization’s culture. For example, ask them how they might handle a difficult situation. See if they answer with confidence and provide support for their position or just provide the standard rote response. Body language and tone will tell you more than just the words they use. Training and mentoring can overcome any knowledge shortcomings, but if you think you are going to change the fundamental character of a person after you’ve hired them, you have another thing coming. In other words, the staff you get depends upon the effort you put into hiring them.

See the needs of the staff, and be seen providing the professional development and training they need. See what you need to do to improve yourself, and be seen improving

a person buying a ¼-in. drill bit is not really buying a ¼-in. drill bit; they are buying a ¼-in. hole. In the words of Covey, find the “third alternative.” Be seen modeling this behavior of helping the customer, not denying the customer. Henry Ford noted, “Don’t find fault—find a remedy.”

See the strengths in your organization, and be seen building on them. Play to those strengths, and the impact of the weaknesses will lessen. See where you have influence, work in your “Circle of Influence,” and find success with those issues. Hard work and success with the issues in your control will cause your circle of influence to expand, and then you will have the opportunity to take on other issues.

See the weaknesses in the organization that are causing dysfunction, and be seen addressing them. As Howard Putnam, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines, once noted, “Turbulence is inevitable; misery is optional.” There is nothing more malignant in an organization than the misery of an obvious weakness seen by all, while the staff sees that nothing is being done about it. While these challenges are inevitable in all of our organizations, and addressing these challenges may sometimes be difficult, the issues

cannot be ignored. Also, as I've learned, many times, failure is not usually the result of personal failure but failure of the system. See the difference, and be seen applying the right correction for the circumstance. As W. Edwards Deming noted, "Confusing common causes with special causes will only make things worse." If you do see something as a personal failure, provide corrective guidance, but never be seen correcting the person responsible in public.

See the processes that support the department and staff, and be seen improving those processes, or adding or deleting them. Solid processes that support the staff are the foundation of an excellent operation. See if the ones you keep need improvement. See which processes are needed and which ones may be discarded. Sometimes your entire system and the processes that support it need to be changed. As Howard Putnam once noted, "Some people play the game, while others change the way the game is played." See the right things to do (play the game), and be seen doing the right things (change the game if necessary).

HUMBLE COLLABORATION

Perhaps most important of all, *see the things you don't see*. Be seen acknowledging that you don't know it all. Be humble. If you are truly humble, you will instinctively work from a collaborative mind set, because you know you need the knowledge and skills of the whole team for your department to succeed. If you try to fake it, the staff and your customers will see right through you. I like John Wooden's comment on teamwork: "It takes 10 hands to score a basket." In the end, the ability to meet the needs of an enterprise as large as a university is far bigger than one person. Be seen collaborating, breaking down silos, asking for help when it's needed, and following the Golden Rule.

So what does "See and Be Seen" mean? That's for you to define! While I've shared some examples of what I've done, it will take your own unique interpretation of what it means for you and your organization. What are the key principles and core values that form the basis for your leadership? What does your analysis of the department's strength and weaknesses tell you? Is the department in alignment with the university's mission? Do you have the courage to see the reality, seek the truth, and

see what is really going on? Then be seen taking action to deal with the reality you see. The approach I've shared here has helped me and our organization to meet our ultimate goal (our group purpose) of ensuring that the university's facilities are never the reason learning does not happen.

<<<<<< >>>>>>

This was not meant to be a treatise on leadership, but just a summary of a few ideas that have helped me along the way. Thank you for letting me share my thoughts with you; hopefully you will find some nugget in these ramblings that will help you and your organization. ☺

Gary Reynolds retires in January 2018 as the associate vice chancellor for campus planning and facilities management at the University of Colorado - Colorado Springs. His long career in educational facilities included stints at Colorado College and Iowa State University, and he served APPA as President, Vice President for Educational Programs, long-time faculty member at the Institute for Facilities Management, and co-founder and co-director of APPA's Center for Facilities Research. He can be reached at glrcolo@gmail.com.



Congratulations to winners of 2017

Diversion:
Loyola Marymount University

Per Capita Classic:
Rhode Island School of Design

Get your school in the game for
RecycleMania 2018

www.RecycleMania.org

The Coca-Cola Company

