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Innovative Reflection Tools for Developing Leadership for Transformation

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SESSION PROPOSAL:
INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

INNOVATIVE REFLECTION TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP FOR TRANSFORMATION

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Program Description
Reflection is a critical element used to transform individuals into leaders. The purpose of this engaging workshop is to offer a variety of innovative reflection tools that can be used by leadership academics and practitioners in various settings. Each tool presented will be taught, practiced, and shared.
**Abstract**

Since developing leadership is seeded in learning, there is a continuous effort to understand the most effective methods and techniques to assist individuals in becoming leaders. The purpose of this engaging workshop is to offer a variety of innovative tools that both academics and practitioners can use with adult learners in various settings to help them further develop leadership knowledge, competencies, and skills through enhanced reflection experiences.

We cannot help create *leaders who transform* without helping them first be *transformed* by their own learning experiences. Learning that *transforms* individuals is learning that *changes* individuals. Since developing leadership is a transforming process, transformational learning theory provides a valuable theoretical lens to guide this session. Merriam and Caffarella (1995) explained that “transformational learning theory is about change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 318). They explained that this kind of learning is more than merely adding to what we already know. It shapes people; “they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47). Mezirow (1991) and Merriam and Caffarella (1995) argue that this theory focuses on three core components: 1) Mental construction of experience: through engaging with each life experience to make meaning that there is an opportunity for a change in perspective and behavior; 2) Critical reflection: effective learning follows effective reflection, not from the experience itself; individuals must not only think about their experiences, but they must also examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that influence how they make sense of their experiences; and 3) Development and action: to truly transform, they need to try out their new knowledge, skills, or roles and then build new competence and self-confidence. Hence, critical reflection is one of the three core components of transformational learning, and we would argue that it is also a critical component of the leadership development process.

In this 90-minute session (we can adjust to 75 minutes, if necessary), participants will learn about the reflection tools, practice using them, and then share their experiences with others in small groups. Each participant will receive a packet that includes descriptions of each tool, technique, and activity. This will include references and lists of additional resources. Here is an outline of our proposed session:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Session overview
   a. What are the session objectives?
   b. What is reflection? (flip chart activity)
   c. Why do reflection? (includes introduction of theoretical framework already described)
3. Reflection tools (each will have a short explanation, opportunity to practice the tool, and duo or trio sharing exercise, and implications to practice discussion):
   a. ORID Reflection Process: Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional Data
   c. Journaling Reflection Process
d. Reflective activities: (e.g., Moods, Body Parts, Quotes, Ball of String, Poem/book, and Brainstorm Groups (linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, musical, mover, mathematical))
e. ABC/123 Reflection Model
f. Other tools (ideas from participants)

4. Debrief: overall implications to practice in the leadership education and leadership development programs

5. Summary, next steps

Through extensive work with reflection processes, we have discovered that most college and university students (particularly undergraduates) and many employees do not understand, take the time, and/or fully engage in a critical reflection process that could assist them in transformational learning experiences. Dilworth (2009) agrees:

It takes time and practice to unlock the ability to reflect. The art of critical reflection takes even longer, and some never get there. However, once the impasse is breached and reflection starts to occur naturally and routinely, the individual can feel empowered and in control of their own life. That can be a liberating experience. When the reflection pushes to the deeper levels of self, it becomes possible to jettison dysfunctional assumptions and behaviors. Deep learning can then occur. It can become transformative learning. The individual is elevated to a new plateau of self-awareness. At this point, it becomes what can be called emancipatory learning--throwing off the self-imposed, and frequently externally imposed, chains that have been constraining clear thinking and advance. Reflection in the end is a dialogue with self.

Most leadership courses and leadership development programs do not assist participants in developing the skills to learn to reflect at the breadth and depth just described. We argue that it is through a host of reflective tools and experiences that individuals can develop true critical reflective skills and habits. This workshop can assist educators and practitioners in being aware of the variety of techniques available and give them practice to enhance these skills. They can immediately begin to implement what they have learned, into their own settings.