

THE NISOD PAPERS



An occasional publication dedicated to topics of interest to community and technical college educators.

Faculty Development: What Important Questions Should We Be Asking?

In higher education, we rightfully devote a lot of resources—time, money, facilities, and people—to advance the topics of student success, persistence, and resilience. But what do we do institutionally, administratively, and collegially to encourage and support faculty to foster their own growth and resilience? Beyond the paycheck, fringe benefits, and the one-and-done workshops, what motivates and inspires those who we charge with motivating and inspiring our students?

True, the students remain the mission for our calling. But beyond the students, what motivates faculty to seek new strategies, topics, and collegial interactions? What motivates them to stay fresh not only for the sake of their respective fields and students, but for their resilience as well? When it comes to personal and professional development, are they in survival mode or renewal mode?

In his book, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*, Tony Schwartz warns that if an organization does not create meaningful learning opportunities for its employees "to develop as human beings [the organization] ought to expect that its people won't get better at their jobs and, over time, may well get worse."

Consider your institution. Is your professional development catalogue a series of workshops on technology, learning management system nuances, reorganization initiatives, and workplace procedures updates? While those have their place in organizational development, what else do faculty need and desire to develop their craft and themselves as individuals? Perhaps the best place to start is to ask the faculty about their professional development needs.

When a college or university leadership team asks faculty to "engage" students, the leaders might want to also ask themselves, "How do we engage our faculty? Can there be student engagement without faculty engagement?"

Who determines the catalogue for your faculty development? Are the programs, workshops, and training sessions developed first by a small administrative cadre or a few faculty members and then marketed to faculty? Or, is the entire faculty given an opportunity to provide feedback about what they need

or want, and then the programming developed from that information? One method could lead to buy-in, the other to a yawn.

Let's borrow a strategy from Al Siebert's *The Resiliency Advantage* and start with this question: What important questions should we be asking ourselves about faculty motivation, development, growth, and resilience?

Pause for a moment and list what you consider to be, within your institutional culture, the top five questions about faculty development begging for answers. Once you have your questions, consider my questions below.

A Baker's Dozen: Categorical Questions About Faculty Development

1. How can we, as much as possible, let faculty have a choice/control over their faculty development? How can we let them identify their needs and passions, and then consider what programming will meet those self-identified needs and passions?
2. How can we connect faculty development activities with individual career and personal trajectories? Not everyone in higher education is interested in climbing the administrative rungs of higher education. How can we help faculty explore the various spokes of professional growth?
3. How can we connect institutionally driven in-service days to the professional interest of faculty? For instance, can we add more faculty-driven workshops to the annual faculty convocations that occur nationwide?
4. How can we use reflective practice to help faculty and institutional leadership see connections between professional growth and personal resilience? What does the campus culture actually do to promote and support true opportunities for ongoing renewal, recovery, and self-care for its leadership?
5. How can we allow and encourage faculty to share their personal passions with their colleagues?
6. How can we encourage opportunities for examining what works, what does not work, and what may work in the teaching and learning space?
7. How can we find ways to incorporate laughter and creativity into faculty development? Is there a local improv comedy group, for instance, that could do a workshop for faculty to emphasize the importance of collaboration and an open-minded approach to challenges?

8. How can we support and encourage faculty to attend and participate at national, regional, and local conferences? How can we fairly allocate scarce institutional resources for such conference attendance?
9. How can we articulate the compelling reasons, such as networking with colleagues and advancing institutional goals, for faculty members to attend professional conferences?
10. How can we find meaningful incentives, such as money, recognition, and collegial support, to encourage faculty to take advantage of growth opportunities?
11. How can we implement a simple, user-friendly process to encourage faculty to become engaged in professional development? For instance, how easy or convoluted is your institution's application process for obtaining faculty development funding and support?
12. How can we locate or develop local "home-grown" opportunities for growth opportunities?
13. How can we encourage and empower the sharing of professional and personal insights gained from the training opportunities mentioned above? In short, beyond personal growth and development, what is the return on investment (ROI) for the institution and the students? To help you consider that, here is a short exercise I often completed upon return to my campus:

Return on Investment (ROI)

Professional Growth and Resilience Opportunities: Sharing the Wealth

Participating in professional events marks a wonderful opportunity for growth and resilience. But what do the participants do after the events end? What happens when they return to their campuses and workspaces? What do they do to maintain the momentum of the opportunity? Does such attendance help the institution and its students? If it does, in what ways?

Consider submitting a simple follow-up call-to-action that outlines how information and strategies learned at the development opportunity can be applied to professional and personal growth. Here is a simple, two-step follow-up format:

Professional Applications

What specific strategies and/or information gleaned from the event can you immediately apply to your workspace at the institution? Include your top three strategies. How can these three strategies have an impact on what you do? In what ways will these benefit your students and colleagues?

Personal Reflections

In what ways did you grow as a professional and as an individual because of this experience? Have you honed or developed a mental model or mindset? Have you embraced new insights about teaching, learning, and resilience?

Growth and resilience require that we have awareness about what we are doing, why we are doing what we do, and how we can make movement towards improvement. What questions do you want to see discussed on your campus? How can you get the conversation started?

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