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Subject: Update March 20

Dear LSC Community:

It is Friday. Today marks the end of our second week of “spring break” and the beginning of a weekend very much needed by one and all to recharge, relax, and maybe take a walk, watch a movie, or read a book that has nothing to do with viruses or the stresses we have faced around our shifting work lives. It is actually good to know that we have another week to make final adjustments to our new routine before we bring back our students and begin anew the work to help them navigate this new learning environment.

We have reassured our campus community that all employees are working within the established safe practices away from campus or on campus with recommended safeguards in place, and have the clear assurance that everyone will get the full paycheck and benefits they are counting on as promised by their work schedule (see the latest email from LSC-News and postings from Human Resources on the LSC website). Those who are **essential** to our operation are working out staggered or limited campus work hours with their supervisors so we can serve those students who must be able to be here F2F. We practice physical distancing with social solidarity. Time for all of us to enjoy a weekend.

If you have not gathered by now, you should know that I am a pretty voracious reader. I usually have two or three books going at once, and I love to re-read books, whether they are my favorite total escape mystery novels or books that make me think. Last night I turned the pages of an old favorite called “Awake at Work” by Michael Carroll (2004). It’s not what you think...it’s not about chocolate snacks or energy drinks.

This book gives us a Buddhist perspective on the working world, and provides 35 practical principles (presented as slogans) that anyone can consider and apply in their daily work life. OK, before you wonder *what in the world? This does not sound like an LSC update...* stay with me a minute, you might find this interesting.

Carroll discusses using these principles/slogans to find work balance and, I would say, a certain calm, in the whirl-wind that work can be...particularly in the times we are currently experiencing. All of the other principles revolve around four primary slogans: 1) Balance the Two Efforts, 2) Be Authentic, 3) Cultivate *Li*, and 4) Work is a Mess.

Let’s take a brief look at the fourth slogan, as that one seems to be the most relevant for the historic times we are experiencing today.*

Carroll opens the chapter on the Work is a Mess slogan thusly:

“Many of us come to work with the hope that we can control our jobs. We want to be the capable authors of our work, not helpless victims of unplanned circumstance. We want to feel on top of our game and in command of the details, and we want work to stay in place, so that we don’t need to worry.

“Yet work will not stay in place, despite all our efforts (pg. 47).”

Sounds like the COVID-19 crisis, right? Sounds remarkably like what I have heard many of our colleagues at LSC express as I walk around the campus: “I just want this to stop.” “I feel out of control. I am worried, but I am getting better.” Translation: Our work has been upended, we are doing our very best to adjust, but we really would prefer to have all of this go back to “normal.”

Yet, work will not stay in place...

Carroll describes an ancient general’s thoughts on how to cope with the shifting tides of war (Digression: See what I did there? I connected today’s update with my update on March 17th comparing Churchill and the WWII themes with our COVID crisis...oops, keep reading):

“In the ancient Chinese text “The Art of War,” the renowned strategist-general Sun Tzu gives the following instruction:

***‘When in battle,
Use the orthodox to engage,
Use the extraordinary to attain victory.’***

“While our workplace may not be a battlefield, Sun Tzu’s words contain some sound advice on how to relate skillfully to work’s surprises (pgs. 48-49).”

Sun Tzu wanted his war leaders to be battle-ready with finely-honed traditional fighting skills and well-practiced every-day “orthodox” tactics, theories, and strategies poised for engagement in battle. But to attain the actual victory, Sun Tzu schooled his warrior leaders in the art of flexibility, resilience, adaptability, and readiness to handle unpredictable change within the chaos that is war.

How the warrior leader prepares and remains ready for the many unanticipated weather, equipment, or personnel changes that war might bring was most important to Sun Tzu. Carroll states:

“...the warrior leader must possess victory in the very fiber of his or her being from the very start, before the battle even begins. Sun Tzu teaches that the warrior leader must be relaxed and open to the present moment at all times. The

more at ease the warrior is with the situation at hand, the more open and powerful and fearless he or she becomes as a leader. Sun Tzu's instruction on engaging the extraordinary is to first 'know oneself' and, through that knowing, to work directly with conflict, appreciate the immediate moment, and let natural intelligence arise. In short, be awake! (pg. 50)."

Sun Tzu suggests that we school ourselves to negate over-reactions, no falling into rumor traps, no unsubstantiated assumptions, keeping steady yet knowing that at any time things can (and do) change and require something beyond what we trained and prepared to do. And that some of these things are beyond our routines, practices, plans, schedules, assumptions, and business-as-usual routines: "...according to Sun Tzu, we will never succeed at work if we rely exclusively on such [routine and usual] things. Only by remaining alert and open to the extraordinary events—the untidy and unpredictable—and engaging them directly and openly can we truly succeed" (pg. 50).

And to put this advice to practical use, Carroll suggests an adaptation of Sun Tzu's advice to warrior leaders on the battlefield for consideration by all of us in the workplace:

**"When at work,
Use established routines to pursue objectives,
Use messiness and surprises to innovate and succeed (pg. 50)."**

I see and hear people already using the historic COVID-19 crisis to practice exactly this modification of Sun Tzu's war tactics for moving forward in times of messiness forced upon our usual work routine: Faculty who have never taught online have found new ways of implementing ideas and concepts in ways they had not tried in "traditional" face-to-face classes; Student affairs staff finding new ways to connect with prospective students and newly enrolled students in ways they will likely continue in future, adding these strategies for connecting to students under different circumstances; Staff who have had to re-think their day into new ways of handling their assigned work, staying healthy, and ensuring that they hold up their part in keeping LSC strong and vibrant. Amazing work all around!

I will conclude this update with the closing sentences of Carroll's chapter on Work is a Mess. He so clearly sums up the sentiment I want to convey as we move into next week:

"By engaging the attitude that work is a mess, we can learn to relax and be curious about the surprises and interruptions. By engaging the messiness of work directly—appreciating both advantages and disadvantages—we become fully equipped to engage such events in all their variations. We have the ingenuity, good humor, and curiosity to adapt and innovate—to be victorious no matter what the circumstances" (pg. 51).

Thank you for all you do for LSC. Thank you for your warrior leader spirit. Have a wonderful weekend.

*If you like this one, I could return later to the other three. Just let me know.

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