We are in the midst of making changes in how we support our educational mission and how we integrate our efforts across campus and within our community. You have seen some of this for yourselves this week. Change is everywhere. Some of the change going on is very visible---$60M worth of construction and renovation is hard to miss. What really matters, however, is harder to see but, in the long run, more important. What I am talking about is the many changes in the ways we work together, what we talk about, what we care about.

- Different roles and responsibilities
- Different organizational designs
- New approaches to the curriculum
- New uses of space
- Leadership throughout the institution
- Different ways to chart our progress and demonstrate the value of our work

We have been forming new habits in how we learn, how we work together and how we are going about building a strong sense of common purpose and direction. Increasingly we are demonstrating the qualities of an institution that will prepare its graduates to thrive in the 21st century by demonstrating in our daily practice the understanding, skills and attitudes that our graduates will need.

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1 After our gathering on Friday, one of the participants gave me a copy of The Art of Possibility by Rosamund and Benjamin Zander (2000, Penguin Books.). Early in the book, I found a quotation that captures what I was trying to say: “…transformation happens less by arguing cogently for something new than by generating active, ongoing practices that shift a culture’s experience of the basics for reality.” (p. 4). That’s what I meant but the authors said it crisply and clearly!
Everyone in the room today is a leader but not all of us have embraced the implications of the roles we play. Leading in a rapidly changing environment is different from leading in more predictable times.

**Thinking about Leadership.**

1. In my library at home, I have at least two full bookshelves worth of reflections on leadership. Some of those books are personal reflections upon a life of leadership and service---some sweetly written and some coated with cynicism and a crust built up from years of struggle. Some are research reports, often in business settings, sometimes in higher education settings. Some use metaphors. Some use the specialized language of the social sciences. Some simply tell touching good stories.

2. Just for the fun of it, back in May when I was preparing a speech on leadership, I went back to my bookshelf and looked for the underlined passages and little colored tabs that I had placed in some of those books when I read them. I figured this would be an interesting set of postcards from my own journey toward a deeper understanding of what leadership means.

3. Max DePree, the son of the founder of Hermann Miller, and CEO of that company when he set his hand to writing two little books on *Leadership is an Art* and *Leadership Jazz*, made two key points that have come to mind again and again, especially at those times when I really do not know what to do next. Even now, in my third presidency, I sometimes have those moments---especially now when nothing is quite like anything I have ever experienced before.
Point 1

“At the core of becoming a leader is the need always to connect one’s voice and one’s touch.” (p. 3 Leadership Jazz) To do that, you must make promises in the presence of your followers and then KEEP those promises. (p. 32).

Point 2

“Leaders and followers are all part of a circle.” (p. 24, Leadership Jazz) There is a difference between being at the heart of an enterprise and being at its center. To be at the center is to be in control and to have power over others. This power can be exercised mindfully and ethically or not. Being at the heart of an organization is different and rare. People who are at the heart of their communities carry themselves as bearers of the essential nature of their enterprises (p. 35-37) and they consistently bring out the best in others.

Leaders who are part of a circle:

✓ see and respect the diversity of their organizations and know how to value and encourage it. For them diversity is a vital asset.
✓ take each member of their community seriously.
✓ affirm the core values inherent in their enterprise and help others to see and embrace those values.
✓ understand how essential it is to foster good working relationships and trust.

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✓ know that significant change means a kind of dying and rebirth---a loss and a gain---and learn how to help the people they work with to go through those experiences honestly.

✓ can, when the need arises, reach deeper into themselves to respond to situations where skill and jargon and learned techniques will always fail us, to find resources rooted in our deepest values and beliefs.

✓ are, each in his or her own way, significant bearers of gifts to the spirit.

✓ are true to themselves as well as to the shared purposes of their organization.

4. There are several questions that anyone should feel free to ask a leader. If a leader does not invite these questions, we should question whether we ought to want to follow them (p. 24, Leadership Jazz).

✓ What can I expect from you?
✓ Can I articulate and then achieve my own goals by following you?
✓ Will I reach my own potential by working with you?
✓ Can I entrust my future to you?
✓ Have you prepared yourself for leadership?
✓ Will you be truly honest with yourself and with me?
✓ Do you have enough self-confidence and trust to let me do my job?
✓ What do you believe?

So what does that mean today at Winona State University?
1. Each one of you is a leader. That means other people notice how you react to things, what you talk about, how you explain what is happening in our own world and in the world around us.

2. Other people look to you to make sense of their own experience. You must take that responsibility seriously. Your words and actions matter.

3. All of us must set a good example in the way we approach our responsibilities. Others notice how we respond to disappointment or setbacks as well as to victories and success.

4. We need to remember those lessons we were taught in kindergarten: (chosen from a longer list prepared by Robert Fulghum\(^3\))

   - Share everything.
   - Don’t hit people.
   - Say you’re sorry when you hurt somebody.
   - Play fair.
   - Clean up your own mess.
   - Learn something new every day.
   - Don’t take things that aren’t yours.
   - When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
   - Pay attention.

5. You have an obligation to care about the experiences of the people you work with here. All of us are affected not only by what is going on around us at work but also by what is

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\(^3\) Retrieved from [http://www.peace.ca/kindergarten.htm on August 20, 2009](http://www.peace.ca/kindergarten.htm on August 20, 2009)
happening in our personal lives and in the broader society of which we are a part. This is a time of heightened alertness and anxiety. People can be quick to take offense or jump to conclusions. We all need to practice patience and work at not overreacting to what we see or hear.

6. As leaders, we set the tone. Everything we do and say will be noticed and interpreted, sometimes in ways we never expected or intended.

7. We all need to pay attention to the needs of others and to help support the professional growth and development of the people who work with us. Some of you have supervisory roles and some of you do not. Remember that whether you actually supervise anyone or not, you are a leader and, as a leader, you must learn to be a mentor and a coach. All of us must help to develop the talent and skills of the people we work with. We can take pride in their achievements and contributions to the advancement of our shared purpose as a community of learners improving our world.

- When someone does well, tell them so and talk with them about what they have learned.
- When someone does not handle something well, help them learn from that experience also.

Remember that it is your job to pay attention and to use whatever happens---for good or ill---as a learning opportunity.

**Bottom Line.**

As leaders, you are stewards of our most precious resource---the talents and expertise of our faculty, staff and students. You
contribute to the environment here so that all of us can lead productive, creative, responsible and rewarding professional lives. As we enter a new biennium, we must remain true to the principles that have guided us through the past year. To put it simply, as Kurt Lohide did yesterday in Rochester, our primary commitments are:

- To protect the experience of our students and
- To take care of our people.

To do that we will put the needs of potential and current students first, protect the quality of our academic programs, and find ways to generate additional revenue from many sources.

We need your support and your leadership if we are to hold true to these principles. Each of you is an ambassador for WSU. Each of you carries our reputation and our future in your hands.

Each of you can make a difference in how successful we will be in realizing the full promise of being a member of

_A community of learners improving our world._