



CALL TO ACTION

Stephanie Hirsh

How learning shaped my leadership

Knowing this will be my last opportunity to write this column as Learning Forward’s executive director, I want to share a few insights on habits I’ve found valuable as a leader. Not surprisingly, they are built on a foundation of continuous learning.

ESTABLISH YOUR EXPERTISE

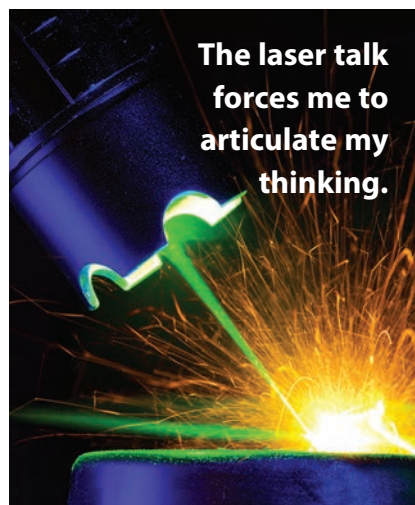
As educators, we are often expected to know a lot about many things, but there is also value in developing an area of expertise. Deep expertise in one subject is where you set yourself apart and where people are more likely to trust, seek, and engage you in important issues and work.

Setting aside time to read and learn every day is essential to establishing that expertise. This reading and reflection ensures you don’t miss important findings that have substantive implications for your agenda. One example of change that can result from this is Learning Forward’s recent commitment to curriculum-focused professional learning.

To strengthen your point of view, pay attention to the research base as well as new trends. And to reduce the chance of developing blind spots or missing opportunities, read what both fans and critics have to say.

HAVE YOUR LASER TALK READY

One of the most important tools I have acquired is the laser talk — a brief, compelling statement that outlines a problem and solution, concluding with



a request for action. The format guides my speeches, facilitation of learning experiences, and writing.

The laser talk forces me to articulate my thinking. It requires me to delineate a clear problem, substantiate it with facts, and present a realistic solution. The concluding call to action is most effective when it is something listeners recognize within their sphere of responsibility and influence. This helps all of us work together to accomplish collective goals and address the needs of the field.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH AMAZING PEOPLE

One of the most rewarding aspects of my career has been the relationships I have developed with people who have motivated me to learn and grow.

At my very first conference, I met Madeline Hunter and Susan Loucks-

Horsley, both of whom presented in ways that inspired me to think about the kind of professional learning leader I wanted to be.

Under the tutelage of Dennis Sparks, executive director emeritus, I deepened my knowledge base and honed my skills. He often challenged my thinking, and, over time, I learned the value of being open to all points of view. This relationship was key to embedding this value in the Learning Forward staff norms.

While there are many others who supported my growth, in particular I want to acknowledge Gerald Ponder, Hayes Mizell, Joellen Killion, and Shirley Hord. Each helped me become a better communicator, leader, and person.

In addition, Learning Forward’s international advisors, trustees, and staff have been valuable colleagues over the years.

GREAT THINGS TO COME

Any success you attribute to me is also due to the great people who have shared my commitment to you and the field.

I expect great things from my successor, and I expect great things from all of you as well. Educators and students are depending on you.

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