

Managing or Leading: Finding the Balance in Disability Services

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We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects...

Access and Inclusion

&

Civility and Respect

...this week and in all aspects of our organization.

Why This Conversation Matters

- Disability services professionals function as both managers and leaders
- As student needs become more diverse, complex, and intersectional, effective teams are essential to student success
- Compliance alone is not enough—student-centered responsiveness is critical
- Both roles shape inclusive, effective programs

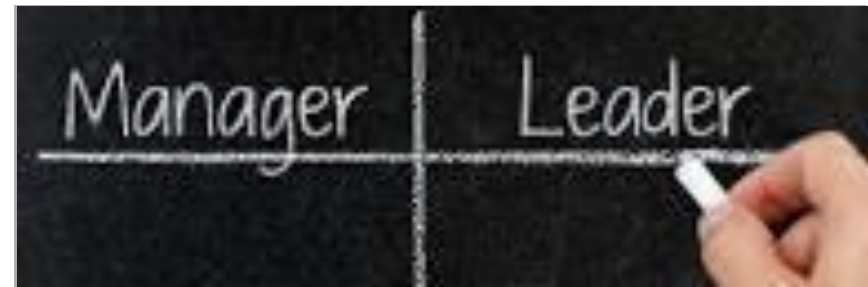
Introduction

Dr. Pamela J. Starr

- M.S., Rehabilitation Counseling with the Deaf, SDSU
- Ph.D., Special Education, UConn
- 26 years in Disability Services
- 10 years as a solo office
- Four-year Universities: Eastern CT State University and San Diego State
- Two-year College: Riverside City College
- CAPED and AHEAD Mentor

Let's talk role models

Reflect on the leadership or management characteristics you have learned, highlighting those you practice and those you intentionally avoid



Managing vs Leading: The Balance

- Managing: compliance, policies, consistency, operations
- Leading: vision, culture, innovation, empowerment
- Both are essential and interconnected
- Together they directly impact student access, equity, and success

→ *Effective disability services professionals don't choose one—they intentionally balance both.*

Knowing When to Manage and When to Lead

MANAGING

- Accommodation procedures
- Documentation & compliance
- Budgets & operations
- Risk mitigation
- Consistency & accountability

LEADING

- Culture change
- Vision & strategy
- Innovation
- Relationship building
- Inspiring growth

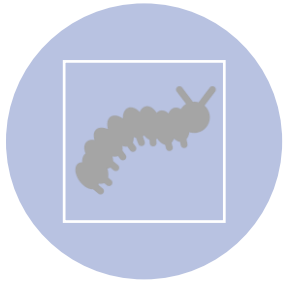
→ The most effective DSPS professionals know when to do both.

Building Effective Teams



- ✓ Align roles to student-centered goals
- ✓ Leverage team expertise to support diverse needs
- ✓ Build trust, communication, and shared purpose
- ✓ Empower staff to innovate and problem-solve

Compliance & Consistency



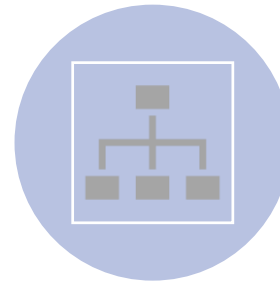
ADA, Section 504,
FERPA, institutional
policies



Ensures equitable access
and legal protection for
students



Builds trust and
consistency across
campus



Requires strong systems,
documentation, and
accountability

Oh My! What Did I Inherit??!

Assessing Your Program's Legacy



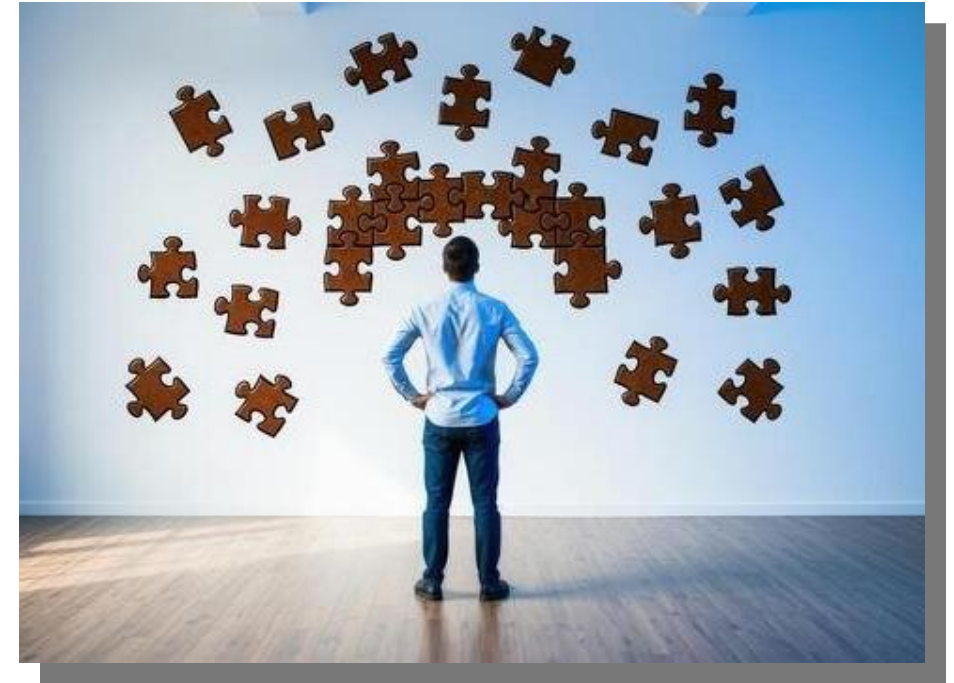
Assessing Your Program's Legacy

1. **Understand:** Review Inherited systems, culture, and challenges
2. **Get to know your team:** Learn who they are; their experiences and expertise
3. **Reveal:** Conducting a program audit
4. **Transform:** Identifying areas for growth

Do not make any major changes within the first 6 months to year, unless essential and/or critical

Change Management

1. Operationalize
2. Planning for Change
3. Communication
4. Training and Support
5. Implementation
6. Reinforcement
7. Lead change with empathy and transparency



Communicate the “Why” Behind Changes Early and Often

Without effective change management, even well-intentioned initiatives can fail due to resistance, confusion, or lack of buy-in.

It's especially critical in education, healthcare, and public service sectors where people are at the heart of operations.

Raising Morale, Building on Strengths and Cultivating Culture

Strategy: Reignite purpose and pride in the work, while honoring the past.

Respecting each for their expert is, and what they bring to the table.	●	Treating faculty and classified professionals EQUALLY	●	Providing professional development opportunities to ALL	●	Department-wide birthday and holiday celebrations, as well as decor – Halloween
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Shifting Mindset Toward Inclusive, Student-Centered Practice

- Strategy: Shift from resistance to curiosity
- Why Resistance Happens: Comfort with the status quo; fear of the unknown; past failed change; lack of trust
- What We're Moving Toward: Physical, academic, and social inclusion
 - Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles
 - Co-creating services with students; feedback loops and advisory boards
- Barriers to Address: Institutional inertia and lack of training or awareness

How Change Management Creates a Culture of Possibility

Awareness → Engagement → Training → Small Wins → New Norms

- RESULT: A CULTURE OF POSSIBILITY
 - **Strategy**: Foster psychological safety and openness
- Psychological safety and trust
- Openness to feedback and new ideas
- Innovation and experimentation
- Learning without blame
- Shared commitment to student success

Micromanaging

- Micromanaging **Squashes** Motivation.
- **Empowering** your team will cultivate motivation – remember each team member was hired for their expertise.



* said every micromanager ever.

Empowering Teams Through Motivation & Innovation

WHAT HOLDS TEAMS BACK?

- Micromanagement
- Lack of trust
- Fear of failure
- Limited autonomy

People were hired for their expertise.

Effective leaders create the conditions for that expertise to flourish.

WHAT HELPS TEAMS THRIVE?

- Empowerment
- Trust in expertise
- Innovation
- Shared ownership
- Growth

Crafting Vision & Cultivating Innovation (1)

VISION → INNOVATION → IMPACT

Vision

- Strategy: Use evolving student needs and institutional priorities to inspire direction
- Operationalize: Facilitate a collaborative visioning retreat with staff and students

Where are we going?

- Student needs
- Future direction

Innovation

- Strategy: Encourage staff to take initiative and lead creative solutions
- Operationalize: Launch a 'pilot project' fund to test new ideas

How do we get there?

- Creative solutions
- Pilot projects

Impact

How do we know?

- Access
- Efficiency

Crafting Vision & Cultivating Innovation (2)

VISION → INNOVATION → IMPACT

Innovation in Action – RCC Kiosk Project

Challenge: Students needed more efficient access to services.

Solution: Collaborative kiosk development.

Impact: Improved student access and streamlined service delivery.

Vision creates direction. Innovation turns that direction into action.

What is Leading Up?

Definition: *Influencing upward in the organizational hierarchy to support better decisions, advocate for students, and shape policy.*

Why it matters: *Frontline leaders often have the clearest view of student needs and systemic gaps.*

When and Why Do We Lead Up?

- When advocating for resources or staffing
- When addressing policy gaps or outdated practices
- When proposing innovative solutions
- Navigating requirements for faculty such as overload
- How DSPS funds can be used

Connecting with Other Managers & Leaders

- The power of peer connection
- Mentorship matters
- Sounding boards for strategy
- Building a culture of collaboration

Final Thoughts & Reflection

- Blending leadership and management is an ongoing, intentional practice
- Where do you operate most: manager or leader?
- What does your team need more of right now?
- How will you apply this to better support students?
- Who is a part of your support community on campus? Across colleges?

Management is
doing things right;
leadership is doing
the right things.

Peter Drucker

Q&A DISCUSSION

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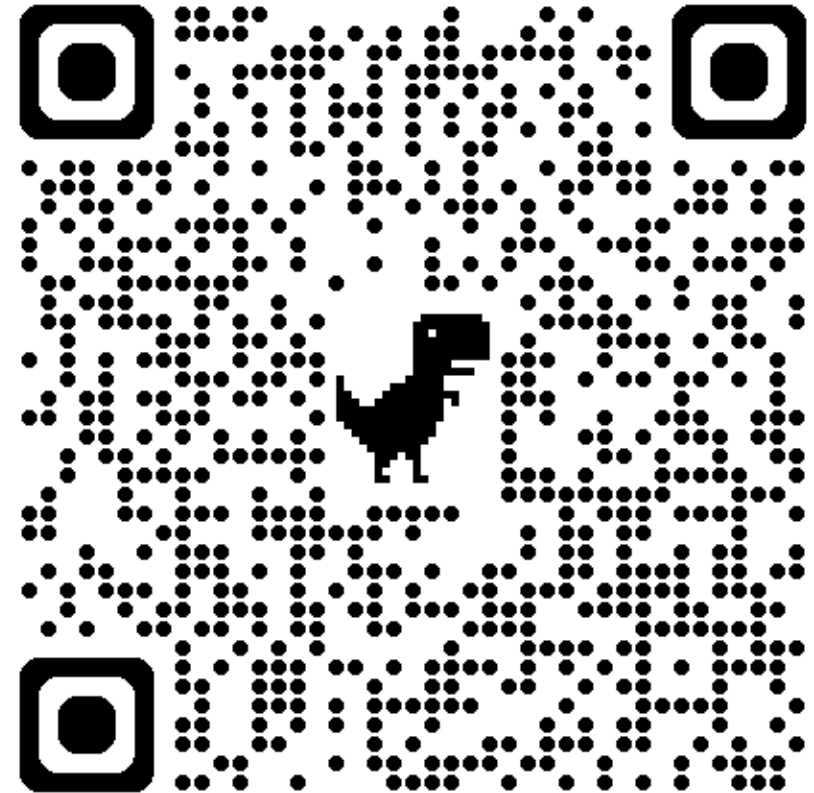


Session Evaluation

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Thank you for attending!

Your feedback helps shape future programming.



Scenario: When Managing is Essential

- A faculty member refuses an accommodation as 'unreasonable'
- What policies guide your response?
- What management responsibilities are triggered?
- What risks exist if handled poorly?

Scenario: When Leadership is Required

- Faculty struggle with implementing accommodations
- What is the leadership opportunity?
- How do you shift culture—not just solve the issue?
- How do you engage your team?

Group Activity: Managing vs Leading

- Identify what requires management vs leadership
- Discuss where both roles overlap
- What happens if one is missing?
- Share insights with the group