

ASM Education Special Interest Group

Would you like fries with that?

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Non Sequitur is a comic strip created by Wiley Miller that I read most days. The message can be political and satirical, or purely for amusement. A recent cartoon showed the main character Danae Pyle, a young, pre-adolescent girl with a pessimistic view of the world, with Lucy, her talking pygmy Clydesdale horse. Lucy asks Danae why she is not studying for her maths test tomorrow. Danae's reply was "Cuz it's the teacher's job to teach us so if I haven't learned enough to pass then it's the teacher who actually fails the test not me".

Did it make me laugh? Not the day that I read it. That morning I had given a lecture with only 60% of the class present. Despite trying to engage those in attendance, I had encountered an overwhelming lack of response and knowledge. Moreover, at the end of the lecture, several students approached me to ask for yet more old exam papers. This was despite the fact that I had spent hours each week writing revision questions which they had yet to access. Returning to my office, I was greeted with an inbox jammed with emails asking questions directly answerable from my lecture notes should a student have cared to look.

I was annoyed. I felt that I was well and truly fulfilling my obligations to the teaching/learning contract, amply satisfying reasonable student expectations, but that my effort was not being reciprocated. It did not seem to me that the students were accepting responsibility for their learning. They were not working with me. Or were they? Was I missing something?

So I took a moment to reflect. I reflected on the introduction of student handouts. A response to increasing student pressure – I remember students telling me repeatedly, "But it is impossible to listen and write at the same time!" – such handouts initially took the form of lecture outlines. Before long, however, and again prompted by student pressure, they grew more comprehensive. Many lecturers began providing full printed lecture notes before lectures. Some lectures subsequently became recitations, other lecturers embellished and extended the text and students annotated. Note taking became minimal or disappeared.

The introduction of learning management systems (LMS) followed, with lots of capabilities, including the provision of quizzes and the storage of recorded lectures. Who needed to come to class now? Everything was in cyberspace waiting for when it suited you to access it. Running through all of this has been the introduction of student fees. All students now pay for

their education and all students expect to get value for their money.

So what doesn't add up? What is it that concerns me? Three examples – non attendance at lectures and practical classes; non participation in revision sessions or lack of use of revision materials provided during a course; and answers to exam questions that reveal only a minimal effort to learn, integrate and come to grips with concepts covered throughout the course. When all these coincide, as they do from time to time, I wonder why I bother and feel very disheartened.

I believe most teachers would agree that students gain most when they accept joint responsibility for their learning, when it is something they see as intrinsically worthwhile and deserving of their effort, when they learn to 'nut it out' for themselves. I know not all students want this experience, but I worry that we are taking the opportunity away from those who do. I believe that teachers are being expected to give too much, to assume too much responsibility for student learning. Students need to learn to stand on their own two feet, to work it out for themselves. Is it hard? Yes, it is. Still, I believe it is the kind of training that students need if they are to move towards intellectual independence. Education is not a product, a commodity for teaching staff to dispense. It is a process, like learning to walk and talk, and requires active consistent input from the person wanting the outcome if the desired result is to be achieved.

In my mind, unilateral student teaching surveys compound the problem. Rather than providing students with the opportunity to reflect on the learning process, they essentially ask them to rate a product. How about a quality of learning survey that asked students to answer the questions below? Would it be more useful perhaps, and send a message about responsible learning if the following questions were to be answered?

I prepare for, and actively participate in, learning experiences such as class discussions.

I work consistently throughout the semester; attend all my classes, and arrive on time.

I agree/understand that my success will be or has been determined by my level of effort and commitment.

Maybe it is just the end of a long and difficult year and everything will look very different after a month down the beach with our mad black Labrador dog that thinks she is a walrus and wants to live an aquatic life. Again, maybe there is a serious misalignment here and some major changes in attitude and practices are required? Perhaps, rather than asking what we could or should do for our students, we should ask how we can best engineer for them to do it for themselves?

ASM Laboratory Leadership and Management Special Interest Group Infantry minor tactics for scientific staff

Captain Dennis Mok, MASM

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Extraordinary leaders... consistently achieve results that far exceed those of the good leaders – JH Zenger and J Folkman

Hopefully the uses of infantry minor tactics (IMT) are not required at any laboratories. IMT are based on the principle of 'fire and movement'. That is, while one soldier is firing to suppress the enemy, the other moves to a more favourable position; the movement is often only three paces per move. It is relatively difficult to perform with a 30kg backpack in summer in Australia.

IMT are instructed to all arms in basic training while undergoing non-infantry speciality training. IMT are the basics for a section attack (9 staff) to a division offensive (30,000 staff). Each move requires a coordinated mutual support and clear communication. If the sequence is not performed perfectly, the moving team can suffer catastrophic consequences. The application of IMT requires a well-trained section commander who normally holds the rank of corporal. The section commander is required to assess the situation quickly and accurately before issue of attack and firing orders. The leadership required to perform this process is extraordinary because one minor mistake can cause severe casualties for the team.

The questions here are whether there are connections between leadership styles in military and non-military settings? And, can we apply some of the military leadership skills to the current business world? There are, of course, many similarities between leadership in the military and leadership in the business world. Business studies are now discovering that battles and military strategies are highly relevant to today's business practices. One good example is the application of generalship, which requires an extraordinary combination of abilities and skills.

The subject of leadership has become one of the most studied topics in human history. So far, leadership has various versions of definition and more theories of application are still emerging. The Australian army defines leadership as "the art of influencing and directing people to willingly achieve the team or organisational goal". No operations can be conducted effectively without the motivation and inspiration provided by an effective leader. Leaders develop their personal character, acquire knowledge and skills, and take action to inspire team members to achieve desired goals.

Military leadership is often underestimated by civilian organisations. Military leadership is the process of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction and motivation. The strength of military leadership concentrates on the enterprising actions of on-scene personnel in an uncertain, fast-changing and ambiguous environment. These conditions are pertinent to armed services in crisis response operations or in warfare, but can also be observed in today's business world, mostly in client oriented organisations or organisations in hyper-competitive environments.

Most of the differences in methods of leadership can be related to differences in the cultures. The basis of the military culture is to place mission accomplishment above everything else. This kind of life-and-death decision making process has reminded all staff to preserve resources while achieving goals. The military culture also places more emphasis on personal character rather than on technical expertise, especially in building up trust among staff. Trust still remains the most important medium in leadership situation where the environment is potentially uncertain and risky.

It is important to understand that civilian business practices are different to the conduct of war. Nevertheless, there are many relevant military lessons that are useful in leadership studies within the non-military world. Ultimately, the requirement is to lead staff into operations. Regardless of role or context, all members are expected to lead effectively.

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2008-2010 Meetings

Contributions listing relevant meetings are welcome. Please send to: editor@theasm.com.au

14-16 March 2008

Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour, Sydney, NSW

Pathology Update 2008

Web: www.rcpa.edu.au/pathologyupdate

8-10 May 2008

The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba, Blue Mountains, NSW
Viruses in May 2008

Viruses in May is an annual intensive clinical virology update for clinicians, scientists and trainees in this discipline. Register early as places are strictly limited.

The programme includes:

- Virus structure and function
- New molecular diagnostic techniques
- Viral disease surveillance
- Antiviral therapy

In addition there will be intensive clinical updates on:

- Treatment and prevention of specific viral infections
- Infection in the immunocompromised patient

Convenors: Prof Bill Rawlinson & Dr Monica Lahra

Conference Management: Australian Society for Microbiology

Web: www.virusesinmay.com

1-5 June 2008

Boston, MA, USA

American Society for Microbiology: 108th General Meeting

Web: www.asm.org

2-5 July 2008

Hilton on the Park, Melbourne, VIC

25th NRL Workshop on Serology

Director: A/Prof Elizabeth M Dax / Workshop Secretariat: Linda Tracey

Tel: (03) 9418 1117

Web: www.nrl.gov.au

6-10 July 2008

Melbourne Convention Centre, VIC

ASM 2008 Melbourne: Australia's premier microbiology scientific meeting & exhibition for 2008!

Chair: Sue Cornish

Conference Management: Australian Society for Microbiology

Janette Sofronidis, Conference Manager

Tel: (03) 9867 8699

Email: janette@theasm.com.au

Web: www.asm2008.org

Confirmed speakers include: Laureate Professor Peter C Doherty, Prof Jay Hinton, Dr Gopinath Balakrish Nair, Dr Liliane Grangeot-Keros, Prof Terri Camesano, Ms Lynne Garcia, Prof Malic Peiris, Prof Stephen Goff, Prof Craig Roy, Prof Tony Pugsley, Prof Alan Cowman (Rubbo Orator).

21-24 July 2008

Sydney Exhibition & Convention Centre, Darling Harbour, Sydney, NSW

41st Annual AIFST Convention in co-location with FoodPro

Contact: Julie Bennett, Email: julie@foodaust.com.au

Mel Malloch, Email: mel@foodaust.com.au

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Web: www.aifst.asn.au

7-22 August 2008

Cairns Convention Centre, Cairns, QLD

ISME12: Microbial Diversity – Sustaining the Blue Planet

Email: blackall@awmc.uq.edu.au

Web: http://www.microbes.org/symposia_future.asp

24 August – 1 September 2008

Inter-University Centre, Dubrovnik, Croatia

John Innes/Rudjer Boškovi Summer Schools in Applied Molecular Microbiology: Microbial Secondary Metabolites: Genomes, Signals and Communities

Applications from PhD students and post-doctoral scientists are now welcome.

Web: www.jic.ac.uk/science/molmicro/summerschool2008/index.htm

Co-directors: David Hopwood, John Innes Centre, Norwich, UK & Julian Davies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Local organiser: Duška Vujaklija, Rudjer Boškovi Institute, Zagreb, Croatia

7-10 September 2008

Cairns Convention Centre, Cairns, QLD

13th International Symposium on Staphylococci and Staphylococcal Infections

Conference Chair: Graeme Nimmo

Email: iss2008@icms.com.au

Web: www.iss2008.com

Hosted by Australian Society for Antimicrobials with collaboration from ASM

12-13 September 2008

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Alice Springs, NT

Tri-State 2008

Conference Management: Australian Society for Microbiology

Tel: (03) 9867 8699

Web: www.tristate2008.org

19-23 October 2008

Biblioteca Sarmiento, Centro Cívico, Bariloche City, Argentina (in front of the wonderful Nahuel Huapi Lake)

15th International Meeting on Frankia and Actinorhizal Plants

Enquiries: Luis Wall & Eugenia Chaia, University of Quilmes, Bernal, Argentina & CRUB University of Comahue, Bariloche, Argentina

Email: lgwall@unq.edu.ar

2009

6-10 July 2009

Perth

ASM2009

Chairs: Tom Riley, David Smith, Barbara Chang & Charlene Kahler

2010

4-8 July 2010

Darling Harbour Convention Centre, Sydney, NSW

Overlapping with the 10th International Symposium on the Genetics of Industrial Microorganisms

Chair: Ian Macreadie

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