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## Creating Connections, Sharing Successes

Thank you for the invitation to be back home in Kentucky. As Telly noted I spent most of my life in Kentucky and left five years ago to join the Student Affairs team at the University of West Florida in Pensacola.

For those of you who do not know, my Kentucky roots are strong. I was born in Owensboro, grew up in Louisville, received two degrees from the University of Louisville, served on the CPAK board for many years, and spent the early years of my career at Spalding University. While at Spalding I was presented with many challenging opportunities that shaped my success as a student affairs professional and educator today. I served as the Coordinator of Student Development, Dean of Students, and Vice President for Student Affairs. I spent 13.5 years at Spalding and during this time I had responsibility for Student Life, Enrollment Services, Campus Safety, Dining Services, Bookstore, and Facilities Services. At U of L I learned the value of student affairs and the importance of connections. Spalding and U of L are different today than they were when I was there, and this is a good thing. I am grateful for the opportunities I had in Kentucky, and most importantly, I am appreciative of the relationships and connections that were established.

Relationships, Connections, and Success, these are key themes that we will discuss and reflect upon during the next 24 hours. Why did you come to the CPAK meeting? Is it to learn a new skill, to present a successful program or initiative from your campus, to connect with colleagues, to take a break from the office routine, or to be inspired? Think about why you are here and how you can make the theme, “Creating Connections and Sharing Successes”, more meaningful for you.

I want to start with a quote I use often in staff meetings and with student leaders.

***Pieces of a Puzzle***

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, in the book *Living a Life that Matters Most* by Harold Kushner (2001) says, “Each lifetime is the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. For some, there are more pieces. For others, the puzzle is more difficult to assemble. But know this: you do not have within yourself all of pieces to your puzzle. Everyone carries with them at least one and probably many pieces to someone else’s puzzle. Sometimes they know it; sometimes they do not. And when you present your piece, which is worthless to you, to another, whether you know it or not, whether they know it or not, you are a messenger from the Most High.” (pp. 142)

Tonight, one of my goals is to provide you with another piece of your puzzle and to challenge you to meet others, thus share a piece of their puzzle. I believe so much of what we do as student affairs professionals is helping our students to complete their puzzles of life. I also want to challenge you to think about the roles that you play on your campus and do you work to create connections and share successes?

Patricia King noted in *Student Success in College* (Kuh, 2005),

“Students start college with a bag in which they put puzzle pieces they collect during the course of their time in college. Into a bag goes a puzzle piece for every activity, starting with fall orientation, advising sessions, classes, cultural events, residence hall meetings, and so forth. For many students the jumble of pieces does not create a coherent, sensible picture. That is a problem because students who cannot discern meaning from their college activities often report academic difficulty or social isolation, and are at risk of

leaving school. Unlike a jigsaw puzzle that has a picture on the box top, college often comes without directions” (pp. 109).

In student affairs, we help students to make sense of all of the pieces and help to create a beautiful picture. But too often the picture is not clear until graduation or after. I believe we must create the pictures for our newest students so they can begin to put the puzzles together.

As leaders in Student Affairs, and yes, all of us here tonight are leaders regardless of our positions:

- How do we help students to complete college puzzle?
- Why do we do the work that we do with and for students?
- How do we manage change?
- How can we do all of this when our budgets keep getting smaller?
- How can we partner with our colleagues in Academic Affairs?
- How can we stay current in the profession?
- How do we know we are making a difference?

These are all questions we are challenged to answer and think about today in preparation for tomorrow.

To help us think about this, I offer seven important words that start with C, thus the Seven C’s.

- Competence
- Challenges
- Communication
- Conviction
- Colleagueship
- Collaboration
- Connections

## Competence

Let's begin talking about the first of the seven C's, competence. I believe in student affairs we must be competent and be competent as leaders. John Quincy Adams once said, "*If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.*"

How do we stay current and remain competent to meet the challenges, serve students, and be successful? Here are a few things to reflect upon, and questions to think about, related to being and remaining competent to share successes in Education and Student Affairs.

- What credentials do you have and what credentials do you need?
- What books do you read? Some of my favorites are *Student Success in College* by George Kuh, *Learning Reconsidered I and II*, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, *Confidence* by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, *Results that Last* by Quint Studer, and just for fun most books by John Grisham and Harlan Coben.
- What websites do you routinely visit, and I am not talking about e-bay, facebook, MySpace, or shopping.com? Do you visit CNN, MSNBC, NASPA, ACPA, The Chronicle of Higher Education, the American Council on Education, your campus site?
- What are your learning goals, or as Jim Collins would say, do you have a BHAG, Big Hairy Audacious Goal? Your BHAG may be personal, professional, or academic related. My BHAG is to co-write a book. Two of my learning goals for this year are to learn how to use elluminate so I can join meetings and teach face to face remotely. And to keep my facebook page up to date. Former students from Spalding are inviting me to be friends and I forgot my password. Technology has certainly changed how we create connections. My 13 year old daughter Abby helps me with this.
- What do you know about the presidential candidates and their plans for higher education? We have an opportunity to make our votes count and we can facilitate discussions on our campuses about key

political issues. For many of our students this will be the first time to cast a vote in a presidential election. How are we responding?

- Can you describe in 30 seconds or less the value of student affairs, or more specifically, the value of participating in the programs you offer?
- Let me try with this to give you a glimpse of life at UWF. During new student orientation I welcome the new students and families. I tell the students, at UWF we want you to dream big and we want this to be a place where your personal and academic dreams begin to come true. You can do this by making the most of your experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Believe me that the more you put into your UWF experience the more you will gain in return. At UWF, students have names and the buildings have numbers. Share your dreams and we will help them to come true. Now what will you say about your programs. ..

In addition, we need to be willing to admit to what we do not know and be willing to do the research to learn and to stay current in the profession. Each of us as individuals must remain competent, and as leaders we must commit to helping our students and staff members succeed. The degrees we have, the lessons we have learned from experiences, the connections we make will open doors to new opportunities. But we must be ready to walk through the open doors. Are you ready and doing everything you need to do to remain competent and to be competent as a leader?

### **Challenges**

Another important word that starts with C, is challenge, because we face these each and every day. The headline in the Chronicle of Higher Education today read “Florida Faces \$2 Billion Shortfall in Higher Education”. Our attitude helps to determine how we meet and face these challenges. What are some of the challenges we need to be prepared for? I am teaching Budgeting, Finance, and Governance in Higher Education in our master’s program this semester and I am trying to stay current on the challenges we face, but in today’s political environment this is changing every day. Here are a few things that will impact you and our students directly or indirectly: The Association of Governing Boards state the following as key policy issues, thus challenges, for 2008:

- Price of tuition – keeps escalating beyond inflation and Congress has proposed caps and penalties if you exceed the cap
- Student Aid policy and the delay in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act
- Access and Success -- diverse demographics, retention, persistence, success
- Accountability for student learning – student learning outcomes, how do we know if students are learning?
- Consumer information or lack of clear information, particularly First Generation Students– Spellings Commission report, Ad Council “Know How to Go” campaign
- Global Competitiveness
- Aligning the P-20 education system, thus creating more partnerships.

Other challenges include the shrinking state resources we are receiving in higher education. Both Kentucky and Florida face serious issues related to budget reductions and we are all in the process of planning different scenarios to address the challenges. It will not be easy but with conviction, effective communication, competence, collegueship, collaboration, and connections we will make the right choices.

I want to share a brief story to challenge your thinking related to handling adversity and it is about carrots, eggs, and coffee beans.

**ARE YOU A CARROT, AN EGG, OR A COFFEE BEAN?**

by Mary Sullivan - used with her expressed permission.

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as if as soon as one problem was solved a new one arose. Her mother took her to the kitchen.

The mother filled three pots with water.

In the first, she placed carrots.

In the second she placed eggs.  
And the last she placed ground coffee beans.

She let them sit and boil without saying a word. About twenty minutes later, she turned off the burners.

She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl.

Turning to her daughter, she said, "Tell me what you see."

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied. (You know the tone of voice.)

She brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did, and noted that they felt soft and mushy.

She then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg inside.

Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma.

The daughter then asked, "So, what's the point, mother?" (Remember the tone of voice.)

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity - boiling water - but each reacted differently.

The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak.

The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid center. But, after sitting through the boiling water, its insides had become hardened.

The ground coffee beans were unique, however. The bean actually changes the hot water - the very circumstances that bring the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor of the bean. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you instead of letting it change you.

So as you look at the challenges ahead, will you act as a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?  
( from <http://www.new-mind.com/Library/carroteggcoffeebean.htm> website, February 8, 2008)

## **Communication**

The third word that starts with C, is communication. We know the importance of being a great listener; we know the importance of written and oral communications. I want to share a story that looks at communication in a different way.

### **How Things Work in Real Life**

#### *An experiment of leading by example*

Start with a cage containing five monkeys. Inside the cage, hang a banana on a string and place a set of stairs under it. Before long, a monkey will go to the stairs and start to climb towards the banana. As soon as the monkey touches the stairs, spray all of the other monkeys with cold water.

After a while, another monkey makes an attempt with the same result, all the other monkeys are sprayed with cold water. Pretty soon, when another monkey tries to climb the stairs, the other monkeys will try to prevent it.

Now, put away the cold water. Remove one monkey from the cage and replace it with a new one. The new monkey sees the banana and wants to climb the stairs. To this monkey's surprise and horror, all of the other monkeys attack this monkey. After another attempt and attack, this newest monkey knows that to climb the stairs, all the other monkeys will assault the monkey.

Next, remove another of the original five monkeys and replace it with a new monkey. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm!

Likewise, replace a third original monkey with a new one, then a fourth, then the fifth. Every time the newest monkey takes to the stairs it is attacked. Most of the

monkeys beating the newest monkey have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they are participating in the beating of the newest monkey. After replacing all the original monkeys, none of the remaining monkeys have ever been sprayed with cold water. Nevertheless, no monkey ever again approaches the stairs to try for the banana.

Why not? Because as far as all the monkeys know this is the way it's always been done. Something to think about with regards to how many departmental practices begin, are shared, and are perpetuated. This story is written in *Good Practice in Student Affairs: Principles to Foster Student Learning and Staff Development*, by Blimling and Whitt (1999).

How were the monkeys communicating? It was via non-verbals and the influences of others. How do the things we say and do or not say and do influence others? Are we communicating with intentionality or by chance? Do we encourage new staff members to ask questions or do we “attack” them when they want to do something in a different way? In order to create meaningful connections and share successes we must communicate with intentionality and be attentive to non-verbal cues and our attitudes.

### **Conviction**

I have addressed competence, challenges, communication, and now want you to think about conviction. Ruby Bridges, a civil rights pioneer, once said, “Don’t follow the path. Go where there is no path and begin the trail. When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength, and conviction, the only thing that can stop you is you!”

Conviction is the power to do what you believe in and the commitment to make it happen. In Student Affairs we have the responsibility and opportunity to influence the lives of fellow staff members

and the lives of the students we serve. As leaders in the educational enterprise we must have conviction to make a difference. In *Good to Great* (2001), Jim Collins describes the differences between level 4 and level 5 leaders.

Level 4 leaders are committed to the vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision that stimulates high performance standards. Level 4 leaders get things done and make a difference. But, Level 5 leaders have conviction and differ from level 4 leaders in that they, “are ambitious for the cause, the movement, the mission, the work, not themselves and they have the will to do whatever it takes to make good on that ambition”(pp. 11). One level 5 leader noted in *Good to Great*, “I have learned that Level 5 leadership requires being clever for the greater good. In the end, it is my responsibility to ensure that the right decisions happen, even if I don’t have the sole power to make those decisions, and even if those decisions could not win a popular vote. The only way I can achieve that is if people know that I’m motivated first and always for the greatness of our work, not myself” (pp. 11).

Level 5 leaders have conviction. Do you have the conviction to make the right decisions, take the right actions, to take the right stands, in order to make a difference in the lives of the students we serve?

### **Colleagueship, Collaboration, and Connections**

The final three C’s are all interrelated and dependent on one another, colleagueship, collaboration, and connections. So I have decided to discuss these together instead of separately. You have not and will not achieve success alone. Along the way, parents, family members, friends, teachers, colleagues, and mentors have supported and guided you. Colleagues are the folks we work with at our institutions, at other institutions, folks at our table this evening, folks

in professional organizations, and our future colleagues in our graduate programs. I remember in the doctoral program at Louisville, Dr. Strobe, Dr. Cuyjet and Dr. Golden referred to the students as colleagues. This made an impact on me as it helped me to understand the power and influence of the people in our profession. You have many colleagues in your life and remember these colleagues may share puzzle pieces with you when you least expect it.

Let me share a story about the value of connections and how they happen when you least expect it.

Shortly before I finished dinner alone at the 2002 NASPA conference in Boston, a woman carrying a large envelope walked up to order carryout. I asked if by chance she was attending the NASPA conference. I believe well over half of the restaurant patrons were NASPA attendees. She said yes and we introduced ourselves to one another. She planned to order carryout and go to her room and review her notes for her interest session the following morning. Her co-presenter got sick and was unable to make the trip. Needless to say she looked frazzled. In a few short minutes we discovered that we were both SSAO's and agreed to meet for coffee during the conference. You know how that is, you say you will meet but you never do because you get too busy or your paths do not cross during the conference. With over 3,000 student affairs professionals in attendance staying in several different hotels, I did not believe we would actually connect.

I was from a small private university in Kentucky; she was from a large private technical school in New York. She brought her whole Student Affairs team to NASPA and I traveled alone. What did we have in common?

Lucky for me, I was wrong and this networking connection was meant to be! Mary Beth and I crossed paths several times during the conference. We met coming to and going from sessions. We talked during the opening reception and introduced one another to colleagues as "new friends."

Remember we had only met the night before but we treated one another like long-time colleagues. We crossed paths at the Harvard Education Seminars reception for alumni and realized another commonality. We agreed to meet for tea on Tuesday afternoon and learned that we have more similarities than differences. Mary Beth and I are wives, mothers, SSAO's, community volunteers, and women with aspirations to succeed and make the most of our personal and professional lives. Wow, I feel so fortunate to have met Mary Beth.

We exchanged cards and agreed to stay in touch. Over the next several months we exchanged e-mails, shared stories about our work, and agreed to work on professional development activities together. I took a new job in Florida and Mary-Beth served as a sounding board for questions about making a move.

Over the past few years we have continued to re-connect where our relationship began at the NASPA conference. One of our joint dreams is to write and/or edit a book together. We are working on this and I know that one day our dream will become a reality. We spend hours talking about what is missing in the literature for women student affairs professionals and one day we hope to fill this gap.

What is the lesson in this story? Mary-Beth and I agree that our paths crossed for a reason. Simply put, it was a fortuitous encounter. And our common vision is to share our wisdom and experiences with other student affairs professionals, while continuing to develop ourselves. Another reason is for us to be great colleagues and great friends. Student Affairs is fundamentally about relationships, and we feel fortunate that our chance encounter lead to new opportunities and a great partnership.

Maybe, the new colleague is at the 2008 CPAK conference, you never know...

Let's talk a moment about extraordinary colleagues who you may refer to as Mentors. Mentors will continue to come in and out of your life. Mentors leave us with an insight, a kernel of truth, or a

piece of wisdom. Mentors plant seeds that germinate for a lifetime and they challenge us to move on and help our organizations grow and embrace new possibilities. Mentors also remind us of the profound power of learning and the promise of moving on. Think for a moment about the mentors in your life and the mentors who guide you on your professional journey. How have you been inspired by your mentors? And how have you, as a mentor, inspired others, specifically your students?

We are not on the journey in student affairs alone and by creating connections we create successes along the way. This happens as a result of collaboration. In *Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (2006), the authors suggest that the “holistic process of learning that places the student at the center of the learning experience demands collaboration, and collaboration demands cultural change (back cover).” Are we collaborating with intentionality? Can you give an example of a collaborative effort that you lead on your campus?

One of my favorite books is by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Confidence, How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin and End*. She describes winning sports teams, successful organizations and international companies, schools in crisis, and losing teams and how they differ and how leaders make a difference. She notes the following four things that leaders need to do to promote collaboration and ultimately restore folk’s confidence in one another: “One, get connected in new ways through conversations, two, carry out important work jointly, three, communicate respect, and four, demonstrate inclusion”(2004, pp. 241). Sounds simple enough.

When we collaborate, amazing things happen. In *Learning Reconsidered 2*, the authors note these measurable outcomes from collaboration:

- Collaboration makes better use of all the available talent
- Collaboration reorients and links resources in ways that the total value of them is greater than the sum of their parts

- Collaboration forms new networks of ideas and resources
- Collaboration creates a spectrum of new and healthy cultural norms that transform working relationships and re-focus energy away from competition and the maintenance of silos and toward cross-functional planning and shared responsibility for learning.

This is why we are in this profession, to help our students to learn inside and outside of the classroom.

I challenge you to be leaders in collaboration and it is my belief that we have to be the ones to reach out to other departments on our campuses. We have created countless numbers of partnerships with faculty and other administrators at UWF and this has truly made a positive impact on the success of the programs and services for our students. Take a chance and collaborate with a new faculty member and I am sure you will be pleased with the response.

Another quote from Moss-Kanter is about the essence of leaders. “Leadership is not about the leader, it is about how he or she builds the confidence in everyone else. Leaders are responsible for both the big structures that serve as the cornerstones of confidence and for the human touches that shape a positive emotional climate to inspire and motivate others” (2004, pp.325). I challenge you to be a leader who builds confidence in others and makes connections with others!

Tonight, I have focused on building puzzles of life and the seven C’s of competence, challenges, communication, conviction, collegueship, collaboration, and connections that lead us to “Create Connections and Share Successes”. In order to be successful we must be realistic about the opportunities ahead and the challenges we face in this new century. Last week while reading NASPA Executive Director Gwen Dungy’s monthly update I was struck by the significance of her reminder to us as professionals. She shared a story from the Alice Manicur Symposium for Women Aspiring to be Senior Student Affairs Officers. It is worth sharing with you tonight in case you did not see it.

“At the Alice Manicur Symposium, some participants paused to question whether or not to pursue senior-level positions, despite having the skills necessary to be outstanding senior administrators. Their mentors, in many cases, made significant personal sacrifices to attain such positions. However, this is not a precedent that the rising generation of student affairs administrators necessarily wants to continue. Having a desire for life beyond the job is not something to feel guilty about. In fact, it is important for those of us who serve as role models to show glimpses into the other side of our lives, which include good doses of leisure and laughter, to those with whom we work and those aspiring to enter the field. Indeed, balancing work and life may not be as difficult as you think. Gwen recently learned about a great concept called *binge chillin'*. Colleagues say that to binge chill (BC) is to do whatever you want, as long as it is not work-related, for a minimum of 24 hours-without guilt! Our aspiring student affairs professionals are making it clear that they do not want to do student affairs work as it has always been done. We've changed with the times in so many other ways that Gwen is confident we can also learn to pause, relax, and binge chill! Perhaps it can become a habit that we can all incorporate into our busy and productive lives.”

In order to create connections that last and are meaningful and share our successes we must have a life outside of our work and binge chill! Take time for yourself, make time to connect with your family and friends and share your successes with them. I can assure you that I am successful because of the encouragement and sacrifices of friends, family, colleagues, mentors and students. It is my husband John, 13 year old daughter, Abby and 10 year old son, John David who remind me of the value of life. Sue Monk Kidd wrote in her book, *First Light*

(2006), “The only monument that matters may be the work of love we carve into the lives around us”(p. 40).

As student affairs professionals we impact the lives of our families, friends, colleagues and our students every day and are creating monuments filled with love, caring, compassion, and conviction. As Ruby Bridges said, “When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength, and conviction the only thing that can stop you is you!” And finally, in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “You are a very special person – become what you are.”

Let’s Create Connections and Share Successes!

Thank you!

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