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INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ABSTRACTS

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What ever happened to summer?



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Did you ever have a summer that felt like summer? For me, it was when I was a full-time faculty. I enjoyed the nine-month teaching contract and the three months of downtime, yet I was eager to return to campus and my students. As I transitioned from teaching to administration, my summer “downtime” became the summer crunch time. People ask, “How is your summer going?” knowing that I work for a college. My response is usually, “What summer?” I am sure those of you who work in administrative positions have had similar experiences, and often ask the question “What ever happened to summer?”

As administrators we tend to feel obligated to always be present, or if not present, very available through electronic or other forms of communication. Michael Bugeja (2006) discussed the issue of addiction related to electronic communication in his article “Stalked by E-mail on Vacation,” comparing the electronic connections to the use of narcotics. I know my logic in constantly checking emails is so that I do not have an unmanageable amount of communication to address when I return. Could the real reason for my obsessive email habit be an addiction?

To be fair, higher education academic administrative positions are challenging. Bugeja (2006) confirms this challenge academic administrators face as “department and program chiefs have the toughest jobs in academe because they have to advocate for their faculties and acquiesce to their deans, finding a middle ground between those polarities” (p. 28). With the challenges associated with the dichotomous roles in higher education of faculty and administration, it is important that we take time to re-charge, re-evaluate, purge, and plan for the upcoming year.

Re-charge. Take time to be away, completely away, and disconnect from your administrative role. I may not always follow my own advice, but I do try to disconnect even if only for a day or two, each summer. While advising to “re-charge” may seem simple, some of us are challenged by this task. I do admit that I do not always follow my own advice. All the “what-ifs” run through my crowded brain - what if I miss an important phone call, email, meeting, etc. The reality is I am not that important. I can truly disconnect, but I must force myself not to look at my email, calendar, or retrieve messages. Re-charging can only happen if you unplug from your daily “stuff” and re-plug into your disconnected self.

Re-evaluate. Try to carve out a day from that busy summer to define what is important in your personal and professional life. If you are spending too many evenings doing the work you



could not get to during the day, what changes can be made to help you with the work/life balance? During this precious time for re-evaluation, take the time to review the personal goals, value statements, mission and professional goals that you may have written down last year, or many years ago. How long has it been since you looked at your goals? Are they still relevant? This is the time when you need to examine if you are headed on the right path, or if it is time you re-adjust your course.

Purge. This can be very therapeutic; to remove all of that stuff you do not have to keep. I have a love/hate relationship with the action of purging. I love the feeling when I can actually fit another file in my drawer, find the item on my desk, or even just see my desk, but I hate making that first purge. Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi (1998) suggested that changing your surroundings will help you gain a new perspective. He goes on to say “Taking charge of one’s home or office environment—throwing out the excess, redecorating to one’s taste, making it

personally and psychologically comfortable—could be the first step in reordering one’s life.”

Plan. Our institutions love to plan - we have strategic plans, operational plans, assessment plans, master plans, and on and on. While you are busy overseeing, reorganizing and assuring completion of these plans, be sure you take some time to plan for yourself. Plan the time to re-charge, review and re-focus your personal mission, reduce the clutter and purge your workspace.

I have been fortunate to complete several leadership series. Each time I would finish a leadership summit I felt re-charged, refreshed, and ready to take on the world. Then I opened my email, or returned to the office and became entrenched in daily activities. As a result, I forgot to keep the personal and professional goals in front of me.

From the last leadership series, I decided it was finally time to put what I learned into practice. We were lead through the process of developing our own mission statement. It was

a valuable exercise, when approached with the mind-set that this is how I want to lead, and how I can make a difference. Csikszentimihalyi (1998) has said, “One cannot lead a life that is truly excellent without feeling that one belongs to something greater and more permanent than oneself.” I display the statement I developed beside my computer monitor so that every day I read and review my mission as I strive to lead an excellent life.

Summer is over; it is time to make your own personal plans for the upcoming year to complement your professional and institutional goals. You still have time to **re-charge** yourself, **re-evaluate** your work/life balance, **purge** the paper and tasks that do not add value to your day, and **plan** to position yourself for a successful year.



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