

Devon Deming: An Uncommon Metrics System for Creating Outstanding Leaders



Devon Deming (Metro Director of Commute Services), Photos © John Livzey, 2016

Leadership is difficult to define. It is even harder to teach. But newly appointed Metro Director of Commute Services Devon Deming discovered that leadership could be taught, and taught well. And she learned this when she participated in the invitation-only WTS International Mid-Career Leadership Program in Washington, DC. By every measure, Deming's experience was profound.

"The WTS training program helped me understand my own personal career goals and gave me insight into the career paths of other successful women in transportation. Before the training, I might not have considered taking a position outside the comfort zone of my previous agency, but the training helped me understand the huge growth potential of finding the courage to take that leap!"

Specifics matter. And Deming credits the program for providing very detailed, practical, effective guidance, as well as an empowering structure.



"They chose 28 women from all over the country in all different areas of transportation, and there was a wide range of women, spanning at least 20 years of age. I was grateful and honored to be there. We spent three days together from breakfast to dinner. We didn't have any free time and we were absolutely encouraged to check *out* of the office. Of course, all of the women in the training were committed overachievers so it was very hard for all of us to ignore email and cell phones for three days. But we did, for the most part, which was really good to help us focus on the training. It helped us be present for it. That was very, very important, because this was not your normal leadership training."

When Devon underwent the training, she was still serving as Administrator for the Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) Rideshare Program. In that position—and in her current one—she needed to excel as a people person, but she also required a host of other skills to succeed. Fortunately, the leadership training assignments, which began before the program started, honed all of those skills and more.

“Before the training we were asked to participate in a 360-degree evaluation. That included our direct supervisor, other superiors, peers, and direct reports. And they evaluated each participant’s strengths and weaknesses through a 98-item questionnaire. We had to complete our own version of it as well. And that process was intense! It was very interesting to see how you perceived your strengths and weaknesses versus everyone else’s evaluation of you.

“For example, I felt I was not the best negotiator; I thought I could really improve on that. But across the board my 360-degree review said that was one of my strengths. For me, that was fascinating. Some of the training participants were very upset by what they found out from the review, even traumatized. It was a great reality check, but not everyone was prepared for reality. I think anyone considering the program needs to really look at it as an investment in themselves. It’s a tremendous tool for self-awareness, but you have to be willing to accept the feedback. In fact, the whole training really ends up being about personal growth. It helps you make sure that the career path you’re on is the career path that’s best for you. The ultimate realization—what they were trying to get us to see—was that the more time you spend doing the things that satisfy you personally, the happier you’ll be in your job and the more successful you’ll be. You’ll have better career growth because you love what you do.”

But she cautions, this program was really not for the faint of heart.

“This wasn’t someone just sitting down with you and telling you about some abstract leadership theory. This was very personal, introspective, exploratory, and intense. There were a lot of surprises for everyone. And everyone left the training feeling like they learned something about themselves that would help them move forward personally and professionally. So you have to approach the program with an open mind and you have to be prepared to reveal very personal things about yourself. You have to be honest with yourself and everyone else.”

But Deming feels that the effort and commitment were well worth it.

“It is a phenomenal networking opportunity. I now have 28 new people who know me very well. But you’re not only networking with each of them. You’re also networking with each of *their* networks. When I returned to LAWA, I brought back this perspective and a lot of the exercises and shared them with friends, co-workers, peers, etc. So it expands even farther. And I’ll continue doing that in my new position at Metro as well. Personally, I was just honored to be there and I felt the skills I learned were invaluable. I’ll use them for the rest of my career and my life.”