

A Conversation with Dr. Gerard Buckley, President of NTID and Vice President of RIT

Facilitated by Luke Auburn

Luke Auburn: You're listening to the RIT Professional Development Podcast series. I'm your host, Luke Auburn. Today's guest is Dr. Buckley, president of NTID and vice president of RIT since 2011. Dr. Buckley has more than 30 years of experience in higher education including more than 20 years serving in a variety of capacities at NTID. Today he leads more than 500 faculty and staff. We'll talk about NTID's approach to professional development and advice he has for faculty and staff. Dr. Buckley, thank you for having us.

Dr. Buckley: Well, thank you for the invitation. I'm happy to join you.

Luke Auburn: So, in your view, what are the essential competencies people need in order to be successful working at NTID?

Dr. Buckley: Probably the same competencies that Dr. Robert Frisina, our first director, identified more than 45 years ago when he began the task of establishing NTID here. First of all, they have to be professionally competent in their technical area of responsibility, their discipline if they're a faculty member. And, secondly, if they're a staff member or interpreter then they have to be very skilled in the interpreting.

The second thing they need to have is characteristic of a passion for the education of deaf and hard of hearing students. People come here from all over the world to work because of NTID and because of the ability to have a positive impact on the lives of deaf people. And they have to have that passion for wanting to make a difference in the lives of deaf people.

And the third thing is the ability to work with interdisciplinary groups because no one has the answer. Here at NTID we have interpreters. We have faculty. We have speech therapists. We have audiologists. We have counselors. All of us contribute to helping young deaf and hard of hearing people be professionally successful. So those are three major characteristics.

Luke Auburn: Interesting. How do you identify that passion in people?

Dr. Buckley: A lot of it happens through the interview process. And because we are the one NTID in the world, really, in the nation, now other countries are replicating us in Japan and other countries now. There are programs that are very comparable to NTID, and we've served as a role model to them over the last 45 years. But now people search us out. They've heard of us. After 45 years, we've become the model to the nation of providing education in a mainstream setting. So people who are interested in deaf education want to work in a mainstream setting, look to come here to be a place where they can really fulfill their mission in life, if you will.

Luke Auburn: So, as you just touched on, you lead a very unique institution as the largest technical college for deaf and hard of hearing students in the world. I imagine that creates some unique opportunities for professional development. What programs has NTID developed specifically for its faculty and staff to help them advance in their careers?

Dr. Buckley: We are always here have a philosophy that we're all learning together since the beginning days. So we're not only teaching students. We're learning from them. Our faculty are committed further, able to develop their communication skills to the fullest of their ability. So every day they're committing to improving their signing skills, improving their ability to communicate with the diversity of deaf and hard of hearing people.

They're also committed to their professional development of their discipline or their technical background. So NTID provides a variety of professional workshops and professional development activities that are focused on that. For example, in January during the intersession, we had 200 people working in access services here. We really focused on our sign language interpreting workforce because, during the year, those 125 of our top interpreters in the world with an average of 14 years' experience in the classroom, they don't have the opportunity to really engage in professional development because they are often interpreting those workshops. So during the January intersession we actually brought in the experts in the nation to work with them, provide them the in-depth two-week opportunity to really improve

their skills. So we're very focused on supporting the professional growth of our faculty and staff.

Luke Auburn: As a former faculty member who has yourself climbed the career ladder, what are the top career advancement tips you have for faculty?

Dr. Buckley: Well, I think my faculty colleagues would say I haven't really advanced. You know, what do you mean? But really take advantage of the resources here at RIT. We just -- we have a marvelous array of resources at RIT and here at NTID. Take advantage of it. Use those resources. Talk to your peers. Identify mentor and older faculty members, that person, and ask for help, support, and assistance because people here are very committed to helping the professional growth of everyone. So I just think there is a sea of opportunities. When someone says, Oh, I can't find something; it's probably because they're not looking enough. There really are people throughout the campus, throughout the university who are committed to supporting the professional growth of individuals.

So my advice really to faculty here is really also very special. Our standards are rising for faculty development. Research and scholarship is a new area. It's not necessarily new for the university but it's an enhanced emphasis. So faculty have to be more focused in their careers on the scholarly part of their portfolio, the research part of their portfolio, and balancing that with teaching excellence that's required of everyone. And so my advice to people is really be very mindful in the faculty area of what you were hired to do and what the expectations are, and then make sure you seek out the appropriate mentoring and guidance to satisfy those expectations.

Luke Auburn: How did you personally develop the breadth and depth of knowledge that you need for your current role?

Dr. Buckley: If you have a passion for your work and you love your work, then it doesn't feel like you're working. So, if you're working 18 hour days, it doesn't feel that way. And a very patient spouse and family that understood my passion and most of the people at NTID are the same way.

One of my major roles is to tell people to go home. Go home and recharge. Get out that personal side of your lives and have the balance because that's important. We're very focused here at RIT and at NTID especially on the success of our students. Our people don't go home. And when they go home they get on the computer and they're working more. I tell them to log off. Log off and allow yourself the personal opportunity for renewal. And then you can come back at eight in the morning and start again. You know the sun, will come up tomorrow. You don't have to solve all of the problems and challenges in deaf education today. You can wait until tomorrow.

And, you know, for me, my job is really just simple. I get paid to do what I love. This place made a difference in my life. It impacted my daughter, who is professional veterinarian now, who is deaf, also. And I look around and I see, wow. This place has changed the lives of thousands of young deaf people. And guess what? I get to temporarily lead it or facilitate its success. And I get to work with the best people in the world. We really do. NTID attracts highly qualified people who come here with a passion for their work. And sometimes the magic happens simply because you get those people together. And you give them the opportunity to make a difference, and they do.

Luke Auburn: Well, you talked about taking time to log off. That must keep your staff sharp and ready to attack the next day.

Dr. Buckley: And no one does it. We're all guilty. I mean, people say, "What do you do?" Oh, Facebook. But you're reading faculty, staff, and student opinions on Facebook. Yeah. That's how I stay in touch. We have a large number of people who work here. I learn a lot about what students are perceiving things and how we can improve our services. And our faculty and staff, as I said, they work hard. I see them responding in an email at eleven o'clock at night or two in the morning. I can sometimes jump in and say, "Hey, now. Shut the computer off." It's just the

nature of our society now and students you know expect. I mean, you teach a course now. You know students send you a text or an email at three in the afternoon. They expect an answer by five that afternoon. Some of that is very healthy, but some of it's not realistic. And we have to help people realize what's the appropriate balance.

Luke Auburn: So given that 24-hour cycle we're kind of on these days, what skills do you see as becoming increasingly important for professionals at RIT and NTID moving into the future?

Dr. Buckley: I think we all -- you know, we talk about being lifelong learners. I copied the directory from my iPhone 6 in my iPad last night to read them on the plane coming back because I'm convinced I don't take advantage of all the capacities of that technology. And it's changing all the time, so all of us really have to be committed to really understanding how to use technology effectively. I think that's one.

And then the second particular skill is I think -- and what we hear from employers out there is that the ability to work with teams, interdisciplinary teams, that's not easy, especially at a place like RIT where we have colleges and we have our own unique disciplines. So I think the willingness and the ability to develop skills working across the boundaries, looking at challenges in new ways, it's just increasingly important. It's what we hear from employers, and it's what we have to practice here at RIT. And we're making progress in that area, but it remains something -- it's a goal that we have to continue to improve.

Luke Auburn: Dr. Buckley, thank you very much for your time. That concludes another edition of the RIT professional development podcast series. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit rit.edu/cpd.