

Cultivating a Successful Academic Career in Higher Education Institutes: The 10 X C Model

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Abstract—The modern era has brought with it significant organizational changes. These changes have not bypassed the academic world, and along with the old academic bonds that include a world of knowledge and ethics, academic faculty members are required more than ever not only to survive in the academic world, but also to thrive and flourish and position themselves as modern and opinionated academicians. Based upon the writings of organizational consultants, the article suggests a 10 X C model for cultivating an academic backbone, as well as emphasizing its input to the professional growth of university and college academics: Competence, Calculations of pain & gain, Character, Commitment, Communication, Curiosity, Coping, Courage, Collaboration and Celebration.

Keywords—Academic career, academicians, higher education, the 10xC Model.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE modern era has brought with it significant organizational changes. Contemporary organizations adopt economical and versatile structures, use information technologies, launch and modify products, services and processes. While renewing themselves, they constantly seek the one thing that might give them a relative advantage over their competitors and at the same time they endeavor to outline an organizational culture, values, vision and organizational ideology - all for the purpose of paving their way to a longed for success in a world of constant change [1]. These changes have not bypassed the academic world, and along with the good old academic bonds that include a world of knowledge and ethics, academic faculty members are required more than ever not only to survive in the academic world, but also to thrive and flourish and position themselves as modern and opinionated academicians.

In her book *Ten strategies for gaining power and influence at work*, Susan Marshall [2] explains the necessity of developing a strong backbone that any employee who wants to succeed in the dynamic work world of the modern era. Although her book was originally intended for the business world, it is easily possible to transpose her insights to the academic context as well.

II. WHAT IS A BACKBONE IN THE CONTEXT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONDUCT?

Marshall [2] defines backbone as "firm and resolute character, like courage... mixed with gumption, which

comprises common sense, enterprise and initiative" (P. 10). She reminds us all of role models from our past who had the nerve to stand up for something, even when they were likely to suffer for it, like the student who chides a teacher for giving the class a collective punishment, or a co-worker who stood firm against decrees the staff could not work with. These people choose to say what they believed in, maintain an unpopular position, or sometimes restrain themselves and refuse to follow the biased majority, even at the risk of putting their status and prestige on the line.

What they all shared was the integrity that characterized them. Integrity is derived from five essential values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect/dignity and responsibility. Likewise, academic integrity is the outcome of these same five values [3] and they are all acceptable in all the three main areas of growth among academic faculty members: the learning process for acquisition of advanced degrees, their teaching, and their research.

Below is a brief description of each of these five values:

- **Honesty** means the search for truth in academic research, pursuing the truth while totally condemning any tactics of copying, cheating, deceit and plagiarism and any other kind of dishonest behavior that jeopardizes the educational process. Honesty is best expressed in the saying: "He who cites a thing in the name of its author brings salvation to the world." (In the Scriptures Chapters of the Fathers, six).
- **Trust** means cultivating an atmosphere of acceptance, having confidence in the reliability of academic colleagues (unless they have proven unreliable), and encouraging free expression of opinions and ideas, which is essential to academic enlightenment.
- **Fairness** involves creating an academic atmosphere of clear and uniform standards, while allowing each individual to realize his/her maximum potential. For example: giving an established, valid and reliable assessment of students' and teachers' achievements, without any bias or personal interest.
- **Respect/dignity** means appreciating and cherishing students, as well as teachers. Students and teachers should treat each other and their peers with the appropriate respect. Each one of them should be treated as a worthy individual and should not be treated as an object (Objectification) for gaining academic benefit [4].
- **Responsibility**: academic responsibility lies both in teaching and in research. In teaching, the academicians is obliged to foster a generation of learners with knowledge and skills in the relevant discipline. This responsibility

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should also be directed toward society in general, since it relies on worthy graduates and masters in their fields. In research, the academician is obliged to conduct an educated inquiry that may add and promote knowledge, sometimes despite social pressure or political bon-ton.

According to Marshall [2], a strong backbone, which can provide an employee with power and influence in the workplace, will eventually manifest itself in three major areas: competence, purposeful risk taking, and self-confidence.

In the academic world, competence means the ability to demonstrate optimal performance in each of the various skills and capabilities required of a faculty member. Beyond profound knowledge of the discipline, one must possess the ability to conduct research, write and teach, and to possess good interpersonal communication skills. All these can be improved and enhanced through study, experience and practice, but also through the help of experts in their fields, such as statisticians, linguistic editors and colleagues.

Risk taking in the academic world means the ability to deal with challenges in which success is not guaranteed but depends entirely on our cognitive abilities. Risk taking may pose a threat, but may also provide an opportunity. In other words, risk taking is not necessarily a potential source of harm, but also a source of growth. Therefore, those who take risks replace the question of "how to minimize the risk and thus avoid its negative consequences?" with the question of "how to manage the risk in order to achieve success?"

Risk management is not a one-time move but a structured and circular process which involves recognizing and assessing the risks, planning the response, experiencing them under supervision, and finally feedback and inquiry, and then going back to the beginning [5]. Applying the risk management process may promote self-leveraging.

Academic competence and the personal growth that come with calculated risk taking promote self-confidence. Developing and enhancing academic competence may infuse one with calm and confidence in their own abilities. Surviving risk taking increases self-esteem and the audacity to try again and move on to the next challenge. One must distinguish between self-confidence and arrogance: while self-confidence helps the individuals' positions and their professional growth, arrogance glorifies their personal egos at the expense of others.

III. THE C MODEL

A. Competence

Be open to growing your capabilities in every aspect of your academic career: Improve your writing abilities, control your time schedules, learn how to improve your presentations and cultivate experiences that will help your proficiency grow.

B. Calculations of Pain & Gain

Be able to engage in intelligent, purposeful endeavors on behalf of your career. Taking calculated and appropriate dares will lead you to success.

An academic career constantly involves making decisions. Some of these decisions, such as choosing one's mentor for the dissertation or doctoral thesis and choosing its subject, have significant implications on the progress of one's career. Simply put, the decision making process may follow either a rational or in an intuitive model [6].

The rational model has four stages:

- A. Identifying information (intelligence) – data collection, classification, processing and presentation for the purpose of clarifying the subject at hand and for use as a database in later stages of decision making.
- B. Analysis and design – defining alternatives to the solution.
- C. Choice – choosing the preferable solution out of all the available options.
- D. Implementation – implementing the decision made and following up its consequences.

The intuitive model, on the other hand, is based more on "gut feelings" of "what is the right thing to do", but it is also partly based on a cognitive and superficial review of past experiences and the lessons learned through their outcomes. Marshall says that it is not important how we decide – as long as we decide. For her, even the tossing of a coin as a way of making a decision is 10 times better than being stuck (and not deciding) because of the fear of bearing the consequences of any decision. According to her, there is no decision that is negative or wrong, since every decision we make brings different events into our lives which allow us to mend or offset its bad outcome, should there be one. This is quite similar to the 'butterfly effect', which demonstrates how small changes in the starting point of a dynamic system can bring about great changes in the system's behavior in the long run.

C. Character

Learn from significant academic others but develop your own confident and original Character. Choose academic figures that will serve as your role models. Successful people who do well in the academic world can inspire you and mark for you not only the level of success you may want to achieve, but also the way to achieve it.

Learn the academic language that is unique to your area. Every academic field of knowledge has its own characteristic discourse and terminology. Listen to your colleagues' language which is appropriate for conduct in the academic world: The spoken language of a lecture and the written language of an article. The unique language that you will finally adopt, both in your interpersonal conduct and in your academic writing, will distinguish you from the rest and help you draw attention to you.

D. Commitment

Be obligated to the path of your career as long as it is gratifying, rewarding and self-fulfilling. In other words, be committed to yourself. Observe, study and assess the environment in which you operate. As in an efficient progress through a maze, create a cognitive map of your academic career in order to outline a fast and logical sequence between

your current landmark in the academic scale and your desirable destination point. Spot the decision making centers, study the codes of rewarded behavior, be attentive to relevant information (knowledge = power), and team up with supportive people, as well as with powerful ones; the powerful ones are not necessarily those with the authority to punish or reward within the department, but also those with possession of knowledge and skills, who have won national and international recognition for their work.

Be goal oriented. Always ask yourself, "Why am I doing what I am doing?" This question will ensure that your actions are focused and therefore more efficient. Also it will reduce the chances of wasting energy on pointless thoughts and actions. Setting goals prior to an academic activity (appointment, meeting, lesson etc.) more than guarantees their achievement.

The dialogue between Alice and the Cat, in the book "Alice's adventures in wonderland" (Lewis Carroll, 1865), illustrates the crucial correlation between our heart's wishes and the road we need to take:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.

'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.

'I don't much care where –' said Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat" [7].

E. Communication

Interact respectfully and humbly with others. Do not be foul, bullying types of academics. Be the ones to ask the right questions. Ask practical, direct and goal-oriented questions, in a way that is respectful of both you and the person you ask. In a job or promotion interview, or in any other academic offer that is put to you, make sure to clarify what was said to you by paraphrasing it (re-phrasing). Paraphrase (Paraphrasis in Greek) Questions that paraphrase expressions or re-phrased statements that ask for comment will spare you misunderstandings, anger and distress, which may otherwise derive from the gaps between the speakers' encoding and your decoding of what they say.

Learn to listen actively and, verify and compare the messages with your prior knowledge. Oppose and overcome background noise and respond only after having fully and completely understood what was said.

Use the skill of humor. Humor has been found to be efficient in coping with tension and anxiety, especially prior to exams. According to Ziv [8] it is theoretically possible to anticipate a positive correlation between academic results and the humor which had been interspersed into the material studied. Based on the conditioning theory, Ziv claims that it is possible to predict that, when a bond is created between studying and humor as a source of enjoyment, the material being studied will be better understood: the simple fact is that pleasant experiences are remembered more easily than those which are indifferent. According to Ziv, it is theoretically possible to anticipate a positive correlation between academic

results and the humor that had been interspersed into the material studied. Based on the conditioning theory, Ziv claims that it is possible to predict that, when a bond is created between studying and humor as a source of enjoyment, the material being studied will be better understood: the simple fact is that pleasant experiences are remembered more easily than those that are indifferent.

In addition to the direct benefits that humor has for the students, humor also has proven advantages for the teacher as well: humor establishes the scope of his/her influence on the group and strengthens his/her standing as a leader.

F. Curiosity

Develop real interest in others: students and colleagues alike. Whenever we label something as boring, we actually close one more door of opportunities. Curious people are unlikely to call something as tedious. Instead, they always see it as a possibility to learn and experience new things.

G. Concentration

Leave unimportant thoughts and issues out of your daily routine. Your thinking must be goal-oriented. Any thought that fails to reward or promote you should be cast aside. Sometimes we trouble ourselves by thinking, "What if...?" or "Why did this happen to me?" or by conducting a comprehensive personality analysis of someone who has hurt us deeply. These thoughts, which focus on the past, consume our energies and leave us with no energy to put into constructive thoughts about our academic future and functioning.

H. Courage

Support your valid findings even though they may not be politically correct. Do not yield to intimidations. Phrases like "You don't know what you're talking about", or "You're just a tiny cog in a huge wheel" are "killers". They kill our self-confidence, and especially the likelihood we will ever again dare say what we believe to be true. Giving in to this kind of intimidation may bend or break our spirit and prevent us from developing a strong and stable backbone that would characterize us as having a mind of our own which others must consider.

I. Collaboration

Cooperate with other academics and join forces. The whole exceeds the sum of its parts. Listen to the wisdom gained by veteran lecturers. They can help you modify your sessions and prepare new assignments for your students. Schedule some time to sit down with your colleges, as well as your department chair and ask for their advice. That kind of partnership benefits your students significantly.

J. Celebration

Rejoice your achievements and contributions. Be conscious of your talents and abilities, for they are your strength and opportunities. It is impossible to guarantee occupational happiness, but in the spirit of the United States Declaration of Independence from 1776, we have the right to the pursuit of

happiness as well as our natural right to life and to freedom: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness..." Awareness of this right and actions taken to fulfill it may help you love your work immensely. Explore subjects that fascinate you; collaborate academically with people who allow you to express yourself; teach courses that interest and challenge you, and choose your teaching hours according to your biological clock, whether you are a morning person or an evening one. At the same time ensure other people's right to pursue their own happiness, particularly if you are in a leading position. Allow students and colleagues to express themselves, help put great ideas into action, reward excellence and do not allow frustration to pile up.

IV. CONCLUSION

In Hebrew, the term "backbone" describes not only the spine of a living creature, but also the inflorescence axis of a plant, which is inhabited by its flowers and fruit. Figuratively speaking, one may say that an academic backbone yields us not only the stability and flexibility to help us perform at our best, but also the academic produce to enjoy and to be blessed with.

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