THE CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP AT CSUSM:
Understanding It, Living It, and Advancing It In a Leadership Role

As with all large institutions, Cal State San Marcos has its own unique organizational culture, one that reflects the institution’s growth and development over time (our history), one that creates the environment in which we do our daily work (our present), and one that helps shape the direction the University is heading (our future). Based on the premise that "leadership" at CSUSM is systemic and foundational to our culture, every member of the institution is perceived as a leader in his or her respective role, and plays a critical role in defining and promoting this "culture of leadership" at CSUSM. And, as a leader, every member has a role in ensuring that new hires also understand this culture through the process of effective "onboarding."

Central to these conversations is the notion that all leaders must become familiar with CSUSM’s unique culture of leadership, one that is informed by an overarching and driving "university first" mentality, one that directs the leadership to put broader interests of the larger institution first and hold the "good of the institutional order" above those of divisions, colleges, or units.

Outlined below are our five various leadership subcultures that define the overarching organizational culture of leadership at CSUSM and provide key concepts as they have been identified or defined by CSUSM’s senior leadership. Each CSUSM leader and supervisor must understand the importance of their individual role, behavior, and example in contributing to our culture.

I. The Subculture of “Respect”
A number of obvious, yet important, principles come together to create a subculture of respect to guide our work, and help define many of the “rules of engagement” by which we work with peers and colleagues. These guiding principles direct us to:

- **Assume good intent** with one another and work on the premise of trust. Believe that others are working “above board” and ensure that you do the same;
- **Appreciate others’ perspectives** by giving them the opportunity to voice their opinion(s) and acknowledging that you’ve heard them;
- **Ensure confidentiality** around sensitive issues, which may often mean not discussing them with even your closest direct reports or colleagues;
- **Agree to disagree** on some issues, but work to find common ground and group consensus whenever possible;
- Work with a spirit of collaboration, which includes peer and colleague consultation (sometimes even if it doesn’t seem like it might be necessary), inclusion (loop people in where appropriate), and when in doubt, “ask—don’t assume” (cross-divisional synergies are often present, but not immediately obvious, so better to ask, consult, and include than to accidentally omit or sidestep);
- **Work to resolve issues at the peer level first** before taking them up the chain of command;
- **When things go wrong or not as planned, and in the spirit of assuming good intent, work with colleagues to determine what happened and how the situation might have been pre-empted; make sure that follow-up measures are taken to help mitigate against future occurrences;**
- **Practice meeting etiquette:** be on time for meetings with colleagues and notify as much in advance if you know you’re running late; read all meeting related materials in advance; participate in dialogue but don’t monopolize the conversation; listen to others;
II. The Subculture of “Advocacy”
Inherent in this subculture are those principles that help the leader be a successful advocate for both divisional/college/unit initiatives and for those of the larger institution. Be able and willing to:

- Identify and call advocacy behavior; acknowledge if you are speaking from a divisional perspective or a university perspective and understand the difference;
- Understand what issues (both divisional and university) require a “sense of urgency” in addressing, and handle accordingly;
- When there is group consensus around an issue (whether you agree or not), speak and advocate with one common voice that reflects the consensus.

III. The Subculture of “Communication”
Understanding the subculture of communication at CSUSM will help leaders avoid problems and ease day-to-day inter-workings with colleagues. A few simple principles in this subculture include:

- Email Communication
  - Keep complicated issues that require a lot of explanation, confidential discussions, and disagreements off of email—these conversations are better handled by phone or in person;
  - Don’t inundate colleagues unnecessarily;
  - Remember that email doesn’t often convey tenor or tone and can sometimes suggest an unintentional meaning. Again, know when to pick up the phone instead;
  - Be mindful of forwarding messages without permission or knowledge of the original sender, and use “reply all” carefully and sparingly.
- Whenever possible, give colleagues an early heads up on issues or ideas. Good front-end communications can sometimes raise necessary flags or garner needed support around an issue;
- Close communication loops and do so in a timely fashion. Take responsibility for closing loops that you’ve opened and help ensure that others do the same;
- Communicate with purpose. Be clear with colleagues about what needs to be communicated to others, what requires formal approval, and what is advisory.
- Use version control on all written communications to ensure that iterative documents are kept current.

IV. The Subculture of “Collegiality”
While all of the above subcultures have the spirit of collegiality at their core, there are perhaps a few other principles worth noting here and that may be unique to the CSUSM environment with respect to fostering collegiality. These include:

- Cross-divisional support and participation. Recognize that CSUSM’s divisional structure is horizontal and, as such, activities and initiatives flow across and through all divisions. Divisions are not silos of activity, but rather conduits that help ideas and issues migrate appropriately across the organization. As such, support the work of your colleagues in other divisions, participate in their divisional activities when invited and/or appropriate, and look for those logical places of intersection and flow between your division and
theirs; build bridges and pipelines, not walls. Inherent in this is the necessity of recognizing, understanding, and appreciating each others' different roles across the institution;

- Be intentional about scheduling routine meetings with your colleagues, as appropriate, and keep to the schedule as much as possible. Prepare agendas for meetings and if discussion topics don’t warrant a meeting, agree together to cancel or postpone;

- In the true spirit of collegiality, “have each others’ backs” but know when to hold each other accountable, share responsibility, and take ownership of issues when they are yours to own. Strive to be a high functioning “team” and recognize that our collective whole is greater than the sum of our individual administrative parts.

V. The Subculture of "Support and Success"
Finally, central to the success of our institution is the extent to which we effectively acculturate new hires within our units and divisions and ensure that they understand CSUSM's culture of leadership, as described herein. And then, in turn, it’s important to help them live it and promote it as they mature in their positions. This practice, known as “onboarding,” requires leaders to play an active and intentional role in familiarizing new hires with the institutional culture, supporting their transition—not just at the job-function level, but at the organizational acculturation level as well—and guiding their success as they navigate the various depths of our institutional channels. Here are a few currently used or recommended onboarding strategies for managers/leaders to use with new hires:

- Assign a "buddy" to the new hire, a fellow leader who is well versed in the CSUSM culture of leadership and can lend advice or offer suggestions for navigating the organizational waters. While neither a job coach nor a trainer, the buddy is a confidential colleague and advocate who knows where potential landmines might be, who's who in the organization, and how the various organizational subcultures described above work;

- Ensure structured, ongoing meetings for the new hire and buddy;

- Recognize that the new hire will need time for meeting and getting to know people and protect the time investment for him/her to do so;

- Clear the new hire's calendar for the first week, two weeks or longer to ensure that the new hire has time for onboarding and acculturation activities;

- Identify existing resources and opportunities (e.g. Campus Connect) for the new hire's participation;

- Identify "quick win" opportunities for the new hire within the first 90 days to instill confidence and to help him/her establish credibility and "relationship equity;"

- Co-champion a new hire's idea, so that it's not immediately dismissed;

- For hires new to the position but not to CSUSM, help and support them as they reinvent themselves in their new internal role, and assist them in establishing positional authority and gaining confidence in their abilities;

- For hires new to the academic environment, help them understand the academic mission, language, and nuances of the academy;

- Identify, establish and implement blameless feedback mechanisms for new hires.

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