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Collaborative Leadership through Strengths Development Part I: Self-Awareness through Strengths Development

By Anita Henck, PhD, and Eileen Hulme, PhD

This is part one of a two-part article series about leading through strengths-oriented collaboration. In this first article, Henck and Hulme provide the context for this collaborative leadership model, beginning with self-awareness and self-management. Strengths identification and development will be discussed as a tool for developing a more productive view of oneself. In Part II (next month's issue), they will address the importance of other-awareness and look at practical implementation issues in building a strengths-oriented team.

Isigher education administration has traditionally followed a conventional hierarchical leadership model. Over the last decade, it has begun to transition into a more collaborative approach to leadership (Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin, 2006). This is attributed both to the increased number of women leaders, with collaboration over solitude being a preferred style (Kezar et al., p. 76) and to a theoretical shift that defines leadership as a process and, thus, "emphasizes mutuality between leader and followers" (Kezar et al., p. 76).

Today's university leaders have the opportunity to enhance the work of staff and faculty—both in quality and satisfaction—through intentional efforts at building a collaborative team leadership approach. Unlike past attempts at team building, collaborative leadership is not

just off-site sessions with ropes courses and "getting to know you exercises." Nor is it a top-down approach requiring interdepartmental projects while providing rewards for required collaboration. Rather, it requires a rich and informed understanding of one's innate characteristics, traits, and passions; an ability to manage those abilities through a heightened sense of emotional intelligence; and a driving desire to understand and value the other's perspective. Without these essential elements of team building, it becomes difficult to establish the trust necessary for team productivity; strengths identification and development provide tools for these essential elements of team building.

Understanding and managing self

Foundational work must be done before team building can begin. The historic words inscribed on the ancient Greek temple at Delphi—"Know thyself"—remain an important adage millennia later. Effective leaders begin with healthy self-awareness and move to self-efficacy rooted in a positive mind-set. The ability to manage oneself is a crucial aspect of collaborative engagement.

Self-awareness. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) write, "Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, as well as one's strengths and limitations and one's values and motives. People with self-awareness are realistic—neither overly self-critical nor naively hopeful. Rather,

they are honest with themselves about themselves" (p. 40). They advise that "...to guide the emotional tone of a group, ... leaders must first have a sure sense of their own directions and priorities..." (Goleman et al., p. 32). Selfawareness is an important first step in the development of collaborative leadership, as it has considerable impact on individual behavior and the value of individual contributions.

Self-efficacy and mind-set. Self-awareness alone is not enough. Leaders must also be cognizant of the beliefs they hold that affect their actions. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory is rooted in the concept that self-reflective thought affects one's behavior. It posits that belief in one's capacity to produce will result in the desired effect. In short, if you believe you can do something, your likelihood to succeed is enhanced. So, optimal individual performance is

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Leader

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Faculty Roles

Discipline-Based Education Research

By Rob Kelly

In 1999 the American Physical Society championed the recognition of education research as a subdiscipline in physics. This, along with support from funding agencies and recent legislation that—in spirit, if not funding—calls for improved science education, has spurred the growth of education research in the field. Physics is at the forefront of this trend and is setting a precedent that other disciplines will likely follow.

Noah Finkelstein and Steven Pollock are two University of Colorado at Boulder physics professors in the subdiscipline of education research. *Academic Leader* recently spoke to them about this growing subdiscipline, its effects on their institution, and the applicability of this model to other disciplines.

"For many years, individual physicists have been engaged in scholarly activities, studying education especially at the introductory level, but in the last 10 or 15 years, it has become both more systematic and more widespread," Pollock says.

Currently there are 30 PhD-granting institutions that have an education research group as part of the regular Physics Department. Like faculty in other subdisciplines, education researchers are regular faculty members. They just happen to conduct research exclusively on education within the discipline.

The need for rigor

Typically, faculty are not trained in developing evaluation and assessments and often rely on ad hoc instruments such as final exams to measure student learning. One problem with using traditional evaluations to measure learning is that they measure students' knowledge at the end rather than measuring student progress over time.

Another shortcoming of traditional

evaluations is that they do not typically measure student progress in learning the conceptual underpinnings of a discipline, Finkelstein says. For example, students may be able to calculate which lightbulb in a circuit would be the brightest and perform this ability on a test, but would they be able to explain why?

"We know that in every discipline that has started to evaluate student learning in a more objective and scholarly way than they have historically, they universally have found that students are not learning what they believe them to be learning. We're subject to wishful thinking as educators. Some people call it the front-row phenomenon. You look at the front row and say, 'Oh, they get it,' and we can fool ourselves with these exams that don't actually measure learning.

"We encourage all faculty to apply the same scholarly rigor to their teaching as they do to their scholarship. That means making measurements as best we can to understand the effects of our interventions or teaching. That's where data collection becomes very valuable, where you can actually substantiate the claims, and that becomes instrumental then in the idea of departmental transformation or reform," Finkelstein says.

Setting an agenda

Finkelstein and Pollock started their careers in traditional physics research, and both got involved in education research from a growing interest in improving the experiences of their students. For Finkelstein, this shift in research focus occurred when he was a postdoc. Pollock began focusing on education research after he earned tenure

Finkelstein was hired specifically to help build the education research group in CU's Physics Department

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(and recently earned tenure in education research). There are currently six full-time researchers in the group whose primary goal is to advance the fundamental knowledge in this subdiscipline.

Every five years, CU's Physics Department has a series of faculty meetings to discuss the direction of the department, and each research group makes presentations about the future of the subdiscipline. This is one of the mechanisms by which the department allocates resources and helps decide future hires.

The group's agenda is not driven by the specific needs of the department. Rather, as in other branches of physics research, the education research group seeks to develop new knowledge, not necessarily applied work.

They began by building on the research from colleagues at the University of Washington, the University of Maryland, and Harvard University, implementing research-based teaching approaches such as computer simulations, tutorials, and peer instruction and conducting careful assessments of the effects of these techniques on student learning.

Most of their research is on introductory physics courses, which have a wellestablished curriculum across institutions, and such research has the potential to benefit the largest number of students.

Over the past five years, 20 of the 40-some faculty members at CU who teach freshman-level courses have been involved in the group's research, voluntarily incorporating the use of learning assistants, tutorials, concept tests, and other research-based teaching approaches.

There are also skeptics who are reluctant to get involved, because they think it will take more time and effort to incorporate these methods into their classes. However, the data on the use of these techniques is compelling. For instance, that data shows that every time an introductory course incorpo-

rates tutorials, students learn more than every other time the same course has been taught without tutorials.

Although it is not a mandated part of their work, Finkelstein and Pollock do quite a bit of outreach—both within their department and across campus—to show the benefits of education research and improve teaching.

"We don't ever tell the faculty what to do. Nobody can tell anybody what to do. We try and convince them using the data we've collected, the kinds of innovations that we've run are effective and that they should then think about using them," Finkelstein says.

Dissemination

As with any other discipline, one of the mandates of education research is dissemination. The primary audience for Finkelstein and Pollock's work is the physics education research community, which has dedicated journals and organizations.

Their work has a local impact as well through collaborations with the school of education, community K-12 schools, the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program, and the Graduate Teaching Program. These partnerships are part of CU's effort to transform science teaching, and although it's not an explicit goal of the physics education research group, it is a natural extension of the group's work.

"In the end we can do this in terms of outreach in teaching education because it's not an afterthought, not something we do in addition to our research. It's tightly coupled with our research and teaching," Finkelstein says. "These [partnerships] are what are traditionally considered outreach, and traditionally those kinds of things fail because they are not part of the core identity of the institution. We're bringing them into the core identity by doing research and by using these mechanisms to enhance the education of our students. When we tie them to the research and teaching missions, all of a sudden they have legs."

Compelling reasons for discipline-based education research

Traditionally, education research has been viewed by many as the domain of schools of education or as small-scale projects of interested faculty within their disciplines. Discipline-based education research offers several advantages over the ways that education research has traditionally occurred:

- Research within a discipline can provide perspectives that researchers outside the discipline do not have. "If you want to improve the introductory physics class, you have to be a physicist. You have to understand the nature of the culture and the tools used within the field. We can make the discussion or the questions that we're asking relevant to our colleagues. We know what questions they ask," Finkelstein says.
- Start-up costs are relatively low. A
 full-time education researcher does
 not require the lab facilities typically
 required for faculty lines within the
 sciences.
- It can enhance the status of the department. Although education research is not as firmly established in most disciplines as it is in physics, there is growth in this area in disciplines such as biology and mathematics. Being at the forefront of an area of research such as education research can attract the notice of potential faculty as well as granting agencies.
- It can advance the agenda of education reform on campus. By having a group of scholars dedicated to education research, there are bound to be formal and informal partnerships that form across disciplines and functions that can improve education across campus.

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Book Excerpt

We are pleased to present this excerpt from the book Leading a Small College or University: A Conversation That Never Ends (forth-coming from Atwood Publishing, www.atwoodpublishing.com) by Harry L. Peterson. This excerpt is from a chapter titled "How Organizations Shape Our Behavior: Why Do People Do The Things They Do?"

Small Group Behavior

By Harry L. Peterson, PhD

Ithin your college are countless small groups. Students form friendships with their roommates or with others of similar academic or social interests. Faculty and staff work in departments or other work units, typically performing tasks similar to one another. Even the president works within a smaller context much of the time with the staff and administrators who directly report to him or her. Within each small group, people socialize with one another, learn from, consult with and gossip with one another. In this interaction, they learn to assign meaning to what is happening around them. So it is important that you not only understand the saga of your college in general, but also understand how people in smaller units behave and think.

There is fascinating research showing how individuals who think of themselves as part of a group can influence one another.

Cass Sunstein's analysis of decisions of federal judges in his book Why Societies Need Dissent may be especially pertinent to colleges and universities. In their autonomy, federal judges are somewhat like tenured faculty members with job security. However, in other respects they have substantially more autonomy, and for this reason, one might think that they would be even less subject to the opinions of their peers. They undergo no significant peer review; their salaries are not determined by their colleagues. They are appointed for their competence as well as their political perspective; and they are typically in middle age, with well-established views, when they are appointed. Nonetheless, they are very much affected by their peers.

Sunstein studied three-judge panels, identified whether judges were appointed by a Republican or a Democratic president, and evaluated their voting behavior as liberal or conservative. As expected, the judges appointed by Republican or Democratic presidents were, respectively, typically conservative or liberal. In settings in which two judges were from one party and the third from the other party, their behavior changed. The judge who was outnumbered two to one voted more like the members of the other party. Sunstein refers to this as "ideological dampening." Occasionally, the behavior of the outnumbered judges became so affected that they essentially joined and agreed with the members of the other party. Sunstein calls this the "reversal effect." When all three judges were appointed by a president of the same political party, their liberalism or conservatism was heightened. Sunstein refers to this as "amplification" (Sunstein 2003, 166-193).

These findings parallel the behavior of work units within universities. Because university departments are, to use Robert Birnbaum's phrase, "loosely coupled," the subculture of the department is especially influential on faculty members' behavior.

As in the example of the judges, people, even unconsciously, are influenced by their colleagues. As with the judges, collective decision making may take on the character of key individuals and the group can work together more harmoniously or in a more conflicted way even with relatively small changes in personnel. Although Sunstein's research led him to conclude that the tendency to conform within work groups stifles innovating and healthy dissent, I do not believe that this is inevitable. You can strengthen those aspects of the

organizational saga that encourage dialogue, and reinforce this healthy behavior at the small group level when it occurs. You can be attuned to the influence of key individuals in their small groups, working with them so that they can understand your vision and, in turn, affect their group.

Key individuals

For eight years I lobbied in the Wisconsin State Capitol for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Proposals were adopted or blocked in the majority caucus. Caucus members met in a large room, with the formal leadership seated together in the front. As with every group, most legislators sat in the same chairs at the same table for each meeting, sitting with legislators with whom they got along socially and politically and who tended to see the world as they did. At each of those tables of 15 legislators, there were always two or three people who were very influential with others at the table. They were not necessarily formal leaders. I knew that if I could persuade those key individuals to support my amendment, I was likely to get a majority of votes. One table's key people might use policy arguments to persuade their colleagues. Another table's key people might rely more on personal relationships. Recognizing this, I also knew how best to craft my approach.

At the Capitol, there was an organizational culture with sagas about "how we do legislation in the Wisconsin Capitol." There were formal leaders at the front of the room (like the president of your faculty senate) who needed to be formally engaged. There were caucus tables (like your academic departments), each with its subculture

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and ways of getting things done, and each with its one or two key people who affected the others in the unit. Finally, there were leaders at each table who were not necessarily the formal leaders but who might be individuals with informal influence.

Identifying informal leaders

These key individuals are likely to be "Connectors," as Malcolm Gladwell coined the term in *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell writes, "What makes someone a Connector? The first—and most obvious—criterion is that Connectors know lots of people. They are the kinds of people who know everyone. All of us know someone like this. But I don't think that we spend a lot of time thinking about the importance of these kinds of people" (Gladwell 2000, 38).

Connectors are not necessarily people we think of as leaders. They are, rather, people who others listen to. They are well liked and respected. They make recommendations about books, restaurants, and friends and, in very informal ways, affect the behavior of people around them. They bring people together, often trying to reach resolution of conflicts. In higher education they are the individuals who know people in other academic departments. They tend to be on the "inside" of the institution. Their self-image, and the image others have of them, is that they care about preserving and advancing the university.

The older Connectors are people who perpetuate the university's organizational saga, who tell the stories that define the institution. People turn to them for a comparison of the new president with the leaders of the past. They are precious to the university, and they need to be supported and nurtured because of what they represent. They are important to you, for their support

is crucial to the advancement of your ideas.

One of your important early tasks is to identify these Connectors, to get to know them and their sphere of influence.

Summary and implications

There are four key points in this chapter that have implications for your leadership.

Understanding a university only through an organization chart, with its formal position descriptions and divisions of labor, is important but not sufficient to successfully lead a complex organization. The culture of your institution has an enormous influence on the people who work there.

Organizations are suffused with emotion, meaning, and values. It is through work and relations with colleagues that people obtain much of the meaning in their lives. These emotional aspects, while not explicitly rational or logical, can be very positive sources of influence in the work lives of individuals and in your direction for the university. The emotional attachment that staff have to their university can be called upon to provide individual sacrifices for the greater good.

Employees are not only influenced by the people who are their superiors on the formal organizational chart; they are influenced by others in their immediate work lives.

Finally, only with the right context can you lead campuswide change. Ideally it is a positive context, an atmosphere in which dialogue is valued, that you helped create through analysis and careful communication with both the formal leadership and with the Connectors.

Research on leadership reveals that successful leaders see their universities as ambiguous; they see themselves in the center of their organizations, not on the top; and they are seen by their colleagues within the universities as influ-

enceable. Imagining yourself in the middle of the organization, not simply on the top, is itself an idea of such fundamental ambiguity that you may think of it as an early test of your comfort with your job.

Behavior in organizations is complex, and understanding and influencing it is difficult and subtle. However, human behavior is not random, and it is not irrational. Just because people are influenced by many factors and people does not mean that they reject leadership.

In order to be successful, you not only must understand but must embrace these historical, extra-rational, nonhierarchical, informal aspects of university life. Understanding and embracing them will help you to establish the working environment, the context, that makes it possible for these bright, highly specialized colleagues to join in creating the best conditions for learning and teaching for its students.

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Harry L. Peterson has more than 30 years of experience in higher education. He is president emeritus of Western State College of Colorado and has served as deputy chancellor of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities in St. Paul and as vice president for university relations and development at the University of Idaho. Currently, Peterson serves as a consultant to college and university presidents and as a presidential evaluator for the State University of New York.

V

Leadership Development

Creating a Center for Professional Development and Leadership

By Jeffrey L. Buller, PhD

olleges and universities have realized increasingly that effective teaching by instructors and successful learning by students does not occur through serendipity. Even though more and more graduate programs are providing doctoral students with experience and training in how to teach at the college level, many faculty members still reach their positions largely through an education based on how to perform research, not on how to include students in that research or train others in their disciplines. The resources devoted to a center for teaching and learning can help excellent professors become even more effective in the classroom, bring improvement to instructors who face challenges in their teaching duties, assist graduate students with learning how to become effective teachers before they ever enter a classroom, and provide all students with improved strategies for college-level learning.

Despite these successes—or perhaps because of them—it has become ever more apparent that teaching and research are not the only responsibilities in which faculty members engage and for which they need training in how to be more effective.

College professors serve on committees, eventually are asked to chair these bodies, act collectively in faculty assemblies and senates, initiate course proposals and curricular reforms, and challenge policies that are no longer useful or productive. They may go on to become department chairs, division coordinators, program heads, deans, provosts, or even presidents. They are expected to demonstrate leadership in their courses and in their service responsibilities, manage resources responsibly, and supervise student workers or members of the staff. If many faculty members still receive little formal training in how to teach, most

still have almost no access to formal programs in how to lead, even though shared governance requires many members of the faculty to assume leadership roles. For this reason, the time has come for colleges and universities to consider a corollary to their centers for excellence in teaching and learning, the Center for Professional Development and Leadership, which can provide formal training for members of the institution who seek or are asked to accept positions of responsibility over others.

To be sure, there are plenty of conferences and workshops available on how to chair an academic department, lead a college, or head an institution. These opportunities, such as the training programs provided by the American Council on Education, are excellent, and a campus-based center for professional development and leadership is in no way intended to replace those resources. A fully developed center for professional development and training would provide opportunities for:

- undergraduate students to learn parliamentary procedure, budget planning, and other skills they will need in order to be effective leaders in student government, campus organizations, and life after graduation;
- graduate students to learn successful strategies in leadership that will prepare them for their roles as faculty members, lawyers, physicians, managers, and other positions for which they are preparing;
- faculty members to learn effective ways of conducting meetings, developing new initiatives, preparing for an administrative position, supervising others, resolving conflict, and developing their own career plans;
- department chairs and deans to learn best practices in conducting performance evaluations, planning and supervising budgets, developing good

- morale within their units, moving an area forward, solving personnel problems, and meeting the many other challenges that arise when one is in an administrative position; and
- provosts, other vice presidents, and the president or chancellor to learn advanced approaches to strategic planning, securing additional resources, dealing with the media, developing a vision, promoting diversity, and dealing with the stress that arises from leadership positions.

An effective center for professional development and training should offer workshops and Web courses for those who wish to develop their leadership skills, individual consultations for those who are experiencing specific challenges, remediation when a supervisor has received evaluations indicating that improvements are necessary, and a highly visible proof of an institution's commitment to visionary leadership and the best principles of management.

The University of Virginia's Leadership Development Center (www.virginia.edu/ldc/) illustrates the great potential that institution-based leadership training programs have. The Center offers a wide range of conferences and workshops, sponsors a program called Leadership Perspectives that offers a high level of training to administrators and faculty members. It also offers other opportunities to work groups, members of an administrative staff, and executive coaching. Other universities sometimes provide leadership training for members of the faculty and staff as part of a larger professional development program that is primarily focused on external constituents. For instance, the James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland (www.academy.umd.edu) is involved

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enhanced by an optimistic mind-set. Dweck (2006), in looking at the differences between individuals with a fixed mind-set (i.e., belief in predetermined and limited intelligence) versus growth mind-set (i.e., belief that intelligence is able to be changed or improved), reports that those with perspectives of growth or malleability are higher achieving than are those believing in a fixed entity. So, those who believe that they can manage themselves while possessing the ability to learn and change have greater levels of achievement than those who believe that they have no choice and are "just the way they are." Thus, self-awareness is enhanced by a growth mind-set and positive self-efficacy. However, beyond developing a healthy perspective on him/herself, an effective leader must also be able to manage his/her actions, as well as

his/her self-oriented beliefs.

Self-management. Goleman et al. (2002) define self-management as "... the component of emotional intelligence that frees us from being a prisoner of our feelings. It's what allows the mental clarity and concentrated energy that leadership demands... Leaders with such self-mastery embody an upbeat, optimistic enthusiasm that tunes resonance to the positive range" (p. 46).

So, in addition to positive beliefs about one's ability to shape one's thoughts, greater achievement is reached by those who think clearly and positively about what it means to be successful; they continue to learn and grow.

A strengths-identification approach to self-awareness

Historically, human resource management has operated from a deficit-

based system. Cyclical performance reviews have highlighted areas of deficiency and identified action plans for remediation over the next review cycle. By contrast, the strengths-identification approach of the last decade has provided a refreshing alternative. By identifying areas of natural talent, developing them into strengths, and focusing work efforts in areas that bring energy and satisfaction, the strengths approach to personal development provides important tools to self-awareness. This, in turn, enhances professional performance. Ideally, leaders are able to know themselves, to identify their strengths, and to build on those strengths with an optimistic outlook related to their ability to succeed.

The field of positive psychology gives insights into how one's self-awareness, self-efficacy, mind-set, and self-management can position an individual for

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both in the theoretical study of leadership and in its successful implementation at all levels, from the university itself to the international level. Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis uses the office of the executive vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean of the faculties as a hub for a number of faculty development centers, ranging in focus from teaching and learning to leadership development and advocacy. (See www.iupui.edu/ administration/acad_affairs/cls/). These and other successful models of providing members of the faculty, staff, administration, and student body with the type of training needed today for good campus leadership deserve to be emulated by more institutions, particularly those that have faced challenges with leadership in the past or that have a longstanding institutional commitment to leadership development.

Initial steps in the creation of a center for professional development and leadership training can be relatively modest. Most such centers begin as an office or initiative within an existing center for excellence in teaching or under the vice president for academic affairs. A typical semester-long program for an incipient professional development center might include workshops on performance appraisal, chairing effective meetings, budget planning, strategic planning and implementation, conflict resolution, dealing with the media, and promoting collegiality.

If the institution already conducts a first-year faculty experience program, tenure and promotion workshops, and a mentoring program, these existing initiatives can be incorporated into or augmented through the development of the new center. An annual recognition for visionary leadership or effective management, similar to the recogni-

tions most institutions now provide in the areas of teaching, research, and service, can help bring the new center immediate visibility. Most important, the academic leader who champions the creation of the center for professional development and leadership will have made an important contribution to the institution's overall commitment to meeting the needs of its constituents and promoting the best possible leadership throughout the entire campus.

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enhanced success. Through the use of strengths-identification instruments, such as the Clifton Strength Finder (CSF) instrument, VIA (Values in Action), or other tools, individuals are given insights into identifying their talents that can be developed into strengths. This, in turn, can be used to enhance a positive approach to life and work, as well as an increased optimism related to the ability to succeed.

Strengths development

Strengths identification is an effective tool in enhancing self-awareness. The next stage—strengths development—is a key component in broadening self-management.

Energy and effort. Once an individual's strengths have been identified, it is critically important to emphasize the development aspect of a strengths perspective. The Clifton Strengths Finder (CSF) identifies a person's top five talents from an inventory of 34 talents. The top five talents do not actually become strengths until one has added knowledge and skill to the equation. For example, one talent identified by the CSF is referred to as the "achiever" talent. A person with the achiever talent has great energy and works extremely hard. They are highly productive and exhibit a high degree of stamina. So, an achiever faculty member may have a productive work ethic, but it is the addition of the person's knowledge of his/her academic discipline that creates excellence in the person's professional pursuits.

If effort is not applied to the development of one's talents, a person may actually adopt a fixed mind-set. People may use their talent as simply an excuse for unproductive behavior. However, with development they will be able to produce what Clifton and Buckingham (2001) refer to as "consistent, near perfect performance" (p. 25).

Emotional intelligence. Knowing and developing one's strengths can also be a part of the tools toward building a greater degree of emotional intelligence. Talents represent a person's first response to processing information, dealing with people, and ways of seeing the world. But leaders often make their greatest mistakes out of the mismanagement of their talents as opposed to their weaknesses. If these responses are not regulated, they can prove counterproductive. For example, a person with the talent of empathy may be able to embrace and internalize the feelings of others with great ease. This is important in building an emotionally healthy team. However, if the talent is not regulated, it may also cause a lapse in good judgment because of the person's propensity to be swayed by the emotions of others. Therefore, the regulation of the "shadow side" of a strength will result in greater emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

Movement toward a leadership model of collaboration is enhanced by a strengths-oriented approach. With intentional work toward self-awareness and self-management, each individual is better poised for optimal contributions to the work of the group. This, coupled with a growth mind-set, encourages the development of talents into strengths. Part II of this series will address issues of "other-awareness" and provide practical examples of strengths development in a model of collaborative engagement.

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