

Final Celebration Comments
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I am a “lifer” in extension. I have been an agent, a state specialist, a program leader and now am the Associate Director. I know the extension organization from a state perspective, and I believe I understand regional and national issues as well. I love this organization and I love the work we do. I have found and continue to find great joy in my work and continue, after 30 some years to value what we do. Not every one can say that about their work, and I understand the privilege that goes with having interesting and rewarding work.

Colleagues from Wisconsin recently returned from the regional Mid-Managers Conference and reported that about three fourths of the people at the conference were NELD alums. Some of you will finish out your careers in the position you now hold. Others of you will assume positions of greater responsibility in your state or another state. As you are thinking about what you will do with what you have learned from this experience, I'd like to add my observations about the best leaders in extension that I have observed throughout my career.

1. Good leaders have common sense. We work in academic environments.

You are completing an experience where you've made a real effort to get involved with new learning. Learning about good leaders and learning how to be a good leader is important. But trust me, good judgement and common sense are even more important. I did an internship early in my career with a dean who told me that 80% of administrative work was good judgement and 20% required some special skill. I think that good judgement is even more than 80% of the work I do.

2. Good leaders have integrity. They are honest and reliable. You can trust them. They keep confidences. This is harder than it sounds. We've all said things we later wished we could take back. As a leader you have access to

more information than you can share and it is often difficult to keep it confidential. But being able to maintain confidentiality is crucial to your future as a leader. Everyone makes mistakes and when good leaders are wrong, they admit it...I call this "fall on the ground and beg forgiveness". Sometimes you have to do that. Then, move on.

3. Good leaders have good communication skills. We've spent a good deal of time on this topic during this seminar so I won't belabor it. Let me just say that the most frequent communication mistakes I see involve triangulation...sharing the concern with a third party and not the affected party and what I call sugar coating. That is trying so hard to be nice, you lose the intent of the communication.
4. Good leaders think and act outside the box. At the same time, they understand that change takes time. For myself, this was probably my biggest single concern in the first 20 years of my career. I like things to happen quickly. I wanted those old grey haired people in the Dean's office to move over and let some of us younger folks with good ideas take over. Most people resist change, large institutions move slowly, and for change to be institutionalized, others must own it. At the same time, good leaders initiate the least change they can to get the job done. Especially major structural change. Every change takes energy from the work of the organization. The less energy you spin off for structural issues, the more energy available to actually do work. People can change what they do from almost any kind of

structure. In Wisconsin, we made a deliberate decision to make changes in how we operate without structural changes.

5. Good leaders are institutionalists. No matter where they are in the institution, they think of the whole institution's interests, not just the interests of their own program, county or effort. One real weakness of extension is the energy we have spent at the local, state and national level fighting with each other about who gets more...more resources, more credit, more support...etc...The best leaders don't fight with ourselves, but rather work together to find more resources and more opportunities for our institutions.
6. Good leaders anticipate what the opposition thinks. They can think not only of their own side of the argument, but they anticipate what the opposing argument or position is. They think through "what's in it" for the other side and plan alternatives in advance that allow both sides to get at least some of what they want.
7. Good leaders choose their battles wisely. They save their energy for big major efforts where the likelihood of success is high or where the problem is critically important.
8. Good leaders are good managers. Their work is done on time and on budget. Their systems operate and their programs hum. The most creative vision on earth isn't worth anything if you can't get the work done.
9. Good leaders make people their priority. They allocate significant chunks of time to getting new people off to a successful start. This is not only an

investment in the organization's future, but also helps leaders see the organization through new eyes.

10. Good leaders take care of themselves and believe in themselves. They know that they won't make good decisions or have the energy work requires if they are exhausted. They have fun and are fun to be with. And they demonstrate they have confidence in their ability to lead. If you don't have confidence in yourself, why should ANYONE else want to follow you? People want to work with good leaders. Trust your instincts and don't be afraid to take risks, because you are a good leader. I wish you the best as you continue your leadership journey.