

'ACTION CONVERSATIONS:' REPORTING TEMPLATE

Date, Time, and Place of Conversation: Thursday, September 18, 2014

Duration of the Conversation: one hour – 12 noon to 1:00 p.m.

Conveners: Sarah Blakeslee, Annette Heilesen, Sandra MacNevin

Moderator: Sarah Blakeslee

Recorder: Joanne Davis

Number of Participants: 5 participants, including facilitator and recorder

Type of Participants: staff, managers, and retiree

Theme # 5 – Staff Renewal

The major ideas / proposed actions / implementation steps/ assessment of priorities emerging from this conversation are:

1. Professional Development:

- Staff noted that there needs to be more mentoring and training in order to assist staff employees with advancement and promotions within the University. Cross training by managers would be one way to achieve this goal, as it would allow employees to learn new skills from other areas. This would give staff employees an advantage when applying for other positions that advance their careers as they would have some hands-on experience related to the new position.
- It was recommended that supervisors develop ways to expose staff to new opportunities; for example, by backfilling vacant positions.

2. Technological Tools to Support Staff:

- Staff noted that in order to keep up with changing technology and job requirements, it is important for managers to provide additional flextime so that staff members are able to attend needed training.
- It was recommended that “alert e-mails” be sent out to all staff, notifying them of upcoming workshops related to upgrading technology skills.

- It was noted that we need to be more proactive about communicating to staff members about what training and resources are available.

3. Staff Wellness

- Staff noted that when they have to take time off work for various reasons (e.g. illness, vacation, family emergencies, etc.) they are under a lot of stress as there is no backup employee to do the work that piles up in their absences. In addition, managers will often push the work on to another staff member who has not been trained in that area, causing stress on the employee left to backfill. In order to address this issue, it was recommended that management create a backup system by cross training employees. This would be a proactive strategy and would reduce stress for all staff involved.
- Staff recommended that managers provide more flextime for staff employees so that staff have the opportunity to participate in campus events as well as additional training that will help them do a better job.
- Staff noted that morale is extremely low on campus and that staff need to feel valued especially by faculty employees.
- Staff noted that they do not feel respected by faculty, and that they would like to find a way to communicate to faculty the nature and challenges of the staff employees' work. Staff noted that faculty and staff alike have the same goal of supporting student success. Staff noted that a culture change is needed to bridge the faculty/staff divide.
- Staff noted that in order for faculty to develop an appreciation for staff and their contributions to the University, this will have to modeled by senior managers and at the deans' level.

4. Building Community as Part of Staff Renewal

- Staff noted that there are too many silos on campus, and staff expressed their feelings of being disconnected from other staff on campus.
- It was suggested that more communication is needed about events that bring staff together. These mixers, such as the "Koffee and Kudos" event are best practices we might consider modeling, and also develop new clubs and organizations that provide an opportunity for staff from different areas of the campus to get together.
- It was suggested that managers develop events that promote this kind of mixing of staff from various departments and units.
- Staff recommended that managers and supervisors be provided with training on how to manage staff employees in their units. In addition, it was suggested that

Human Resources might provide opportunities when onboarding new supervisors and provide training that addresses supervisory best practices and skills.

- It was also suggested that managers create more collaborative work groups whereby staff share responsibility for outcomes, have complementary skills, and are able to backfill for each other.
- It was noted that there is a need to recognize staff accomplishments and to celebrate the value and contributions of staff across all job classifications and groupings.
- It was recommended that additional staff recognition programs be developed, in addition to the annual staff award ceremony, and the suggestion was made that perhaps Staff Council might take the lead in this area.
- In addition, it was recommended that faculty be encouraged to recommend staff for awards. With this kind of engagement by faculty, perhaps it would help faculty better understand the job duties of staff employees in their units and would enhance the respect that faculty and staff should have for each other.