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Welcome to You've Got This, a weekly podcast for higher education professionals looking to increase their confidence and capacity for juggling the day-to-day demands of an academic life.

I'm your host, Dr.

Katie Linder.

In this episode, I'm going to talk about how I'm doing with some new responsibilities at work.

I think I've mentioned this in a couple of places, especially when I talked about my annual goals for 2024.

But in the new year, I was asked to assume an interim leadership role over one of the largest divisions on our campus.

Now, I am not going to lie, I was pretty intimidated by this request, but there were some very specific things that I did to ease into the role that helped a lot.

And I know that many of you have probably already experienced being asked to take on interim responsibilities, or maybe you will be asked to do this in the future.

So in case any of you find yourselves in a similar position, hopefully some of these tips might be helpful.

Now, the first tip that I have is that I reflected on one of the most important leadership lessons that I've learned over the years, which is it is not always about what you know, but how you operate.

It's not always about the what, but it's about the how.

Now, this is something that I picked up pretty early in my career because I started to move into roles because of my skills and not necessarily because of like content knowledge that I had gained over time.

Now, certainly skills are created out of content knowledge.

Sometimes that's how it works, but I've also found over time that sometimes it's kind of how I approach a situation and not necessarily knowing all the details about a situation that is getting me further along.

So in this new role, there are of course, a lot of areas that I oversee that I have not had the experience of leading in the past.

So there are certainly gaps in my knowledge, But there are incredibly effective leaders in the division who do have deep experience in that work.

And I know that I can rely on them to do a lot of that kind of detail level work as needed.

And it was important for me to remember that I didn't need to know all of those details in order to lead at a higher level effectively.

So this is also a lesson I have found that coaching has taught me as well, because one of the things I talk about with my coach training program is that you don't have to know everything about your client's discipline or their background or all of the things that they know in order to effectively coach them.

So for example, I can coach a chemist even though I have never been in that field.

And so this is another one of those lessons about sometimes it's more about the how than it is about the what.

Now the second thing that I think is really helpful is to find what I call a translator.

Now I reached out to someone knowledgeable about this new area over the winter break and asked for a phone call so that I could just ask them some questions.

And my goal with talking to that person was really to try and make as many connections with my past experience as I could so that I knew what I could lean into.

And years ago, I had a colleague that I served in a similar role for when she wanted to make the shift from instructional design to like broader faculty development.

And I helped her to see that she actually already knew a lot of the broader concepts and principles, Even if they were called different things in the different fields.

So that's really what I was looking for in this particular call.

And I continue to have those conversations with people that I trust that are very knowledgeable in the field, because it gives me kind of the confidence that I know more than I think I do because of my past experience and because of things I've been exposed to over the course of many different roles at several different institutions.

So that kind of translation work of someone saying, you know, you may not have done this exact thing, but it's similar to this other thing over here that you did, and you know, this previous job is really helpful.

So I find that if you know someone who knows you well enough that they can kind of help make those connections, that's important.

Another opportunity would be to like send them your resume.

If, if this is someone who you don't know super well and just say, help me make those connections, having that kind of translator assistance, I think is really helpful.

Okay.

So the third thing that I did, which is kind of related to some of these other things I'm talking about was to remind myself of the skills that I bring to the work and try to make connections to the challenges that I know I'm going to be facing in the role with the skills that I already have.

Now a while back, just as kind of like an exercise in my own curiosity and exploration, I cataloged a number of different skills that I've been collecting over the past couple of decades.

And these are skills like academic publishing, public speaking, coaching, knowledge of how organizational finances and budgets work, etc.

Like there's a number of things that I would put on this list and some of them are personal like the yoga training that I did and some of them are certainly more professional.

And I went back to this list of competencies to reflect on which ones I thought would be most helpful in this new role and the kinds of work that I know I'm going to be doing.

And the ones that I landed on were more interpersonal skills.

So for example, helping people to feel seen and heard, listening deeply to questions and doing my best to provide information when I can, creating a larger table so that more people have seats for different conversations that we're going to need to be having in the coming months, making the right introductions so that collaborations and more cooperative work can be happening.

These are the kinds of skills that I'll probably be leaning into the most and notice how like none of these skills rely too heavily on content knowledge.

They're way more about kind of relationships and helping me to connect people to each other.

And so that's something that I need to also kind of keep front and center as I'm continuing into the work.

Okay, the next thing I did that I found incredibly helpful is that I was just honest with people around me, including the people who are asking me to kind of take on this role about the gaps that might make the role more challenging for me.

So I have had a ton of colleagues at my institution offer their support as I make this transition.

They've been very kind and as they've been, you know, asking me about kind of how I'm feeling about it, I've just been honest about the kinds of things that are most concerning to me.

And I think it's important when you take on a challenge that's kind of like this, it feels kind of big and it feels, um, complex that you don't feel the need to be perfect.

And so I won't be able to do this job well, if I'm constantly worried about kind of that imposter syndrome, that someone's going to like find out a flaw or gap in my knowledge that I've been like trying to hide.

Like I'm not hiding any of that.

Like I think what I can do best is to just stay curious in this role, to ask questions when I need to, and know that I can approach this as just another step in my journey toward learning, which means I don't have to show up, uh, in a perfect way.

Now, admittedly, it is a bit of a steep and fast learning curve.

And I'm like scrambling, you know, to, to go as fast as I can, but I'm putting everything I know into doing my best.

And that includes relying on a lot of this like past experience and knowledge.

And then the last thing I would say that I'm really focused on right now is in this particular interim role, really just showing up and doing my best.

And, and that goes back to this concept of just not being perfect, but doing my best.

And I know that I will need to take care of myself so that I can be my best in this role.

So I'm being extra careful about self-care and boundaries and getting the rest I need to show up every day to take on this new set of responsibilities.

And one of the things I've already noticed, like a pretty clear shift in my schedule is that I really need to show up for people during the day.

And I used to have a little bit more margin, you know, in between meetings and things like that to kind of catch up on email and just make sure that I was kind of staying on top of that.

And even with, you know, really heavy meeting weeks, which as some of you have been listening for a while, you know, I have pretty heavy meeting weeks.

I was still able to have my evenings, you know, pretty much to myself in this new role, just over the past couple of weeks that I've been in this role, I have definitely had to take more work home.

And part of that is the kinds of things that I'm dealing with over email and the kinds of questions I'm getting.

They just require a little bit more thought and some of them are pretty complex and I need to actually have, you know, time to kind of like think through a response and make sure that I, you know, know enough information to give the right response.

And I think that what I have found is having a little bit more margin in the evenings where I know I can come home and have dinner and just kind of sit uninterrupted and like work through, you know, the more and the much more emails that I'm seeing come through my inbox.

That's been really helpful for me.

Now you might be thinking like, well, is that like keeping boundaries?

Is that work life balance?

You know, all those questions when you're bringing to work home in the evening.

And what I found, at least for now, it feels so much better to me to come in in the morning to a like cleaned up, cleared out inbox, then to start the day feeling like completely overwhelmed and that I'm like not on top of things.

And the other piece of this, um, that I have found that can be quite challenging is I don't want to bottleneck anyone.

So if there's something sitting in my inbox that needs like an approval or a review or something like that, I want to make sure that that's getting back to people at least within 24 hours, if not, you know, 12 hours of them sending me an email.

So staying on top of that has required a little bit more evening work.

And for now that feels okay.

That actually feels like a healthy thing for me to be doing because it allows me to put my energy where I want it to go, uh, during the day.

So those are a few things that I am doing as I am transitioning into this new interim leadership position.

And as always, I would love to hear how you are taking on new challenges and how you're relying on your past experiences and knowledge to be successful.

You can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.

com to share, and please know that I always love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for listening.

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