Leadership

Sometimes you need to go up to the balcony and see the bigger picture.

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Leadership

Good Question
Ethics in and of the University

A series presented by the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University

Good Question
Ethics in and of the University
A special series addressing issues in higher education to celebrate 20 years of scholarship in ethics.
“Adaptive work requires that we be creative, experimental, and improvisational, and that we be strategically savvy about the effects of our interventions.”

Students are fascinated by questioning, risk-taking, and being alive in the moment with real people in real time. This kind of leadership requires that we grapple with thorny issues that defy easy answers, where there are no clear receptors of success or failure, and where the owners of our time and attention. Distraction is all consuming, and it grew harder for her to see what was really important.

Alma Blount never would have imagined that she would become a professor and teach for more than 20 years. Raised in Western North Carolina, she learned fragility, self-reliance, and the importance of the value of education and ideas from her family. She shared many vivid stories about her North Carolina ancestors, from which she developed an early interest in politics and public engagement. Blount financed her own undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before embarking on a career in human rights work and photojournalism. Her journey led her to work with international, faith-based organizations in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Blount was passionate about her work, but it became all-consuming, and it grew harder for her to see what was really important. In 1989, she reached a turning point. Already feeling burnt out after having lost her work and her calling, and she realized that it was time to adjust our perspectives and problem-solving strategies if our way of doing business no longer fits the conditions we face and is ineffective. Adaptive work requires that we be creative, experimental, and improvisational, and that we be strategically savvy about the effects of our interventions.

Universities have incorporated into their undergraduate curricula. Some say teachers lack the professional experience and grounding that make the training relevant, such as being able to hold a group with diverse perspectives in a difficult conversation, building trust for deeper dialogue, and analyzing complicated, long-term problems.

When I came to Duke, I brought the adaptive leadership pedagogy with me, and found an immediate resonance for it with students. Fees undergraduate and graduate students have extensive personal or professional experiences of group conflict. But they know how pervasive such conflicts are, and they are ready to learn. So I chose to develop my improvisational, and that we be creative,

I know a framework for analyzing problems within complex, dynamic systems that Harvard’s Ronald Heifetz has developed for three decades. It’s called adaptive leadership. It has long been a staple for policy schools and businesses, but few universities have incorporated it into their undergraduate curricula. Some say teachers lack the professional experience and grounding that make the training relevant, such as being able to hold a group with diverse perspectives in a difficult conversation, building trust for deeper dialogue, and analyzing complicated, long-term problems.

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