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Using Multisource Feedback to Strengthen and Develop Leadership Skills

Feedback is often one of the most overlooked parts of leadership development. For most individuals, and I would even say the majority of leaders, self-reflection and evaluation is something that never crosses their mind. While it is one of the most overlooked, it is almost one of the most important, as feedback and self-reflection can be an aid to anyone trying to better themselves in any area. Since leadership depends so much on the followers, feedback is especially important in this area of development, and should be utilized more often than it seems to be today.

Rosch, Anderson, and Jordan’s article, “Analyzing the Effectiveness of Multisource Feedback as a Leadership Development Tool for College Students,” serves as evidence that the development of leadership in college students depends greatly on feedback. Their study consisted of 144 undergraduate students (38% male and 62% female) and 374 observers, who knew the undergraduate students in a number of capacities used a 1-5 scale to rate the students on different aspects of their leadership. The overall findings of the study were that students were much harder on themselves when rating their own leadership skills than the observers. The most important aspect of the conclusions of this study are that observers are not the best source to utilize in rating the leadership skills of students. In fact, Rosch, Anderson, and Jordan state in their article that “the people best positioned to rate students’ leadership capacity are students themselves and that observers may be more useful to reinforce effort and learning, rather than service as an incentive or roadmap to skill acquisition” (41). More than likely, students rating their peers on their leadership skills is the most humbling but honest opinion available. Since other students are in similar positions, it is easier and much more reliable to allow them to conduct feedback and constructive criticism. The observers, who were mostly instructors and supervisors, are not on a peer level with the students, making it tougher to give accurate feedback about their performance.

The University of Tennessee takes steps every day to improve the programs they offer to strengthen student leadership on campus. However, we are not immune to the common overlooking of feedback. As a part of my projected retreat for campus leaders, *Reignition¸* one of the more important parts of this retreat would be feedback and constructive criticism. During the retreat, there will be an immense number of opportunities for peer to peer review, as well as self-reflection. Over the course of three days, students will be able to observe the leadership skills of others, especially those within their own organizations. By giving them the opportunity to productively produce feedback regarding their peers, a more accurate representation of where they stand in their leadership journey will become apparent. Each student can then take this information back to campus and use it as a tool to better themselves, their leadership skills, and their respective organizations. The importance and necessity of including this in the *Reignition* proposal is too great to ignore and should stand as a cornerstone of The University of Tennessee’s plan to strengthen student leadership.

The reasoning behind peer-to-peer review, as we will call it, is apparent in the study done by Rosch, Anderson, and Jordan. They state that “the results within the current study imply that observers rated students using only a generalized perception of overall leadership competency and responded to each individual question within each subscale using this single, universal impression of the student” (42). This statement made by the authors of this article and inventors of this study, suggests that peer-to-peer review will consist of more honest feedback. Instead of using a generalized perception, which seemed to be the basis of the observers in this study, students have the ability to base their judgments off of multiple instances and events. Their feedback has the ability to avoid generalization completely, and they will be equipped with three days of opportunities for examples by the conclusion of the retreat. Because of this, students will be able to provide accurate feedback to the other members of their organization, as well as feedback to students across other campus organizations. The overwhelming point of this is to ensure our students are taking the time to reflect on their actions and how those actions impact their followers as well as the other people on their leadership team.

Works Cited

Rosch, David M., James C. Anderson, and Shannon N. Jordan. "Analyzing the Effectiveness of

Multisource Feedback as a Leadership Development Tool for College Students." *Journal of Leadership Studies* 6.3 (2012): 33-46. Web.