

Chad Flynn: Transcript

Introductions, Role and Leadership Focus

Time: 2:48

Question: Please introduce yourself and your role and what your leadership focus has been for the past year or a few years?

Hi, my name is Chad Flynn and I am the Dean of Trades and Technology and Medicine, had college in medicine, had Alberta, which is in the South Eastern corner of the great province of Alberta. What has been my leadership focus for the past few years? Well, I've had two main focal points in regard to my leadership. Number one is to provide support and remove any roadblocks for my faculty and my staff so that they can do the best for their students. And the second is to provide an empathetic environment with a focus on learner centered teaching. So that requires me to make sure that I'm there to listen to the students as well as my faculty and staff. And again, it goes back to my first of just providing that support. But the support isn't just there for the faculty and staff, it's also there for the students. And so I work a lot with making sure that relationships between students and faculty are good. And if they're not, I'm there to help facilitate those discussions so that they can come to some sort of resolution.

What role do I think leadership plays in managing change in my field? Leadership is absolutely key and managing change in our fields, we need to be aware of what's happening in the changing fields with the changing technologies, changing pedagogy, different thoughts and different practices that are being done out there. And we don't have to be experts, but we do need to be informed. So I think it's very important that we do our due diligence to make sure we know what's going on out there. We also need to have an open mind. This is the time to support out of the box thinking and I'm not saying, don't be critical, but you should be open. You should always be asking yourself, is this going to serve the student best? And if it is, it's something that you should consider. And also make sure that you're bouncing ideas off of other leaders, even bouncing ideas off of other leaders within your own organization or own school. And I'm thinking about our coordinators and our department chairs and just our leaders in our groups. So bouncing ideas off of them and collaborating with them. Again, we, leadership comes from the top-down, obviously in some of these great ideas that come, they need the support of the administration. And oftentimes we talk about this grassroots thing or instructors--And I've been there myself--where instructors can come up with ideas and, and start them at that level. But now as an administrator, I feel like I have a responsibility to provide support for those people who are in the grass, in the weeds or whatever you want to call it. And who have these ideas and to give them the support that they need from the top now, so instead of a bottom-up approach, I'm taking more of a top-down, approach them out there looking to see what others are doing and to see how I can provide support in that.

Unique Challenges

Time: 2:30

Q: What are the unique challenges I faced when trying to manage change for learning in digital environments?

Chad:

What are the unique challenges I faced when trying to manage change for learning in digital environments? I have, my area is in trades and technology, which requires a lot of hands-on training. So when the pandemic of COVID-19 first started, many before this said that these disciplines could not be taught online. That there's just no point in even trying. However, the pandemic proved this false. We had to jump online, we had to get out of the classrooms just like everybody else. So we had to come up with ways to make sure our students, we're still getting the outcomes that they needed To continue on in their education and continue on in their careers. It did require a bit of thinking outside of the box and that still occurring to this day. But what I'm seeing is a lot of creative, innovative ideas that are still being easy as we transition back to face-to-face, slowly, we're starting to see a lot of these good ideas that were done in the online version, also being done in this face-to-face version. Another challenge area for me as many trades instructors had an aversion to technology. They just, they would rather use the tools and rather than the tech. And what we found actually is at the beginning of the whole jumping to online, our instructors were maybe a little bit behind the curve. However, they quickly got ahead of the curve and surpassed many schools in the innovative ideas because honestly they are problem-solvers. That's what they do. They diagnose, they troubleshoot, they fix. And so we just had to listen to them. We had to look at the ideas that they were coming up with and we had to champion the ones that wrote them and provide them the support that they needed in order to do that. Now, does that mean that this is all perfect? No. By no means there was a lot of mistakes made along the way. There were a lot of things that didn't really work out as well as we thought, but at least we experimented and we, we worked with them. Another thing that we also did and made sure we did was involved the students and all of this. We let them know right from the beginning that this is new for everybody, that we required their input. They were the number one stake holders and all of this. So what was working, what wasn't engaging in conversations with your students, right from the get-go is just great pedagogy anyways. But in all of this, they're the ones that basically taught us how to use backchannels. We've got a lot of instructors now who use Slack or Discord or matter most that are using these backchannels to powerfully run their classes. It's giving voices to students and never had voices before. So there's a lot of opportunity here, and yes, there is a lot of challenges. But again, these challenges provided opportunity and in my discipline of trades and technology, they just rose ahead and shone.

Issues to Consider

Time: 4:23

Q: What is one overarching technology issue that all educational leaders are going to need to consider and how am I addressing it in my context?

Education has changed drastically and this has opened our eyes to the needs of more, a more flexible model. No longer is the student straight out of high school and right into higher ed. When I went to school, back in my day. It was you went to high school, then you split off. You either went to trade school or you went into college slash university and work through all that. Now, we're seeing that we don't have to follow that model. There's a lot of people out there who are working full-time, who still want to have an education, want to better themselves. We have single parents out there. We have parents with children that are in school and so they're not able to go to school full time. They have to have a full-time job, as well as providing accessibility for the kids. So, this is an issue. Anything something that we really need to address. An area that we're really looking at doing this and the way we're addressing it at our colleges were really embracing HyFlex and HyFlex, meaning that you can, our students have the choice of showing up and attending face-to-face. They also have the choice of attending synchronously online, or they also have the choice of attending asynchronously in watching the videos later. Now this does not mean that we're just pointing webcams at instructors while they do their lectures. This is an entire shift to the model. And this is, it's a challenge and it's an area that we're all working on. But we're working through the different pedagogy. How can we, instead of just recording three hour lectures or an hour long lecture, can we make this more interactive so that it can be done online, face-to-face or online later on? And how can we create community and all that? So these are some of the challenges that we're looking at. But I look at our CAD BEAT programs as an architectural, built engineering or environment engineering program. They've been doing it for the past six months. They did at previous to this school year as a pilot and they've really been doubling down on it. And they really work hard at it. So they, they've made sure that the students are involved, whether they decide to be synchronously or asynchronously. And it's been absolutely phenomenal to see the amount of work and the engagement with the students. There's, there are a lot of challenges and those are still things that are going through and there's not anything that I can even get into scratching the surface on in just answering this question. But it's just an area that we're really looking at. How can we engage with their students in this flexible manner? We have students that, because we're in Southeast Alberta, live in rural communities where we are the closest post-secondary Institute. But it's still quite a commute for them to come. So why not have them be able to attend from somewhere else? We have students that want to take programs at our college that are not available anywhere else. So instead of having to move to Medicine Hat is there not a way that they can get the same sort of education online? And so these are some of the things we're working through. So I really do believe that education has changed. I do believe that it's opened up to a more flexible model. And it's just something that we need to really do a lot more research into it, a lot more practice in and again, as I've said before, we're going to make a lot of mistakes along the way. There'll be some hiccups. But as long as we're engaging with the instructors, the faculty administrator, and especially the students I really do think we're going to have some success.

Chad: Is there anything else I would like to share? There is so much going on right now as far as education is concerned, I sometimes get completely overwhelmed. I do get excited by it, but I am overwhelmed by it. One thing I would say is get out there and talk to your faculty and find out what they're doing. Get out there they go and see what they're doing. Because oftentimes I

found in the past, it is the quiet ones that are doing the most innovative things. They're not out there with the lights on them saying, look at what I'm doing there. Just they've got their head down and they're doing the work and it's working for them. And sometimes they don't even realize how innovative that they are. I've seen that happen so many times in my school where I have, as an example, a carpentry instructor who does reflective journaling. His students have to submit a journal entry every day. He just thought this is a good idea when it's something that he wanted to practice with his class. He didn't realize how revolutionary this was. So in a very humble instructor, in fact, most of my instructors, all my instructors are. But they, they're doing these things at a necessity because if they see a problem and they're fixing it, they're not shouting it from the mountain tops. So get down in the trenches, find out what your faculty and staff are doing. Listen to their ideas. No matter how quiet they are, the ones that wouldn't say boo to you in the hallway because they just want to get to the classroom to deal with their students, find out what they're doing, have conversations, spark up relationships with these instructors and support staff and find out what is working out there and how can you support them.