

James Pritchett

Philosophy of education, research, leadership, communications and management

Service to others, integrity, and respecting and affirming differences are the underlying narrative defining my philosophy of education, research, leadership, communications and management. Serving is why many of us choose to work at Colorado State University (CSU). An implicit social contract exists between CSU and our stakeholders, and our mission is to fulfill this contract with thoughtful engagement, research and education. A role and responsibility of leaders at CSU is to cultivate relationships between the university and its constituents through rigorous service. It is inspiring to serve with creativity and commitment.

In my view, the Director of the Agriculture Experiment Station (AES) and the Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences (CAS) is a catalyst for helping the team achieve its goals according to a shared vision. The Director / Dean is not the source of the vision; instead, the leader listens to the needs of our constituency, as well as the ideas, core beliefs, values and the passions of the team. The leader helps to articulate and facilitate the shared vision, and then is responsible for mobilizing the right set of ingredients to achieve commonly held objectives. The Director and Dean are the champions for the shared vision and must communicate frequently, clearly and with passion to ignite the commitment of others. Commitment to the vision is also needed from our university partners, especially central administration, as well as our constituents. The vision should reflect the shared values of AES and CAS, and when a difficult decision needs to be made, then we return to our values as a guide. CSU's Principles of Community – inclusion, integrity, respect, service, social justice – are agreed upon principles guiding the culture we seek to cultivate. We must practice and promote inclusive excellence.

An under-emphasized leadership responsibility is implementation, in which plans are made, progress is measured, communicated and then the gains realized. In my letter of application, I've written specifically about the roles and experiences that have proven fundamental in becoming a catalyst for mobilizing human and financial capital. An essential step was fostering a shared strategic vision and then serving as a champion for implementation. A key element is striving for unblinking transparency in decision-making whenever it is possible. We also need to measure our progress and celebrate success while acknowledging shortcomings.

At a fundamental level, my focus as a leader is on people and relationships. I invest wholeheartedly in finding career development pathways for the people with whom I work. I also seek to establish trust relationships with our partners. No greater joy exists than helping others achieve their goals and passions and seeing them do well. It is also important to build vibrant relationships that are robust even when challenges arise, and new directions are taken.

A key element of success is fostering a culture of trust. Five characteristics that typify a culture of trust are:

- A culture in which team members can be *vulnerable* in the sense they can voice opinions, ideas and take actions without hesitation,
- A culture that fosters a healthy environment for *conflict* – constructive discussion of differences rather than an atmosphere of superficial harmony,
- A culture of *commitment* to the team's chosen direction and actions in place of leadership ambiguity,
- A culture that encourages *accountability*, and in particular, holding other team members accountable for actions and inaction, and
- A culture focusing on team *success* rather than personal status or ego (Lencioni, 2002)

We inculcate these five characteristics over time and work together to maintain the culture. It requires a conscious, regular investment. A leader must be the guiding example for building a culture of trust.

Leaders exercise day-to-day management with integrity and accountability. Successful day-to-day management is accomplished by understanding and committing to the group vision, developing processes to accomplish goals, and then allowing team members to thrive within agreed upon roles. Expectations must be jointly determined between a leader and team member, written down and transparent. The Dean and Director may need to act as a shield for team members in the day-to-day – acquiring resources as needed, freeing team members from the confines of external pressures and investing in their human capital. Successful teams match people to the right opportunities and engage external stakeholders to make sure that the opportunities exist.

Yet, the status quo is not sufficient when adaptive change is need. AES and CAS will face circumstances that challenge the conventional wisdom. Competing perspectives become relevant and important. Hiefetz and Laurie (2001) argue that this is when the entire organization must be mobilized and accept responsibility for change. These authors advance a set of key arguments - that rather than directing the organization with 'business as usual,' the leader needs to frame the key questions and issues of the adaptive challenge; rather than fending off external threats, the leader should let the unit feel pressure; rather than clarifying roles the leader should challenge ineffectual norms. In this manner, lasting and successful change occurs.

An element of my leadership philosophy is owning the responsibility for adapting to change and catalyzing the group's efforts. My experiences, successes and importantly, mistakes, create a body of work that informs my leadership philosophy.

My philosophy closely mirrors the implementation of the Land Grant Mission at CSU. In my opinion, the best research results from close engagement with the public and industry. These questions can be addressed by nimble and creative teams when we foster a culture of innovation. It may well be that the best path forward for research is a co-creation of knowledge with our constituency. Co-creation of knowledge in its purest form means that our external stakeholders are part of the research team, and then these stakeholders are champions for disseminating results and in seeking the next important questions. The AES and CAS also have a mission to address the "wicked" problems that exist in society – those that have a high degree of uncertainty are politically important. In these instances, the engagement mission is convening important conversations and providing non-partisan science to assist decision makers and citizens. All of our scientific endeavors need be completed with integrity and accountability.

Education, whether it be along traditional student pathways or non-traditional experiences, needs to be defined around an explicit set of outcomes that help students become career ready, and creating tools for our students to be lifelong learners. All of our students need have the cultural competency to ensure they can be effective as global citizens in an ever-changing world. I believe that experiential learning is the best platform for our students to gain the insights that will help them be successful. Nurturing the next generation is an inspiring vocation and a fundamental act of stewardship.

I believe that the College of Agricultural Sciences and the Agricultural Experiment Station are comprised of outstanding individuals and teams. Together, our collective vision is focused on global excellence in the stewarding safe, secure and sustainable food and resource systems.

Works Cited

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Lencioni, P. 2002. *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team*. Jossey-Bass, [ISBN 0-7879-6075-6](https://www.josseybass.com/ISBN-0-7879-6075-6)