



## Petty Principles for Novice Leaders in Higher Education, Part II

Tanjula Petty, EdD • October 14, 2019

In [Part I of this article](#) I offered aspiring leaders in higher education three pointers about how not to approach leadership. In this installment I focus on what leaders *should* do, providing four suggestions for novice leaders who want to have a positive impact on their institutions. I hope you find these lessons encouraging and engaging as you seek to excel in your leadership positions.

### **Be inspirational**

As a leader in higher education you will have not only the most rewarding days but also what I call days of defeat. Whether you work directly or indirectly with students, you must be able to deal with tough situations with your team and assure them that everything will be all right. This has always been easy for me to do; however, when you assume a leadership role, you deal with not only your own problems but also your team's. You can interpret these as personal and professional challenges. Once I was sitting next

to a subordinate when I realized that she was crying. Minutes before walking into the meeting, she had received the news of her fiancé's passing. In that moment, nothing else mattered except comforting and encouraging her. I had to be the voice of inspiration for the team that witnessed this event. Your team will inevitably look to you for motivation and encouragement. As a transformational leader, you must be that voice to encourage and inspire your subordinates. Additionally, as a leader you must bring hope and positivity while keeping focused on the goals of your division. You cannot succumb to gossip, negativity, or mediocrity. Be an encourager who garners your team's trust, and watch them line up to support you.

### **Walk it like you talk it**

I have Generation Z children. To keep up with them, I find myself consuming what they consume to invoke conversations and teach life lessons. Recently my son was listening to a track titled "Walk It Like I Talk It" by the hip-hop group Migos. The first verse begins, "Take my shoes and walk a mile / Something that you can't do." As a leader, you must be able to get your hands dirty to demonstrate to your team that you are on this journey with them. Just as leadership is **not all about you**, you must walk it like you talk it. To do so relates to your integrity, fairness, sincerity, and trustworthiness.

People will listen to what you say, but they are more focused on what you do. Leaders who talk a great game and do not follow through are fated to fail. Leadership is about results, and you must be willing to put in the work to achieve them. Always have a plan, and ensure that for each step you take you focus on constantly moving toward your goals to ensure that you fulfill your institution's mission.

### **Get out and about**

As we are on the subject of walking, I am reminded that as a leader your peripheral vision cannot just be around your desk or outside your window. Get out and about, walk your campus, and get to know the people on it by name. I get to work at 6:00 a.m. just to spend a few moments conversing with the janitorial and maintenance crews. I ask about their families, and they often tell me about plans they've been making. More importantly, they know what is going on around the campus. I am not just talking gossip; they know when things are being said and done that don't promote the school's mission.

Relationships cannot be built within the sheetrock silos that seclude you when you are reading or writing lengthy emails. It is difficult to retain a sense of what your position really is about when you are sitting in your office. You need to get out and see what people actually do as well as learn about the academic programming and how faculty prepare students for the workforce rather than wait for people to tell you about it. You will begin to see their commitment, effort, and achievements firsthand. They will want you to be proud and a part of the team. My best times on a campus have been when I was walking and talking to gain new insight, which was better than any meeting!

### **Embrace change**

Higher education is about more than beautiful infrastructure and enrollment dollars; it is about making a difference in students' lives. Currently, we are experiencing the influx of a new generation of students who learn and speak differently from their predecessors. In higher education, change is inevitable. If you are going to enter and remain in the field of higher education, you must have the creative, optimistic, and innovative mindset needed to think ahead and understand how our students' changing needs drive how we serve our students. To continue to thrive, we must change, and as a leader you are responsible for facilitating change. This facilitation must be ongoing and continuous and not episodic, or else your subordinates will attempt to avoid it.

Every day seems to introduce a new technology that will shape higher education. Information technology is a multibillion-dollar industry that changes at a moment's notice, and if you are unwilling to keep up or adapt or are too set in your ways, you will not see the change coming. That means you will lose footing

and fail to assist your institution in moving forward. As we embrace change you must be willing to be proactive and not reactive before the change comes.

New leadership opportunities will eventually be at your doorstep, and you want to be ready to seize them by having the necessary skills. But no book or journal will ever prepare you holistically for the practical, day-to-day journey of higher education leadership. These Petty Principles will help you succeed as you handle a wide range of situations.

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