

Leadership Talking Points

NEWSLETTER



Leadership Education: Is it For Everyone?

As he spoke to audiences around the world, Dr. Stephen R. Covey used to ask how many would agree that the typical organization doesn't even begin to tap the leadership capability of its people. Nearly every hand would go up. This admission is the result of a paradigm of leadership that divides the world into a few leaders and many followers, and explains why the focus of leadership education is a small elite.

But the world we live in now demands that everyone develop the qualities of leadership: initiative, resourcefulness, vision, the ability to achieve goals, empathy, and creativity. We can't afford to cultivate these qualities in only an elite group of human beings.

"Leadership is a choice, not a position," Dr. Covey taught. He believed all people have the potential to be leaders. His message was that leadership is a primary trait of every human being—the kind of leadership that equates to unique contribution. By contrast, the trappings of leadership—position, popularity, public image—are secondary. A CEO is no more likely to be a leader than anyone else.

That's why FranklinCovey is avid about changing the world of higher education into "leadership education."

Imagine a college where every student is educated to be a leader. Imagine a college where the culture—from administration to faculty to staff to the student population—is purposely designed to produce leaders.

Now imagine a whole generation of college graduates who have learned to be leaders—leaders of their own lives first, as well as leaders of other leaders.

That vision is now becoming reality in colleges on several continents as they formally teach *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*® to all of their students.

CHN University in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, actively labels itself a “Leadership University,” combining career preparation with leadership preparation. With 11,000 students in the Netherlands, South Africa, Thailand, and China, CHN defines leaders as people “who act according to universal principles, take responsibility, value differences in people, synergize, and develop themselves.” Dr. Robert Veenstra, chairman of the board, introduced the 7 Habits into the curriculum. He says, “I want a leadership-focused university. Leadership is, for me, the way to bring out the best in people.”

In the words of Dr. Bruce H. Leslie, chancellor of the Alamo Community College system in Texas, “Many of our students lacked the real foundation of success, the skills to stand up with confidence, to make critical decisions and solve problems, to think for themselves. My interest in the 7 Habits is not just to teach our students skills—although those things are important. My real interest is teaching them to be leaders in their lives, their families, and their work.”

The college that creates such a leadership culture will become this century’s distinctive institution of higher education.

Questions to Ponder

Why is leadership education usually limited to a select few? Why does Dr. Covey say “A CEO is no more likely to be a leader than anyone else”? What would happen if everyone were educated to be a leader? What would be the consequences for organizations that make sure everyone gets leadership training? What about those that don’t?