



TOP 10

LIST FOR
ASPIRING
LEADERS



DR. JOE SCHAFER, PRESIDENT
LARAMIE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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1. Get Intimate with the Budget

Like it or not, managing the fiscal resources of the organization is one of the most critical aspects of your job as a leader, especially when those dollars are watched by others (e.g., investors, taxpayers, etc.). To be good at this requires a broad understanding of resource allocation models, basic understanding of financial operations, and most importantly an aptitude for translating what you hear from the CFO into language you can convey to internal and external constituencies. If you do not have strong financial skills or are somewhat unaware of resource allocation models, now is a good time to build them. They will be foundational to your success as a leader.

2. Leadership Preferred, Diplomacy Required

A leadership position is unfortunately a political one. As a new leader you will find yourself in an environment where diplomacy may be necessary 24/7. There are internal and external politics constantly at play and you must communicate and act with surgical precision. Too direct and you are seen as an autocrat. Too hands-off and you will be targeted as a patsy. It takes an astute pupil of diplomacy to navigate the waters of leadership. Now is the time to start practicing.

3. In God We Trust. Everyone Else Bring Data.

We live in an era of accountability and a deepening need for continuous improvement. Surprisingly though, many leaders, even in the most prominent positions, still make decisions and give direction based on emotion and anecdote. We need to build cultures of evidence in our organizations. To do that, you must have basic understanding of organizational research and more importantly know how to access the individuals who do. Get familiar with where your data resides. Even better, become a student of statistics and analysis of data. These tools will be invaluable to supporting your agenda.

4. Generational Differences Do Matter

In organizations across the nation, four, and perhaps even five different generations of individuals exists in the workplace you will be charged with leading. While no single individual can be pigeon-holed into a generational classification, make no mistake that there are generational differences at play. Communication styles and preferences, personal priorities, tradition, etc. all differ. Knowing how they differ and effectively leading different generations will be one of your greatest challenges regardless of which side of the hill you are looking from. This is more about understanding how different individuals and groups see the world. Knowing this and using it to your advantage is a skill that effective leaders must master. There are many good works on generations, but you may want to read Strauss and Howe's *Millennials Rising* or *The Fourth Turning*.

5. No Matter What You Think, It's Not About You

Thick skin is a necessity in this line of work. You are always in someone's eye, and rightfully so. You will receive advice, feedback, and yes, even criticism, from a variety of individuals in myriad ways. The vast majority of the time they are pointing this criticism to the position you hold, and not directly to you. You'll need to find ways to remove your own emotion for interactions and look for the true meaning in the message. There is no better way to build respect and trust than to be able to be un-phased by tough conversations. Even better, create an environment where tough conversations are welcomed and encouraged, but always with civility.

6. Invest Time Up Front To Build Trust

Leaders are doers. Thus, new leaders often want to hit the ground running. Many find the amount of time spent in meetings, establishing relationships, and gathering organizational input to be painful. Consider this an investment in building trust and awareness about the organization, and don't blow it early on. You'll find that once you have trust, the speed at which you can execute and get people behind you will increase exponentially. For a good, easy read on this, consider Stephen Covey, Jr.'s *Speed of Trust*.

7. Don't Be a Problem Solver (at Least Not Right Away)

It's natural to start a leadership position with energy, passion, and vision. In fact that is probably what landed you the job. You will most likely see areas and things you want to change immediately. Avoid that urge. Don't jump in and solve problems unless they are absolutely critical to the health of the organization. Good leaders take the time to learn the environment and the culture prior to taking action. Your employees will respond better if you take the time to consider all aspects of an issue, and more importantly empower them to discover the problem and resolve it themselves.

8. Once You Have the Job, Your Past Is Irrelevant

More and more, finding good leaders is becoming increasingly difficult, and we are recruiting people from unconventional or nontraditional areas outside of the organization or industry. So while your past may help you land a leadership position, you'll quickly find that some people have limited tolerance for considering it in your leadership. Leaders appointed from the outside find limited inside willingness to hear about how things were done somewhere else. Keep your experience and expertise, but know that your new role changes the way people recognize it. The way you use your experience and background must be strategic and always within the context of your current job.

9. A World of Extremes

This probably isn't advice, but rather full disclosure of leadership positions. It is one of extreme highs and extreme lows. You will find those changes keep the pace of the job moving and unpredictable at times. Whether it is being recognized for all the great work your organization does, receiving the thanks of a client, or being reappointed or re-elected, take the time to revel in those peaks. Soon enough you will find yourself dealing with disheartening employee issues, legal struggles, crises, and the responsibility of making the most difficult decisions of your career. Be prepared for those swings and fluctuations and always remember it is those high points that make dealing with the lows manageable.

10. It's Lonely at the Top

There is no doubt that the higher you rise in the organizational structure, the lonelier it becomes. You'll find it harder and harder to keep deep relationships with people at work. To combat this, start to build relationships with your peers across the state and nation. Take the time to keep your spouse and/or family aware of your work, but don't burden them with it. They will become your primary support system for work-related issues but you do not want to spawn animosity for what you do. Lastly, don't forget to pat yourself on the back every now and then. Not publically, but privately say "good job" when you know that is what you have done.

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Dr. Joe Schaffer, LCCC President

jschaffer@lccc.wy.edu

307.778.1102