

## Year Two Reflection

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### **A Year of Growth Amidst Challenge**

As the COVID pandemic presented many challenges, so did my health and personal life; however, I choose to see those challenges as opportunities for growth, learning, and improvement. Immediately following the Year Two Residency in October, I returned to work with a short deadline to complete one of the largest federal grants in my and the college's history. Through CARES Act funding, we were able to submit a federal competitive IREPO grant for \$2.75M, which was due immediately upon my return to work.

On that Monday return, I noticed difficulty swallowing, and upon my return home realized I was experiencing the same difficulty along with a lopsided smile and other concerning symptoms. An ambulance check, some fast Googling, and a consultation with my doctor had us leaning toward Bell's palsy, a condition brought on largely from stress. A doctor's visit the next day confirmed the diagnoses and allowed for me to go back to work, finish and submit the grant with only a few minutes to spare, and then take the rest of the week off.

What followed was a hard look at the pace of my life, my own expectations of keeping up with significant personal situations, extreme work stress, and my neglect of my health and well-being. The result was cutting down to four-day work weeks to focus on school, family, and health, which eventually resulted in looking for and landing a new job at Champlain College in Vermont. This opportunity provided me with better compensation, a new context in which to implement my leadership skills, and a pathway toward higher education administration.

Certainly, the travel over the last four months has been challenging, but thanks to COVID, I have the opportunity to split my time in New York with my family as my twins finish out their last year of college and in Vermont, learning my new context and coworkers and implementing exciting changes at Champlain. The travel time has also forced me to be more intentional with my time and with my rest, and I often use my travel to catch up with friends, listen to audio books or church services (another advantage to COVID – streamed services), and take time to think and strategize. And because Vermont and Champlain are health oriented, I find I am more active and health conscious overall.

### **Scholarly Learning**

Amidst the challenges and despite the consideration to step out of the DEL during the most challenging times this past year, I remain grateful for the learning each class and faculty member offered. Throughout the DEL, I have often found my papers, application assignments, and individual research to be among those that spur the most growth because it is in these that I can dive in more deeply to coursework and think more strategically about how concepts are linked to each other and to the practical applications in leadership settings.

### **Papers & Applications**

**DEL 800 – Responsible Conduct of Research.** This class was interesting to me as a refresher on research. I saw many tie-ins to my grant work and was pleased to advance my knowledge on the ethics and rules around academic research.

**DEL 802 – Conceptual Frameworks for Leadership.** I very much enjoyed this class, even though it was challenging to keep up with the pace of annotated bibliographies. Completing reading for my first forty articles provided an excellent base from which to start thinking about narrowing my dissertation topic. Creating a literature map and conceptual framework was

extremely helpful in seeing the underpinnings of theory around my topic of leader mindset, risk propensity, and higher education turnaround.

**DEL 805 – Quantitative Research.** This course was challenging but provided an excellent basis for understanding the rigors of data- and survey-based research. Writing the group paper provided a framework for a methodology chapter and helped me to learn what issues need to be addressed in the logic of a study.

**DEL 815 – Qualitative Research.** This course was much easier for me to grab onto, as I am much more of a words and ideas person though I do like how numbers tell a story. After completing this paper and course, I could see a rationale and appeal of a mixed-methods study.

**DEL 830 – Executive Decision Making.** By far one of my favorite classes and one I had been waiting for from the beginning of the DEL journey. This paper focused on leader mindset and parallels some of the concepts I will utilize and explore in my dissertation. There were two concepts I explored and learned more deeply through this study, including dynamic managerial capabilities as explained by Beck & Wiersma (2013) as a combination of human capital (skills and experience), social capital (relationships and goodwill), and cognition (beliefs and mental models) through which leaders can influence the performance of the firm. The other is the idea of generative planning as discussed by Marshak and Bushe (2018) in which a leader is looking for an emergent solution through a process of experimentation and learning. My application assignment for this class focused on my move to Champlain College and highlighted my research and belief in risk as a critical leadership quality.

**DEL 750 – Collaborative Leadership.** This class was disappointing though I will not deny learning and completion of several pieces associated with the portfolio. I did enjoy learning more about the cohort, especially seeing them for their leadership accomplishments and

professional personas rather than as simply classmates. I would recommend portfolio work earlier in the year to help us learn about our fellow leaders and to help us tell our leadership stories earlier in our DEL careers. It wasn't until I began working in earnest and presenting my artifacts that I began to realize just how much I had learned and how deeply I put my DEL learning into practice as a scholar-practitioner.

### **Leadership Theory & Implementation**

Over my second year in the DEL program, my theories of leadership have deepened, especially as I have pursued deeper research for my dissertation focus and as I have made a leap in changing jobs. My leadership model is based on conversation, and I have realized that rather than moving away from it, I see more and more connections to how we communicate, listen, and interact with others. Some of my recent research has included generative planning and appreciative inquiry, both of which are social/relational and conversation based. In researching and writing about both of these for DEL 830, as mentioned, I have gained a deeper appreciation for how powerful conversation can be. As Dr. Mendoza stated in a Leadership Breakfast interview, my goal is never to change a person's behavior or mind but rather it is always to get a second conversation (M. Mendoza, personal communication, April 9, 2021).

In my new position at Champlain College, I started with a listening tour and then developed a strategy for process and pursuit of grant funding. As I have presented pieces of it to others, I have intentionally used specific phrasing, such as making grants easy and equitable and that we need to eventually split sponsored research to move under the provost as we collaborate in Advancement with private foundation funding. At a recent meeting, the President echoed my words, which was not just gratifying that he has bought into my vision but also that it proves

how we influence through our conversations and how those conversations are multiplied and amplified by others to cause change (Stacey, 2012).

In addition to communication and conversation, my ideas of pragmatism and practical judgment have deepened. If I learned anything during the height of COVID, it would be that there are no right or wrong decisions; there are only decisions and pivots. In many ways this can take the pressure off of a leader but only if those around you understand this or if you are comfortable with people being uncomfortable. For me, this has translated into the ability to implement. I recently met with the President and my Vice President, and after the meeting, my VP relayed the President commented that he likes meeting with me because I always have good news and I always have the next step in motion (S. Andriano, personal communication, August 30, 2021).

Because I don't worry as much about pivoting if I need to, I can stay in motion in terms of implementation, realizing that we can learn as we go. Rather than worrying about the perfect answer or direction, I am comfortable relying on my experience and on general sense making realizing that we will likely make mistakes or need to change direction. This came up recently as I have had discussions with one of my team members and another colleague whose work overlaps with mine in terms of corporate relationships. We pulled together a rough outline of how we will work together with the expectation that we will discover more about how the process will and will not work as we move forward together and with the expectation that we will pivot and make revisions as we go and as we learn more. It should be noted I chose the idea of pivot as the topic for my last (virtual) Leadership Breakfast at Roberts Wesleyan and was fortunate enough to interview the Monroe County (NY) Health Commissioner on his ability to

get his team and hundreds of thousands of people to pivot in behaviors and thinking during COVID.

Risk mindset is another area that has captured my attention in a deeper way this year. Though I have always been interested in risk and have felt that it is a vital part of leadership, this year has deepened my understanding, especially as I worked through many articles in conjunction with my dissertation reading and my paper for DEL 830. Because of this interest, I chose risk as the topic for the Leadership Breakfast that ultimately was moved to a virtual delivery mode and the subject of one of my artifacts.

Through this belief in the ability and willingness to take risks as a hallmark of leadership and through my research on the topic, I implemented risk in my own life this year. Realizing I had learned what I could and had advanced as much as I was able at Roberts Wesleyan, I started looking for a new position. I gave myself a five- or six-hour radius and started sending resumes. When I heard back from Champlain College and realized they were the innovative college with upside down majors that we had looked into for our twins years ago, I was ready to make the jump.

I've risked a lot to be here in Vermont at Champlain, giving up a safe and comfortable job, to stretch into a larger college (about double or better than Roberts Wesleyan), in a new context (secular instead of faith-based), and where I knew no one (as opposed to working at my alma mater with previous classmates, friends, and faculty who taught me back in the day). I also have risked our finances with the purchase of a second home while we keep our Rochester roots until the twins are graduated from RIT, which is right down the road from us.

As we purchased the second house and thought of all the extra expenses and time I would spend traveling back and forth, I got the best advice from my mom who said I should think of

this experience as a second doctorate for all that I would learn at Champlain (M. Gastin, personal communication, June 2021). The job also gives me potential pathway for advancement that I know I would not have had I stayed comfortably in the old position. Certainly, risk can lead to failure, but that is okay; one, that failure can lead to learning, and two, the risk could equally lead to success. As leaders we must become comfortable with both of those ideas around risk.

### **Development as a Leader**

As with year one, my second year in the DEL was a year of growth even through significant challenges. As a leader, I focused my attention on how I present myself and how I lead others and looked to grow in understanding of others' needs before my own.

### **Self-Assessment**

In terms of my EQi 360, my felt growth shows clearly on my self-assessment, including growth in empathy toward others and my ability to express my emotions. While flexibility is certainly still challenging for me, I have shown growth more recently in how I have thought about my career and my new context. The willingness to find a secular as opposed to a faith-based college, the willingness to travel and come up with a creative solution of living in two places and working partially remote, and the way that I have approached building a new system at Champlain amidst colleagues who have been operating in specific ways in the absence of this position for the last ten years is a tribute to my growth in this area.

On the 360 review, many of my categories lined up within 10 points of peers and other categories with a few where I was more than 10 points higher than those categories in terms of ratings. I attribute this to feeling positive about my growth in the past two years, as I feel like a whole new person from when I began the DEL. Certainly, the disparity on ratings shows me the need for continued growth. As a continual learner and as a more self-aware leader, I plan to

continue the focus on that growth. More concerning is the very low ratings from a former manager. Because I had left my previous job so recently and because my new manager has only had a few months to get to know me, I included a former manager in the mix.

These ratings were extremely surprising to me, so I reached out to this person for perspective. I am glad that I did as I gained the insight that the ratings come not only from the entire seven years I was at the college rather than reflective of the last year or two of growth but also from the perspective of how the manager perceived I interacted with others rather than reflective of our relationship. Not only was this conversation enlightening and much more hopeful than I initially thought, but it encourages me to continue to keep a posture of learning. I have reached out to Dr. Barnette and will discuss the findings – strengths and opportunities – with him and with my mentor, Dr. Wylie.

### **Professional Development**

One of the most significant areas of growth continues to be in how I invest in others through mentorship. Over the last year, my mentorship abilities, effectiveness, and numbers have all grown. Certainly, with the change in jobs, I have kept some mentor relationships intact (including my relationship with my former president and mentor) and have moved on to less formal arrangements with others. Additionally, I am working to build up relationships in Vermont to include a younger colleague whom I am mentoring in grants and foundation work and a new Vermont connection I met through a DEL colleague.

Another deepening aspect of my leadership development is the focus on calm and even conversation with others no matter the situation. I have become more open to others' ideas and more aware of others' emotions and stake in what they bring to the conversation. This has helped me to take some of the personal and some of my own emotion out of conversations and



situations in order to focus on solutions, next steps, learning, and process rather than on a specific goal or desired outcome. Operating with this mindset and being more open to reframes has made a huge difference in my leadership and in my ability to work with and lead myself and others.

### **Implementation of Leadership**

In addition to the more theoretical aspects of the last year, I want to include the impacts and implementation of projects and initiatives over the last year.

### **Organizational Impact**

The last year spanned work in two organizations in very different contexts and locations. While my title is similar, the work at the former was to continue to raise funds and serve on strategic boards and task forces and my work at the current includes building a new program for fundraising in government, corporate, and foundation arenas as the position was unfilled for over 10 years. The following represent a few impactful projects spanning both institutions.

**Campaign Restart.** After the pause for COVID, I was able to help restart our \$15M building campaign by revising and rewriting all campaign materials. Additionally, I served with two others on the Major Gift Officer Strategy Team to determine best amounts, asks, naming, and timing for gifts. I am proud to say my work resulted in several six- and seven-figure gifts toward the building.

**Federal Grants Strategy.** I was able to complete my two-year project to provide a pathway toward federal grants and grantseeking for my previous institution. I submitted a formal 36-page strategy that included a four-page brief and supporting documents that included an analysis of multiple departmental strengths and needs (determined through a survey and three linked conversations), a written estimate and an assessment of the pros and cons of hiring a

consultant, and a several page recommendation for moving forward. In addition to providing this for my previous institution, I believe there will be some opportunity to mine this for applicability to my new context.

**Grants Process and Strategy Documents.** Through a listening tour across my new institution, I was able to discern and produce a new process for grantseeking and fundraising. This document has been approved by my immediate supervisor and the president, and we are currently seeking buy-in with Finance and the Provost. Additionally, I wrote a strategy for each area of fundraising to accompany the process document that outlines fundraising strategies I am implementing across government, corporate, and foundation funders.

**Fiscal Impact.** In Advancement, we must also count impact through funds raised, and these funds are what enable the college to push the mission forward. At Champlain in my first four months, I have submitted over \$6M, been awarded \$2.25M, and have verbal commitments on an additional \$1M. My goals include continuing to increase the opportunities and awards we receive while working to raise a consistent amount to support both regular and campaign years.

### **Community Impact**

I continue to use my position to serve and impact the greater community, as I believe leadership should extend beyond our organizations.

**Chili Library Foundation.** I completed my service with this fundraising board as I left Roberts Wesleyan College and the Rochester area. I am proud to say the Library was able to open its new building and that I received many expressions of gratefulness for my impact on the board's knowledge and ability to fundraise.

**Leadership Breakfast Series.** After our pivot to online, we were able to replicate our success and hold a second virtual event highlighting the leadership capabilities of our public

health commissioner. I hope to bring a similar event to my new college and context in an effort to expand our reach within the community and to support professional development and networking among local businesses in Vermont.

**GPC Recertification.** I am proud of the accomplishment of recertification as a Grants Professional Certified. This certification – now recognized as an accredited certification – is held by only 350-400 professionals across the country. Items included in recertification include number of months served as a grants professional, institution-wide projects impacting the field, mentorship and oversight of internships, and continued learning in the field. My recertification was upheld without audit or additional documentation as sometimes can happen. I am proud of this accomplishment and the value to the community that it represents.

**Professional Associations.** While I have ended some of my local Rochester ties, I have continued to serve and maintain significant professional memberships, including:

- Grant Writers Network – a Rochester local monthly meeting of local area grant writers – I will seek a new community in Vermont
- ECFRO – an association of NYS corporate and foundation relations officers in higher education, of which I co-founded – I am beginning to meet Vermont higher education officers to explore connections
- Grants Professionals Association – a national network of grant writers
- GPC – Grants Professional Certification
- CLASP & CFRNET – membership in two online listservs, one dedicated to federal grants and grant writers and the other to corporate and foundation relations
- Leaders are Readers – a College reading group meant to support women leaders – now completed with the move to Champlain

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