

Creating the Faculty Team

With Don Fraser, Making Your Mark

Applying High-Performance Principles to Education

This is the second in a series of articles with Don Fraser. The first article, "Ten Ways to Build Successful Students" appeared in our December 2010 edition, and can be found online at: <http://www.workforce-com.com/cer/featured.htm>

The most important person to the student is the faculty member because that's who the student is with in the classroom. But far too many faculty members focus their energies and time on content, curriculum and grading. It's really a micro-focus, said motivator-speaker-professor Don Fraser, publisher of the national bestseller *Making Your Mark*. Unfortunately, what the student is missing is the most important thing they need for entering a college – and that is a vision and a belief in the program.

"I can line up all the different credits and modules a student needs to take, but unless the student believes in it and wants it, it's meaningless," said Fraser. "What we're really talking about is how does a student go from walking in, having paid their fees and registering, to joining us and really understanding what they're a part of, so they can then believe it, want it and really commit to high-performance learning. They're not going to do it with a syllabus, textbook and grading system."

Based on his research, 70 percent of teachers start by focusing on content, as opposed to focusing on the strengths of what they can give to a student. And the number one thing a student wants is career vision.

"So they come in with this tremendous expectation of a career vision, and the only group who can deliver it is the faculty—not the recruiter, not the admissions people, not the president or the director of education. It's the faculty," Fraser explained. "And there are really two groups of faculty. There are faculty who are specific to industry and there are faculty who are generalist faculty."

Seventy percent of teachers start by focusing on content, as opposed to focusing on the strengths of what they can give to a student. And the number one thing a student wants is career vision.

But they each have a role in delivering and we need to start delivering right from the moment the students first see us. They need to know who their faculty team is.

"We market and deliver programs, but we don't teach the program concept, and we don't operate sometimes enough as a faculty team. And yet, the quality of a program will be directly related to how much that faculty sees themselves as a team. Because if I just come in to teach a subject and hand

in my grades, who's helping the student with understanding the industry, making connections, bringing in speakers," Fraser said. "And another thing: if

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nobody is looking after the credibility and the issues of the program, the students will get a lot of content, but they won't believe it.

They really won't be able to understand it. Yes, we have to deliver content, but unless we're delivering it in a program where students understand it, they're not going to get it."

Right from the beginning each member of a faculty team needs to create a foundation for their students so they understand the program they're in, believe it and want it. Yes, they've paid their fees, but right in the beginning there isn't an emotional connection; it's just an economic one, said Fraser.

"After creating that foundation, we then have a responsibility for delivering a skill profile—the things the student needs to graduate with to get a career," said Fraser. "The next stage is the program of studies. And the final piece is the experiential learning and the entry-level job, along with the alumni success stories.

"The only people who can deliver these things are the faculty. If we deliver that, we start a pattern of the students seeing us as a team; and we start operating as a team. I think a good benchmark is meeting monthly as a team and delivering something monthly that keeps the students understanding the big picture of the industry and career, not just another module or another syllabus," Fraser continued. "Because the motivation starts sliding down, and all of this is about tapping motivation and turning it into high-performance learning for the students."

Creating a faculty career team is not easy, however, said Fraser. In fact, he believes it is the most difficult thing to create, mainly because most staff at a college are of the belief that they are either management or administration, or faculty teaching subjects.

"It's not just a problem in the world of academia. It's a problem in every organization," Fraser said. "You have to create teams and when the teams all come together, you have a culture of an organization."

And when it comes to a school getting accreditation, the value of the program is always what's looked at, he said.



DON FRASER is one of North America's leading authorities on student success and retention. A professor at Durham College for the past 30 years, Don publishes the national bestseller *Making Your Mark*, which has sold over one million copies. Don has delivered student motivation and retention

seminars to over 20,000 college staff at various conferences and at over 350 colleges. He co-designed and implemented Durham's student success program 20 years ago and has been working in this area since that time. Don has done a great deal of research on student success and

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“Are the students satisfied? Can they get a career? Is that pathway reasonable, professional and credible? These are the things they look at. But sometimes when we roll it out, it becomes so micro that the students get lost in all the assignments, in the grading. And many teachers are not delivering the larger picture to students to keep their motivation up, and to turn that motivation into behavior of an everyday work ethic,” Fraser said. “Students have to work every day on the curriculum to build up that skill set so they can compete in the industry. But if the faculty just sees their role as teaching, that won’t happen.”

So what exactly are the steps in putting together a faculty team that can accomplish these goals? It begins in the hiring process, according to Fraser.

“People have to know when they’re hired that, yes, they will be teaching—as a faculty member—a syllabus because of their expertise in being able to deliver content. But they also have to understand they have an additional role in knowing the purpose of delivering the content and to create a skill profile for our students in an industry-career program, and that we have to be contributors to that,” he said. “Management has to impart to faculty that they have two roles: Delivery or the teaching of the content, but also building the program and building the students’ vision of the program. There can be a lot of contributors in different styles to that teamwork. But if it’s not there, a student will constantly wonder why they’re taking all these subjects when nobody really has the commitment to the program that they need to really believe in it. And if we don’t do that in the hiring process there will always be confusion later on when someone says

‘I thought I was just here to teach. I don’t have any other responsibility.’

“In reality, whatever percentage we spend in teaching a curriculum, a similar percentage should be spent delivering and building the program for the student. Yes, what we teach has to be broken down into a mastery of skills and curriculum. But it has to connect to a bigger purpose, and we as faculty have to realize that the most important thing we’re doing is building the student for the purpose of career confidence, employment, and success,” Fraser continued. “It’s not just an assignment and a test. We’re not just building a transcript of grades. We’re building people. We’re there to build students for careers. When we connect as faculty on that, we have a stronger program, we have a more motivated student, and, ultimately, we have stability in our own careers—because if there is no program, there is no teacher.”

Creating a powerful day-one or week-one experience for students can also create a strong faculty team.

“It’s one where the faculty team presents the vision of the program in industry, the skill profile, what we do, our backgrounds, icebreakers with the students, eating with the students, visiting industry with the students. All of that shows that we’re a team,” Fraser said. “And then every three weeks or so we should have something where we bring in an alumni, or bring in an employer. But we have to meet as a faculty to constantly look at what we need to do to create strong industry relationships and confidence of our students about the program and career vision. You can’t do that as a one-man band. One person trying to do it by himself or herself will burn out. It must be a shared effort.”

There are some teachers who have little to no relationship with alumni,

something Fraser said is important to have.

“If you have a faculty member who has no relationship with alumni, then they are doing nothing more than

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delivering content. And if you’re just delivering content, you probably can be replaced by an online program,” he explained. “That’s not being critical of online. It’s just to say you’re just delivering content.

But if we’re delivering ‘building people’ then we need to be having some contact with our alumni; we should be bringing them in as speakers.

“Thomas Edison was very proud of a quote that said, ‘Geniuses build great teams.’ There are five more ways you can build a great team,” said Fraser.

Trust – Establish trust and credibility on day one with the student cohorts in that program, so that you can start to build a connection.

Common vision – It starts with the hiring process and continues every day you are on the job.

Open green thinking – This is a concept that basically says you should do whatever it takes. Do some non-traditional things that a lot of other programs aren’t doing. It could be a career program handbook; it could be speakers coming in, industry visitations, and things like that. All of these things are considered applied learning. In a technical education, there’s knowledge, there’s understanding and there are skills. But the most important is applied knowledge. All these things, even if they don’t fit into one specific subject,

actually fit into all subjects. So when you have a tour of industry, that is more important than any subject delivered for an hour or an afternoon.

Personal authority – Every faculty member must have a personal responsibility to contribute to the program culture, even if they just teach part-time or one subject.

Recognition – It starts in the hiring process when management recognizes in the beginning that each member of the team needs to contribute to, and be committed to, the career culture. It’s also critical that when people do things as a team, management recognizes it as important time spent together, not just teaching in a classroom, because the teaching in a classroom will ultimately be influenced by the program culture.

“I believe this to be a strength-based approach. The number one strength a student wants is a career and the number one thing we’re going to deliver every day, from day one through graduation, is the strength of the program. And the only people who can deliver that are the faculty members,” said Fraser. “We need to go back all the time and let the students demonstrate the strengths of their understanding of the industry, with the speakers, with the alumni, with the trips, etc. And that needs to be understood as applied curriculum, or core curriculum. What’s more important than content? Core curriculum, because the core is the one that builds confidence, motivation and behavior. And when a student has that, they start to have the most important magic I can ever see as a teacher. They start to learn on their own. They start to do the pre-readings on their own. They become more

engaged in the classroom. They do better follow-up. So as opposed to me thinking I have to teach it all, they actually want to learn it because they believe in the vision of the program. And that takes a faculty team.”

“If a school commits to the excellence of creating a faculty team, then that team will create an excellent program for students. But I do not see how you can create a great program without a great faculty team,” said Fraser. “As we go through these dif-

ficult times it will be quality programs with strong teams that will survive the next five years. It will be those programs that really build a student, that are credible with industry and that will create the credibility with themselves, through word on the street, through accreditation, etc. They will be the ones that survive, but that culture won’t be there unless there’s a faculty team creating it.”

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Education
REVIEW**

Written by Cheryl Hentz.