

INTERFACE

A PUBLICATION OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONAL BOARD STAFF NETWORK IN COOPERATION WITH THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES

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Is a Great Leader Born or Made?

By Benita Duncan
Lansing Community College

AN APPLE SEED HAS ALL THE CHARACTERISTICS TO BECOME AN apple, but without being put into the ground, watered, cultivated, and developed, it will never become an apple. Although I believe some people are born with the characteristics and skills to become a great leader, without those skills being cultivated and developed,

they will never become one.

Unfortunately, we know many people that serve in a leadership capacity who aren't great leaders. What constitutes a great leader? Someone with integrity, strength, gratitude, patience, endurance, generosity, empathy, and most importantly humility. Being a good leader isn't something just for top-level executives. It is an essential skill for those of us who serve those top executives to be successful in our jobs.

In 2021, I read a great book entitled *The Leader Assistant: Four Pillars of a Confident, Game-Changing Assistant* by Jeremy Burrows (Assistants Lead, 2020). It defines leadership as an act, a practice, and a discipline to take care of the people around us, regardless of how the team or executive shows up every day.

In our roles, we are expected to make things happen even when others fail or don't give us the support to help us to succeed. We are expected to think ahead, communicate, be innovative, counsel, plan events, serve as travel agents, gap fillers, bridge builders, and so much more. The author describes what he calls four pillars of a confident game-changing assistant. He states that although we may have mastered the essential skills to be a good assistant, we need to embody more than just the essentials if we want to become game-changing assistants and maintain longevity in this career path.

The author describes these four "game-changing characteristics" as the differences between a good assistant and an exceptional assistant. I've detailed them below, but I encourage you to read the book to tap into this powerful resource that will empower and equip you to lead with confidence.

- 1. Discerning:** Discernment is defined as acuteness of judgment and understanding. The leader assistant can anticipate the needs of their executive and make decisions on their behalf. Discernment is anticipating. When you are proactive, you plan ahead for something you know will happen, but a great leader anticipates what *could* happen and prepares for it. A leader assistant can anticipate outcomes and be ready to make good decisions.
- 2. Steady:** A leader assistant can juggle multiple projects and never let others see the stress they may be under. Assistants are leaders not because of their ability to do a lot at once, but because of their posture while doing those tasks. Serving presidents and trustees can be a stressful job. We work in an environment where presidents and trustees come and go. Sometimes, trustees don't get along or the president and the board don't get along. Regardless of the stress around us, we can choose the characteristics we want to display. Learning to set aside a negative characteristic for its opposite is what will make you a leader.

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3. **Confidence:** As PBSN members, we are in contact with the most confident people on our campuses. How can we expect to lead if we lack confidence in our ability to get the job done? That's why being connected to the PBSN and other professional organizations is important to building our network of resources. Assistants are often given tasks with no instruction book, but a leader assistant will use their network and resources to figure it out. A downfall of having confidence is relying on compliments to validate who we are. True leaders don't look for validation through accolades because we may never receive them. As leader assistants, we must focus on the invaluable service that only we can provide.

4. **Humble:** An assistant leads in the trenches, working confidently yet humbly, side by side with their executive and peers, not exerting power or control, but influence and diplomacy. Many people lack humility, but humility is what keeps you grounded. In his book *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Zondervan, 2013), Rick Warren states that "humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less." When we are truly humble, we're driven by the work we do for others and not the recognition we receive from them. When recognition does come, the feeling you get is not pride, but gratefulness. PBSN members, be encouraged! You may not have been born a great leader, but you can certainly master these characteristics to become one!



The 2022 Professional Board Staff Network Executive Committee

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Spring Forward

By Bridget T. Abraham, Montgomery College

SPRING IS A SIGN OF RENEWAL. BIRDS ARE CHIRPING. TREES are budding. In some parts of the country, spring crashed in like a tsunami. In others, it crept in at a snail's pace or decided that it will leave us anxiously awaiting its presence, as many do on February 2nd for Punxsutawney Phil. Yet it does not ask or need our permission to do what it always does best — it simply “shows up.”

Showing up presents itself in many forms. Many have shown up by partially or fully returning to their offices. Others have shown up by volunteering their time, exploring the engagement and use of charitable resources. Some have even decided that what once was no longer is. Hence, there is a mass exodus to a discovery of new people, places, and things. However, what seems to be a looming is the overwhelming desire to embrace a narrative of what we have all heard echoed as the “new normal.”

I have to be honest and state that the “new normal” oftentimes feels like what was normal. I rush in, attempting to pick up where things left off. I expect people and processes that were constant to remain consistent in a new, evolving world which has displayed the same swift behavior that changes as rapidly as the four seasons. Whatever you define as a normal pattern, maybe you can attest to the fact that it happens easily, without much thought or effort. The challenge personally and professionally is to spring forward, naturally.

Here are four things to consider and remember as you spring forward:

1. **Slow Down (or Speed Up).** It may feel like you have to

maintain the same momentum that propelled you to where you are. Now is a great opportunity for self-reflection to determine the things that work best. The greater victory is acknowledging the things that do not work, or no longer profit you and your wellness and/or the team's. Identify where you were pre-pandemic. Then resolve whether it's beneficial for you to slow down or speed up. Be honest, remain flexible, but most of all...

2. **Be Intentional.** Relationship-building and maintenance require work. Work cannot consume your existence. You are worth so much more, and so are others. Sometimes, you just have to be intentional about checking in with a “how are you?”
3. **Practice Patience.** There are people that exude empathy, and others have to work at it. In any case, remember that the entire world has undergone a metamorphosis. There is not one creature on this planet that has not been impacted by this pandemic. Remember that you have to be patient with others and with yourself. People are still processing and working through an event that has occurred for the first time in many of our lives, so demonstrating grace is as important as it has ever been.
4. **Be Creative.** Refine your craft. You owe you.

You are valuable. Be great. The world needs you.
Spring Forward.