



The Leadership Gap: Bridging the Divide and Creating a Pipeline Special Topics Session

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Background. Our industries, institutions, colleges, and departments rely on transformational leadership to survive and thrive. While much of what we do in the academy focuses on content creation and delivery, we are increasingly called upon to develop strong, savvy leaders. Leaders who are visionaries, critical thinkers, and problem solvers. Nowhere is this truer than in today's retail industry where at least 10 large retail companies recently lost their CEOs and are challenged with finding candidates that are equipped and ready to take the helm (Kish & Hartman, 2023). Similarly, higher education is not immune to recruitment and retention challenges. The terms, Big Quit and the Great Resignation, readily apply to the academy as tenure-line faculty are leaving at alarming rates (Dolezal, 2022).

Purpose. This special topics session focuses on strategic mentorship of students and faculty to ensure a sustainable, reliable leadership pipeline. The session will: 1) address potential gaps in leadership development and soft skill training; 2) identify innovative leadership development initiatives; and 3) recommend mentorship programs for both students and faculty grounded in the Leadership Pipeline Model (Ram, Drotter, & Noel, 2011).

Framework. The Leadership Pipeline Model uses an iterative approach to professional development taking an individual from managing self (Level 1) to managing enterprises (Level 6). This transparent, systematic approach helps individuals understand key skills at every stage and provides a clear pathway for advancement. Companies and institutions realize the power of developing future leaders, particularly that these individuals gain the necessary soft skills that will improve communication, help solve problems, and build bridges in the workplace.

To encourage engagement, attendees participated in a 'snowball fight.' The moderator asked participants to reflect on a 'leadership failure' or 'leadership gap' they had experienced. Participants wrote their idea on a piece of paper, crumbled up their slips, and threw the 'snowballs' to the front of the room. To generate interest and help panelists frame their comments, the moderator read these aloud. Next, the moderator posed a series of questions to both panel members. As a final wrap, participants engaged a group conversation about current issues.

Benefits. Creating a leadership pipeline mindset is critical to the success of any organization. This process helps individuals: recognize areas for personal improvement; set expectations for future roles and responsibilities; identify potential career pathways; and bridge the divide that often exists in organizations. Using the Leadership Pipeline Model, participants of this session will benefit as they

create leadership and mentorship programs aimed at developing future leaders in the industry and the academy. Who will be the next CEO of Amazon? Who will be your next department chair? Who will be your next student organization president? Will you leave it to providence or do you have a clear succession plan?

References

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