President’s Report  
State Board of Community Colleges  
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Over the last six years, you have often heard me use the phrase, “It’s a community college kind of day.” I came to that term after repeatedly interacting with the people that make our System great – dedicated faculty and staff and engaging students whose real life stories never cease to amaze.

“A community college kind of day” came to refer to any event or encounter with a person who embodied the best of our great System – the spirit, the determination and the passion.

Several months ago, our System Office employees began to talk about identifying the core values and vision that drive the work we do here. It includes and embodies much of the same type of feelings that you have on the campuses, but with a different twist. We exist to support, advocate and to some degree, oversee or regulate what our colleges do and how they fulfill that goal of taking someone from where they are and carry them as far as they can go.

The associate vice presidents took on the task of helping to refine first the core values for our employees and then a vision statement. These words separately and together were to represent the way we do business, the way we come together as units and teams and the way we hope we appear to the external world. I like to think of them as the family principles.

Through survey tools, focus groups and the lives of many post-it notes and markers, a team, led by Dr. Matt Meyer, Maureen Little, Chreatha Alston and two new employees, Anne Bacon and Maria Pharr, talked, facilitated, defined and refined words until they hit on the following four:

Integrity, Accountability, Collaboration and Service.

We were so excited about these terms we immediately ordered lanyards touting our newly identified core values, but the truth is, our core values are so much more than a certain typeface on a giveaway. If they are not lived and exhibited each day, then they are only empty promises.

I applaud every System Office employee who participated in the core-value identification process because you all got it right. These truly are our family principles and I know that because I see people demonstrating these daily.

For example, accountability: One of our most incredible employees is Lynda Wilkins. Now, you have probably only seen Lynda in the State Board meeting in January, 2012
when you recognized her as the MVP, but Lynda is a master at ensuring that all the data on our customized training projects is accurate, on time and understandable. She is the person who annually compiles all the data and information on hundreds of training projects and brings it to you for your approval each August. I don’t know what Lynda’s middle name is but it should be accountability.

With a staff reduction of 25 percent since 2008, collaboration has to be a big part of the way you do business. But there is the concept of collaboration, and then there is the opportunity presented by a dire situation when you truly see how collaborative you really are. Collaboration put to the test, if you will. That happened when the Heart Bleed Bug struck the electronic nerve center of our colleges and the System Office. When the bug hit on April 3, it impacted all of the administrative servers at the 58 colleges, as well as the systems here in our offices. A cross-divisional team from our Technology Solutions Division sprang into collaborative action and within 24 hours a solution was developed, tested and released to the colleges.

But as the agency that supports our colleges, there may be no greater value that we can live and add than outstanding service to our colleges and to one another. A Sandhills Community College employee nominated Alan Tucker in College and Career Readiness because he does “…an outstanding job of providing customer service and valuable information…” to the colleges across the state. “Alan is helping provide crucial information and data that we need to make informed management decisions (and) is helping us better understand how the data he is supplying is impacting our performance and funding,” his nomination read.

And finally, I have always felt that the most important characteristic of leadership is integrity. A few days ago, I was signing an employment certificate for Alice Smith, our 1993 President’s Award winner and our Associate Vice for State-Level Accounting and Operations who will begin her fortieth year of state service this year. I recall learning and working closely with Alice almost twenty years ago as a young, green program director here at the System Office. From that time forward, Alice has always been been for me a model of integrity here at our System Office, not to mention accountability, service, and collaboration. Frequently, I observe Alice leaving the building and crossing the street to her car way past the close of normal business hours, and I wonder what motivates her to keep doing that after 40 years of dedication, and I like so many others here dread the day when she decides to stop.

So accountability, integrity, collaboration and service. These core values led our team to take the next step of identifying a vision statement. What do we want our work to look like? What do we envision as our ultimate goal?

Developing that type of statement for five people would be challenging but developing it for everyone ranging from accountants to workforce professionals and in every division was daunting. Again, the core-value team came up big. They took input from many employees, hours of discussion and distilled it to one phrase:
“One team with one voice... serving 58.”

I’ll admit that identifying the core values and vision statement wasn’t a top-down effort. I’ve typically been skeptical of vision or mission statements; because I’ve found that too often they are quite the opposite of how some organizations actually work. However, in this instance, I’m proud to acknowledge that the work, the considerable thought and the leadership these individuals brought to this process resulted in the crafting of a vision and values that are a true indication of the work we do, and aspire to do, each day.

Now that we’ve identified these values and the vision of our organization, it’s up to us – each of us – to move forward as individuals and as the collective “we” to truly embody all that they imply. We’ve all got to take a page from Lynda, Alice, our IT team and Alan, and from each of our MVPs and MVTeams that you help us recognize each month. The values and vision are decided, now we have to live them.

Recently, a staff member experienced some technical difficulties with her computer. Following our normal internal processes, she entered a ticket with our IT Department’s Help Desk. Less than five minutes later, she received a response from Help Desk staff that they were working to troubleshoot the issue. Her immediate reaction was to thank her co-worker for their service.

How did the co-worker respond?

“One team, one voice.”

That’s a System Office kind of day.