Five Fundamentals of Faculty Development

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I am not a skilled athlete, but I have watched enough sporting events to know that the fundamentals are essential to both player and team success. Coaches can often be heard repeating such maxims as “keep your eye on the ball,” “follow through,” and “hold your position.”

Faculty development has its own set of fundamentals. More than 20 years ago, I co-authored a grant establishing the faculty development center at the University of Central Arkansas. Over the years, I have served as faculty coordinator, co-director, and director. My experiences may benefit others who are working in the field or plan to in the future. Here are five fundamentals for designing and delivering effective faculty development:

1. **Begin with a clear vision.** Almost every authority on leadership will mention the importance of creating a mental picture of your ideal future (i.e., a vision). As a starting point identify your core values. What ideals are most important to you and your institution? How do you see your role as a faculty developer (e.g., mentor, encourager, change agent, etc.)? What do you want faculty development to look and feel like on your campus? Gather input from center staff as well as your constituents. Incorporate these ideas into a brief, descriptive statement. This vision can then serve as a guide for future decisions and actions. (Note: Be sure to check for alignment with your institution’s mission.)

2. **Maintain the right perspective.** In my session at the recent Teaching Professor Conference, I included a cell phone survey regarding effective faculty development. The most-missed survey question revealed that many faculty developers participating in the workshop viewed faculty development from a remedial perspective. This is a less than effective stance. Faculty who take advantage of professional development activities must not be seen as deficient. Rather than approaching faculty development as a way to "fix" designated faculty, recognize its potential to boost the instructional vitality of all faculty. When you see learning to teach as a lifelong process involving continual improvement, you are less inclined to take a remedial view of faculty development. The right perspective is one that is grounded in growth; it focuses on improving student learning, serves all campus faculty, and includes a variety of programs and services. No one group or type of individual is singled out. (Additional guidance: Weimer's 2010 book, *Inspired college teaching: A career-long resource for professional growth* is an excellent resource to orient you toward the desired perspective.)
3. **Network.** A major dimension of providing meaningful faculty development rests on having effective campus relationships. Opportunities to cultivate relationships exist in multiple forms (e.g., face-to-face encounters, phone calls, emails, and handwritten notes). As faculty developers, you can extend your network by attending campus events, even those in which you are initially uninterested. At these receptions, presentations, and meetings, listen to what is on the minds of faculty. Additionally, networking provides the ideal opportunity to partner with other campus offices and services. By working with other campus units, such as disability support, student services, and veteran affairs, you will be able to provide programming that connects faculty to other valuable campus resources.

   When it comes to communicating with campus faculty, department chairs are a vital conduit for channeling information, and their support often yields active encouragement of the benefits of faculty development. Capitalize not only on the networks you establish but also search out those "go-to" folks on campus. Find the informal leaders who advocate for and model excellence in teaching. Regularly invite these individuals to become involved in faculty development activities.

4. **Be responsive and take the initiative.** Working in the area of faculty development is primarily a service. Keep in mind the need to listen to faculty concerns, using these concerns to guide programming. Be proactive in responding to faculty needs instead of waiting to be directed to do so. For example, a few years ago I noted that several faculty members in different departments had mentioned peer observation of teaching as something they desired. I then designed the Teaching Observation Program and invited all faculty to participate. As a faculty developer, you need to create initiatives unique to your particular context and based on specific faculty needs. Be alert for instructional innovations and determine how best your center can support campus implementation.
5. **Exhibit integrity.** Credibility is critical to effective faculty development. Campus faculty must see you as someone whom they can trust and depend on. As a leader in faculty development, you must renew your commitment to maintain confidentiality, follow through with promises, and do what best serves faculty and promotes student learning. Neither your personal agenda nor pet peeves should influence your planning actions. You must genuinely keep the best interests of faculty and students as your focus, while at the same time communicating honestly with administrators by sharing issues and feedback.

As you strive to offer quality faculty development, your initiatives will sometimes miss the mark. But if you return to these five fundamentals, and remember to always give faculty (and students) your best effort, you'll always be on a winning team.

Resource: Weimer, M. (2010). *Inspired college teaching: A career-long resource for professional growth.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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