

## Retool, Tip and Run Like a Business

Leslie Larrabee applies a revolutionary approach to running two entrepreneurial contract and community education programs in California. What she has coined an “organizational strategy” is a non-traditional way to organize these workforce and community development programs by functionally, programmatically and organizationally tipping the college division on its side. Larrabee views the division from an entrepreneurial business perspective instead of the traditional academic perspective, and is then able to run it like a business.

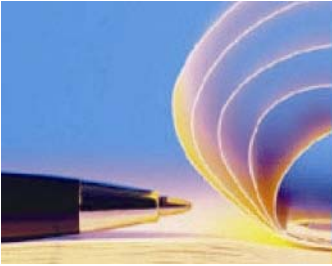
Larrabee developed this strategy by combining the skills she gained from her early career in business development and corporate training with her experiences as an entrepreneur and applying those foundational skills in her work in higher education. Most recently, Larrabee spent six years at the Chabot - Las Positas Community College District prior to her new role at College of the Desert. She has applied her organizational strategy to both community college economic and workforce development divisions.

---

**Leslie Larrabee**

Traditional programs organize their staff and finance separately by individual program, Larrabee observed during her work in the state of California. This is in large part due to the nature of these programs sprouting up from under-budgeted plans, which are built up by grant awards and then additional staff are added on an as needed basis. In this bottom up manner, there is little connectivity between the workforce development, contract education or community education programs. Larrabee described this phenomenon as the *silos model*, “The individual programs get added in silos with the program directors expected to market, sell, sometimes even deliver the training and consulting, all the while managing the logistics of delivering the program, reporting to the Chancellor’s office, developing the work plan, etc. And each program is having a similar experience where the program director or manager is asked to do everything,” Larrabee explained.

Larrabee said that human nature dictates that we gravitate to those things we do well. She explained that how it plays out in a silo-modeled organization is thus: The program director is gifted at developing the workplan and tracking the results. Invariably this is where the director will spend their time. This behavior, while totally understandable, often results in no one to market and sell the program services, so revenue is not realized. On the other hand, if the director is a gifted salesperson, but lacks the experience or skill to identify strong subject matter experts who can deliver their programs, the program suffers as customers have bad training experiences or cannot get their training scheduled in a timely fashion.



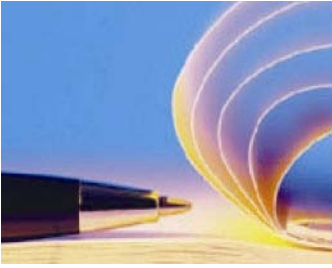
Larrabee suggests that instead of looking at each workforce or community development program within a college individually, you should look at this group of not-for-credit, non-credit, and fee-based programs as a whole. She stresses a functionally-focused model versus a program-focused model. "You have to look at what goes on in the division by function," says Larrabee. "When you do this, you see that program functions across the silos overlap." It takes someone with a larger perspective to step back and know the nature of what we in workforce and community development do, she said. In taking that larger perspective and "tipping the organization on its side," Larrabee suggests looking at all the functions of individual programs and retooling staff and budget to fit the defined functions.

A not-for-credit, non-credit, or fee-based program all have products or services to "sell," just as a business does. Just as a business needs someone with a sales and marketing perspective to advertise their product or service, a workforce or community development program needs a person with the same skill set. "While most programs do some sort of marketing, a person who is trained in sales and marketing usually has a different skill set than most program people have," said Larrabee. "Find somebody who loves sales and marketing and have them work for all of the programs."

Another way to see how workforce or community development programs can function as a whole is by examining what is needed to make a class. Any class, in any program, is made of an instructor, class materials, a location (online or in the classroom) and students, whether they are traditional, incumbent workers or community members. Larrabee suggests that one person or persons needs to coordinate this effort. All of the details, such as scheduling classes, managing the logistics involved in getting materials ordered or ready, getting the instructor to the right place at the right time and paying the instructor or vendor, should be coordinated by one person or persons.

Larrabee mentioned that students or businesses often don't know, or care for that matter, which individual program has the training or services they need. If there is one place, one phone number, one website to which they can go to get the answers they seek, there is a much better chance of having that student or business join the program for their educational or training journey. It is the program's job to identify the right product or service that will meet their personal needs, their professional needs, or their business' needs.

The proof that this organizational strategy works is in the numbers. When Larrabee arrived at Chabot – Las Positas Community College District (CLPCCD), the contract education program wasn't breaking even and had accumulated a half million dollar deficit over the ten years since its inception. After reorganizing the program to function like a business, CLPCCD's deficit was not only eliminated, but the program was able to break even approximately two years after Larrabee implemented the organizational strategy. By the third year, the program was contributing back to the community college district's general fund and peaked at \$4.2 million in revenue. In addition to growing the program's revenue, Larrabee also increased her staff from three to seven and went from 12 instructors to 100 by the end of her six year career with CLPCCD.



# journal of lifelong learning™

Exclusively from Augustsoft, Inc.

Larrabee is in the initial phases of examining the functions of College of the Desert's workforce and community development programs and is beginning to implement the organizational strategy as she did at CLPCCD.

To implement the organizational strategy in any workforce or community development program, Larrabee says that the program needs to find someone with a "30,000 foot perspective" so that they can see how all the continuing education, community education, workforce development programs fit together as a whole. It is only by letting go of traditionally organized programs and applying this business approach that these entrepreneurial endeavors in education can really grow and make lasting contributions to the college, the community and the economy.