



Leadership Defined and Refined

By E. Lander Medlin

As educational facilities professionals supporting the education industry sector, we certainly understand the value of education as an investment in one's individual growth. Indeed, our product – education – changes lives and gives individuals an opportunity for a better future. The facilities we build, operate, and maintain are an important part of the overall student experience. Thus we make an enormous difference for our institutions. But our education should not stop with the attainment of a college degree! That is just the beginning of the learning experience. And this is where APPA can assist you throughout your professional career. Those of us who attended the APPA 2008 conference certainly expanded our learning horizon beginning with the five world-renowned general/plenary speakers and extending throughout the full breadth of the breakout sessions. This year's educational program was the best ever delivered by international APPA, so the insights of these five speakers are well worth repeating.

John Maxwell clearly has a passion for leadership having spent his entire life studying leadership principles and their application. Maxwell emphasized that everything rises and falls on leadership. Countries are more competitive and collaborative, organizations are more productive, and individuals are more effective and successful by any set of tangible and intangible measures. He defined leadership as simply the ability to influence people. He stressed that these skills can be developed and honed with daily applica-

tion and active engagement and will give you a competitive edge. By actively listening to and learning from those you lead, you ensure you are leading by connection rather than leading by assumption. Further, Maxwell delved into the five levels of leadership beginning with "position" and the rights bestowed by the organization, and ending with "personhood" and the respect bestowed by those with whom you work. Clearly leadership is an active engagement in building relationships, increasing connections, and producing results. But it is also about making a daily investment in yourself and others. What are you doing daily to invest in yourself and others? Make a plan today.

James Kouzes, co-author of *The Leader's Legacy*, provided insight on how a leader develops his or her legacy, and why it is so important to the lifeblood of the organization. His premise is that leadership is personal. Kouzes stressed that people in your organization should know who you are, what you care about, and why they ought to follow you. This premise served as the basis for his five sustainable leadership lessons:

You are the most important leader in your organization, so your responsibility as a positive role model and creating a personal connection with your staff is critical.

Your own values, beliefs, and principles must be as clear as those of the organization you lead.

You should be forward-looking, ensuring clarity of the organization's vision and its future.

It takes courage to make a life. He emphasized that adversity reveals character; it does not build it.

The legacy you leave is the life you lead. And, your legacy is someone else's future. He quoted Albert Pike who said, "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us...what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal."

Kouzes concluded by emphasizing the key skill of the better leader is their ability to learn. What are you doing every day to learn and grow your leadership skills?

Don Tapscott, author of *Wikinomics*, spoke about the technology revolution and posits the new Web 2.0 is fundamentally changing the way we orchestrate society; the role of the university; our approach to managing facilities and procuring things; and in general, causing us to rethink pedagogy and learning. In essence, the physical and digital worlds are coming together to dramatically streamline processes and allow new business models to take shape. People and their approaches to the workplace are changing dramatically too. To the "net" generation, technology is ubiquitous, thereby changing their frame of reference as they enter the workplace. They want freedom of choice seeing everything as customizable. They are scrutinizers with high integrity. They operate in highly collaborative ways, are extremely innovative, and work at a very fast pace. This generation sees the Internet as a huge force for change. This age of collaboration has spawned a social revolution where the Internet is about building community *not* transmitting information and content.

We are living in a time of self-organization and mass collaboration – that is the new competitive space. The key for today's leaders will be how one harnesses that collaborative energy. The implications for education are enormous in this new age of highly individualized, consumer-driven

participation and engagement. However, education must change to remain effective and relevant. Tapscott closed with a quote from Victor Hugo, "Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come." Will not education need our best leadership?

Marcus Buckingham referred to a number of his books especially his new work *GO Put Your Strengths to Work* where he stresses the importance of building on your strengths and managing around your weaknesses. He provided data to support his claim that great organizations deliberately accumulate, grow, and develop great teams. These great teams are made up of people who focus on their unique strengths and contribute those individual strengths in engaged, focused, productive, and deliberate ways. As he deconstructed these bold statements, he encouraged each of us to consider whether we have the opportunity to do what we do best every day at work.

When organizations encourage people to focus on their strengths, the data clearly demonstrates their people show up regularly, have fewer accidents and are more productive and profitable. Further, the data supports the view that expectations are clearer, recognition means more, development seems appropriate, alignment occurs, and the organization is more productive. Unfortunately, most organizations are good at gap analysis or "gap-finding" not "gift-finding." Since our core personality traits don't change that much as we age, and we grow most in our areas of greatest strengths, our most productive contribution to the workplace and our colleagues and teammates should be to willingly volunteer those strengths to the team when they are needed, rather than putting one's strengths aside and doing whatever it takes to help the team. In fact, this type of martyrdom won't help the team; it will only serve to undermine it. Ultimately, if you focus on your strengths and how you can contribute them each and every day, you will be more resilient, more productive, and more effective; everyone will win when you do. So, will you choose a strengths-based approach to

life and living and give yourself the chance to express your best self?

Finally, **Stephen M.R. Covey** focused his presentation on "The Speed of Trust." He helped us put on our "trust glasses" so we could see the relevance and pervasive impact of trust – its nature, tools, and processes. This allowed us to

see dividends as a leader and do something to build and grow trust in our organizations. He also provided facts and data on such trust realities as trust being a hard-edged economic driver, and that there is nothing as fast as the speed of trust. He stated that trust is the currency of the new economy. The ability
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to establish, grow, extend, and restore trust is the “leadership competency” of the new global economy. Trust holds the key to enhanced collaboration, increased innovation, and engaged execution, thus providing a truly competitive advantage. And, ultimately trust affects two measurable outcomes – speed and cost – which he defined as the “trust dividend.”

Covey reinforced that in order to create a “trust dividend” (instead of paying a “trust tax”) requires a focus on individual and organizational character and competence resulting in increased credibility. He outlined the 13 behaviors

of high trust leaders, identifying their obstacles and their counterfeits. Unfortunately, too many leaders think trust is too risky when; in fact, a propensity to trust is inspirational, contagious, reciprocal, and in general, facilitates more to happen. Frankly, leadership without mutual benefit – trust – is NOT leadership at all. What is your trust dividend?

So there you have it. As you can readily surmise, this was a powerful professional development opportunity that attendees experienced at the APPA 2008 conference in San Antonio this past July. The chance to learn from such great leaders, writers,

and thinkers, and to network with colleagues and business partners alike, was extraordinary.

You won’t want to miss the APPA 2009 convergence next year, given the similar experience already being planned! Look for the registration opening this coming December and mark your calendar now for Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada next July 8-10, 2009. ☎

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