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## Generous Leadership

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Lana Danielson, Ph.D.



Saundra Shillingstad, Ed.D.

## Generous Leadership

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. LANA DANIELSON CONDUCTED BY DR. SAUNDRA SHILLINGSTAD

This interview is the sixth in a series initiated by the members of the *Bulletin's* 2008-2010 Editorial Board. The goal of the series is to feature interviews conducted with Delta Kappa Gamma members or other educational leaders on a topic related to the theme of the issue.

### Introduction

Dr. Lana Danielson currently serves as my Department Chair in the Teacher Education Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. We served together as colleagues prior to her becoming my Department Chair seven years ago (2003). The theme of the *Bulletin's* Summer 2010 issue is "Educators and Changing Times." Over the years I have had the opportunity to observe first-hand the ways in which Dr. Danielson has utilized the knowledge and skills she shares with her students as their educator and how she continuously applies her wealth of

experience in the classroom to her role as leader and mentor.

### *How would you define your leadership style?*

My preference is a collaborative style. I believe it is important to listen to faculty ideas and to build on their interest and expertise in order to achieve our goals. I prefer to provide background for projects or tasks I introduce, have faculty think about the information individually using some guided questions, then discuss in small groups, and finally consider the proposal as a whole group and using their ideas to design and

implement a plan. This process takes time but it also allows us to look at multiple perspectives, give voice to everyone, and identify potential unintended outcomes.

*Is there a core set of leadership skills that are essential or mandatory for leadership success?*

I think there are some skills that contribute to successful leadership such as being a skilled listener, being a good judge of character, being a good communicator, knowing when to listen and when to speak, being able to unpack information and synthesize it for other consumers, being able to discern information between the lines, etc. Notice that these essential skills tend to be about communication. There are also some character traits that I think are mandatory for successful leadership such as generosity in recognizing, valuing, and acknowledging the talents in others.

*Where does power fit in leadership?*

I think a position or title carries with it a perception of power or authority and the requisite responsibility to use this power appropriately to get things done. As it relates to one's belief about leadership and personal style, I prefer the term "influence" over power because I know that in my position I do influence decisions and behavior. I can't control all of the variables but I can encourage positive, productive interactions. I think we sometimes confuse ego and pride---ego is more about power while pride is about work ethic and accomplishments that result from thoughtful pursuit of worthy endeavors.

*Is it possible to use "too little power" as a leader?*

Having said that I tie the term "power" to the position, I have to recognize that there are responsibilities incumbent upon me to carry out and often times these are the tough decisions that are not easy to make or to communicate. If I don't address concerns and stand behind my decisions, I have not fulfilled my obligation to the authority of my position.

*What is the difference between leadership and management?*

Much of my position involves the role of manager. My job is to take care of the day to day business of the department with things like approving expenditures, assigning duties, adjusting class schedules, and maintaining records, etc. These are tasks that keep the department running smoothly.

Leadership involves providing vision for long-term goals and removing obstacles so faculty can be productive. It is about inspiring others, about being a role model who has also been successful in the work the faculty does and as a result values it.

*Is it possible to be an effective leader without being a great manager?*

I don't think that in my position it is possible to be an effective leader without having management skills. I have worked for leaders who have great vision but do not have a practical sense of how to implement it. Ultimately, colleagues who are recruited to design and implement the vision become disenchanted because they feel overworked and undervalued. I think an effective leader communicates appreciation for the people with whom she or he works and for that to be sincere, the nature of the work, not just the outcome, must be understood.

#### THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Lana Danielson** is a Professor in the College of Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Dr. Danielson has served as the Department Chair of the Teacher Education Department for the past seven years. She is a member of the Omega Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma.

**Dr. Saundra Shillingstad** is an Associate Professor in the College of Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She currently serves on the 2008-2012 *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* Editorial Board.

*How do values and beliefs affect leadership behavior?*

What we bring to a position in terms of our personal values and beliefs defines how we will interact with others and how we will approach the work we do. I don't think we can separate character from behavior. For example, I value integrity very much. I used to tell my students that I defined this as "doing what you should do when nobody is watching." I believe we must enter into our work with integrity and be honest in owning what we do and how we do it.

*Is leadership about using the right "techniques"?*

We can always learn better ways to do something. I don't know that there are "right" techniques so much as "effective" techniques when applied in an appropriate context.

*Where does trust fit in terms of effective leadership?*

Mutual trust is critical to effective leadership. The parties involved have to believe that they have common goals, that they know the motives behind actions that affect their work, and that they can communicate honestly with each other. When trust breaks down, relationships are damaged and repair must occur or the leadership will falter.

*Where does leadership credibility fit in terms of effective leadership?*

A successful, long-term leader does have to be credible. What I say I believe and how I follow through on this affects my relationship with others. I can't ask others to work hard, have an open mind, keep commitments, and so on if I haven't convinced them that I have the same expectations for myself.

*Do leaders need to be liked in order to be successful?*

It sure helps if most of the people with whom a leader works actually like their leader! I think first of all a leader has to be respected for his or her professional knowledge and expertise.

Being "liked" comes from personal interactions over time, with how one is treated. A leader can be liked but not respected or respected but not liked. I think to be successful a leader needs to be respected and liked by most of the people with whom s/he works.

*What are your greatest leadership challenges and joys?*

The greatest challenge for me is to accept the fact that I might not be able to work as effectively as I would like with everyone. I always want to find that common thread on which to weave a solid rapport where there is mutual understanding and sometimes it just doesn't happen.

For me the greatest joys of leadership are the relationships that are developed and the faculty and student successes that result from their commitment to the work they do and my part in supporting them.

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...continued from page 41.

<http://www.leraconteur.scriptmania.com/bloompackage.htm>

Using Bloom's Taxonomy and Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences theory as a focus this site provides lesson plans, learning objectives, and an Assessment Sheet.

<http://www.byrdseed.com/differentiator/>

This site is designed to help teachers construct activities and products from each domain. The teacher can select a content area and then go through the construction process including the complexity/depth of the assignment, resource examples, suggested products and group size.

<http://www.cbv.ns.ca/ssstudies/links/learn/1414.html>

This is another example of a concise chart with verbs and questions stems.

[http://www.teachervision.fen.com/tv/printables/TCR/1576900045\\_019-021.pdf](http://www.teachervision.fen.com/tv/printables/TCR/1576900045_019-021.pdf)

This sites provides specific activities for literature activities

[http://faculty.ccconline.org/index.php?title=Blooms\\_Taxonomy\\_Tutorial\\_FLASH](http://faculty.ccconline.org/index.php?title=Blooms_Taxonomy_Tutorial_FLASH)

This site, constructed by the Colorado Community College System, provides a multimedia explanation with examples.

<http://www.classworks.com/pdf/Blooms%20Revised%20Taxonomy.pdf>

This site is designed as downloadable help that can be included in a teacher plan book for use when planning lessons using Bloom's.

<http://nerds.unl.edu/pages/preser/sec/articles/blooms.html>

This site provides a chart including definition, teacher roles, student roles, provides verbs and products of activities Using Bloom's