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Unique biweekly insights and news review from Ray Schroeder, director of the National Council for Online Education

Leading Faculty Support in Online Learning

Ray Schroeder discusses the unusual mix of qualities that prepare people to succeed in the realm of faculty support.

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Effective leadership is a mix of knowledge, skill, inspiration, a passion of purpose and an essence of care and joy.

These might seem to be a rare combination of qualities, but I have seen them come together time and again in the successful leaders and their operations at colleges and universities across the country. I write often about the changing technologies and trends, but today I want to address the special qualities of successful leadership in this field that make this field special.

The mission of faculty support differs from many other offices. Sure, outcomes matter, but they are measured in terms of attitudes, knowledge and behaviors changed. This work is about advising and teaching teachers to frame their expertise in ways that most effectively educate the learners. As a professor emeritus, having taught for some four dozen years, I can say that some of my colleagues can have larger-than-life egos and are sensitive to criticism. So, it is often a delicate balance to bring about change without bruising or alienating the "client." For instructional designers, media specialists, course developers, accessibility coordinators and the others who comprise the faculty support unit, special skills and qualities are required.

Perhaps most important for this field is a "positive intelligence." [Harvard researcher Shawn Anchor says \(https://hbr.org/2012/01/positive-intelligence\)](https://hbr.org/2012/01/positive-intelligence), "Research shows that when people work with a positive mind-set, performance on nearly every level -- productivity, creativity, engagement -- improves. Yet

Research in Britain by the Social Market Foundation and the University of Warwick's Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy showed that [raising the spirits of workers](http://fortune.com/2015/10/29/happy-productivity-work/) (<http://fortune.com/2015/10/29/happy-productivity-work/>) (by sharing feel-good videos, snacks and drinks in this experiment) resulted in a productivity increase of an average of 12 percent, and reached as high as 20 percent above the control group. Maintaining positive spirits among the staff also rubs off on the clients. Faculty members take advice and criticism much more positively from support staff who are upbeat and positive in their attitudes and demeanor. And this leads to success.

I often remind myself of this well-known quote from Albert Schweitzer: "Success is *not* the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."

As I write this article, I hear small outbursts of laughter interspersed among quiet discussion coming from down the hall in our Faculty Resource Center at the University of Illinois at Springfield. A group of faculty, administrators and staff are working around a large table to come up with solutions to some significant problems. I know that mix of quiet discussion and moments of laughter is the sound of success.

It has been my finding that cultivating an essence of care and joy is the key to succeeding in this field. Leaders who generate this essence in their unit succeed. These are the units and individuals who are recognized for their successes. The units are comprised of individuals who love their work. They have a shared sense of joy in what they do. They are vested in the mission of making better learning opportunities for students and in helping faculty members succeed.

I know of no single formula to engender the attitude that leads to this shared essence in a professional, continuing and online unit, but it is easy to spot. When I visit a campus to share some advice with the administration, I always ask to see the support units (both faculty and student). I can instantly see it in their demeanor and in their eyes. Those who sparkle and smile and have a positive comment are the ones who are succeeding. Those whose eyes are dull and heads downcast are missing the spark of joy and shared love of the community that makes for success.

Try observing this yourself as you go through your day. Notice the people who seem to love their jobs and emanate a feeling of joy. They are the ones who are headed to success. Are you among them?

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