Top Tips from “LEADership Insights: Group Speed Mentoring with GW Leaders”

Aristide Collins, Vice President and Secretary of the University

- To maintain good connections, be in touch when you don’t need something.
- It’s not about the title; it’s about your portfolio of work. Get noticed by doing good work!
- Find two people to mentor you – one inside your organization, one outside – and seek their advice.

Darrell Darnell, Senior Associate Vice President of Safety and Security

- Own your mistakes, and then move on.
- Provide recognition to your team as they like it – through awards, thanks or gifts.
- You cannot control a situation, but you can influence it. You cannot just come into a situation and expect things to go your way without being able to defend why your way is best.

Sabrina Ellis, Vice President for Human Resources

- To get stakeholders on board with the change you wish to bring, create “touch points.” Inform and involve stakeholders in your process along the way.
- Build bridges (and don't burn them). Let people help you get from point A to point Z and move them along with you as you move forward.
- Use what you do outside of your job to help motivate you at work.

Dean Feuer, Graduate School of Education and Human Development

- Worry efficiently. No matter how much you agonize or stress over something, recognize what is out of your control. Focus on what you can control.
- It is important to invite others at all levels to participate in thinking about big problems because everyone wants to be valued and wants to do a good job.
- Step away from your work to engage with family, friends, hobbies and exercise, so that you can come back to your work with fresh eyes.
Dean Guthrie, GW School of Business

- Be open to working extra hard to establish yourself in a new field/career.
- If you want work-life balance, you have to accept that you can’t control every outcome and that you must empower others enough to delegate.
- It doesn’t matter how great your strategy is if you did not develop it with the people who would execute it in mind. If the people are not on board, it won’t work.

Dean Johnson, School of Nursing

- Focus on things that are important to GW (e.g., Strategic Vision, goals) to shape opportunities for yourself.
- Seek balance between your professional and personal life. Sometimes one or the other will have to give for a little while. Designate time for each; leaders need the support of family.
- Always seek to communicate reasonably; don’t seek to blame.
- Surround yourself with people smarter than you – you need diverse talents. Build trust among individuals with diverse talents.

Lou Katz, Executive Vice President and Treasurer

- Prioritization and focus are pivotal for success. Find five of the million things you could be doing in a given moment that are truly important and do those five things.
- Go after projects that will really make a difference. It’s okay to be wrong, no one can be right all the time. If you’re right all the time then you’re picking all the easy things.
- You always report to someone, so you always have to manage up! There should be constant dialogue about what’s important – surprises aren’t good for anybody.
- Managing across is just as important as managing up. Listen because you may be technically right, but the other person may be weighing ten factors that you don’t see.

President Knapp

- Escalation is getting the issue to the place where it can be handled efficiently.
- Prioritize by using the strategic plan as a guide. To ensure continuity of strategic plan, with so many moving parts, rely on the GW Values ("University DNA") to help guide decision making.
- To be an effective leader, you have to be patient, acknowledge the contributions of others, and foster an environment of discussion and debate. Communication is key.
- Universities are unusually complex organizations – multiple constituents, multiple missions. Take the time to figure out the place, the culture, etc.
Alicia Knight, Senior Associate Vice President for Operations

- In navigating politics in the university, understand the players – not just the person, but also their perspective and the context of the situation.
- Take on new opportunities when they are offered to you. Be willing to take on more responsibility in a new professional area or field.
- Good judgment and problem solving skills are one of the best qualities an employee can have. Good judgment includes understanding when you can handle a situation on your own and when it is necessary to escalate.

Forrest Maltzman, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Planning

- Regardless of the outcome, in the end it's better to put aside the differences and be collegial. When working in challenging situations with people, it's important to ask “where am I wrong?” and to be able to give up on some things.
- Try to anticipate what others will think, so that you can avoid escalation by pre-briefing individuals with necessary information and possible strategies. Anticipate escalation in all cases and prepare accordingly.
- Have a sense of humor. If you want things that will upset people, tell a joke and be direct at the same time.

Michael Morsberger, Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations

- Don’t be afraid to do any job.
- Success is about relationship building. Successful relationships are built by listening, focusing on the other person and figuring out how to connect to their passions.
- Every position is customer service oriented, whether you are a dean or work in financial aid. The most important parts of success are to be pleasant, responsive and enthusiastic in your work.

Beth Nolan, Senior Vice President and General Counsel

- If you see something, say something. It is important to speak up; tell someone something that they may not want to hear. It is equally important to be open to hearing others and reacting appropriately.
- Be a host, not a guest in your job. Lead your job; don’t wait for your boss or others to tell you what to do. Anticipate and solve problems.
- Sometimes people hope things will go away and they don’t. It is important to be responsive.
• Your failures are your key moments; they help you to see what you need to learn.

Barbara Porter, Chief of Staff

• Volunteer to get involved with anything you can to broaden your network and mentorship opportunities.
• You have to always be willing to retool yourself and change if you want to progress in your career.
• Give yourself the power to make decisions.
• Embrace your weaknesses so you can surround yourself with those who are strong in those areas.

Terri Harris Reed, Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion

• In working to resolve conflict with a person or to see eye-to-eye, approach the matter without judgment. See the situation from their perspective. Disclose a similar experience you had as a way of relating to the present situation first before taking an opposing stance.
• We all make mistakes. We should all be given the opportunity to learn from them. We should also have people in our lives that give us perspective on the mistakes we do make. They are the ones that remind us there are very few mistakes we make that are insurmountable or that we are unable to move past.
• When having a difficult conversation, ask questions and paraphrase to clarify what the person is saying, therefore they won’t think you are arriving at conclusions about their situation on your own.

Dave Steinour, Chief Information Officer

• Talk through your goals with others and don't be shy about having a sounding board.
• If you aren't taking calculated risks, you are not growing. Do not be risk-adverse or led by fear.
• Set obtainable goals that inform your overall larger goal.

Lorraine Voles, Vice President for External Relations

• It is important to act, even if you make mistakes, but learn to accept feedback both while making decisions and after the fact.
• One of the key factors to success in a university setting is to get buy-in from all affected parties, including staff and administration from various departments and schools,
students, etc. Know that this consensus process will take longer than doing it yourself. Get into the habit of saying "I will start the process" instead of "I will have this done."

- Take responsibility for your own work-life balance; no one else will do it for you. It is important to develop a "self-preservation gene." This includes better time management so you don't have to work such long hours and learning to delegate while being prepared to take full responsibility.