

## A Conversation with Dr. Bill Destler, 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. Our guest today is Dr. Bill Destler who has served as RIT's ninth president since 2007. Prior to RIT, Dr. Destler spent more than 30 years at the University of Maryland, rising from the ranks of research associate and assistant professor of electrical engineering to senior vice president and provost. Currently as president, Dr. Destler leads more than 3,400 faculty and staff. We'll discuss his vision for professional development at the university and advice he has for faculty and staff. Dr. Destler, thank you for joining us.

**Dr. Bill Destler:** It's my pleasure.

**Luke Auburn:** So RIT's strategic plans states that "RIT will become a model of inclusive excellence for all faculty and staff in the areas of professional development and promotion." How can RIT accomplish this, and what do you expect from the managers to foster such an environment?

**Dr. Bill Destler:** Well, first of all, "inclusive excellence" means that we welcome anyone here into our RIT family no matter what their background is, their nationality, their gender, their race, or whatever. And not only do we welcome them and affirm their presence in our community, but we hope to benefit from the diverse of creative ideas that such group brings to our community. And I think the managers can help, of course, by encouraging all of these diverse people in our community to develop their own professional skills to the extent possible and to advance in their careers to the extent possible by making use of the support mechanisms available on the campus.

**Luke Auburn:** What resources do you recommend to faculty and staff who are interested in advancing professionally take advantage of?

**Dr. Bill Destler:** Well, first of all, for staff, they should take advantage of the Office of Professional Development and try to improve their skills for their particular position. Faculty, of course, have opportunities of the same kind, and I'll talk about those in the minute, but I really think that another thing they can do is to enthusiastically embrace the community, and if you can't figure out, you know, how you could contribute, then do a little exploring and find ways in which you can add value to our family here.

**Luke Auburn:** So as a former professor who has risen through the ranks, what are the top career advancement tips you have for faculty?

**Dr. Bill Destler:** For faculty, it's not really rocket science. First of all, you need to basically understand what the criteria are for advancement in the profession. That is, what's the criteria for advancement from assistant professor to associate professor with tenure, or from lecturer to senior lecturer. You need to pay attention to those criteria and not waste your time on things that actually won't contribute to your advancement. But I think that once you understand those and get the proper mentoring and check with senior faculty every now and then to see if you're on the right track, I think you'll be fine.

**Luke Auburn:** Excellent. And along the same lines, what are the top professional development tips you have for staff?

**Dr. Bill Destler:** Staff actually have a, you know, quite a range of professional development opportunities available to them: classes, mentoring. Hopefully their managers will help them progress in their careers. We're all hopeful that RIT becomes a place of opportunity for people to come and to start, perhaps modestly, in positions, but to advance their careers to the point where they can be very, very successful. I think that staff especially have, you know, an obligation and an opportunity to increase their own educational skills by, for example, taking courses or taking advantage of the offerings in professional development, or even taking degree programs here, and we have a large number of our staff have done that as well. So I'd encourage all of them to just take advantage of the opportunities available to you. And then, I

think, look for opportunities that could use your newly acquired skills more effectively and in more advanced positions here at the university.

**Luke Auburn:** Looking ahead to the future, what skills do you see becoming increasingly important to higher education professionals as the field changes?

**Dr. Bill Destler:** Well, clearly, information technology skills are becoming more important. I think you'll see more of our instruction happening online. I think you'll find greater use of technology in our teaching and certainly in our research. So I think that all of the things you might imagine will help. Here at RIT, of course, it also helps if people become adept at trying to get the right-brainers and left-brainers together and getting the creative types and the techie types and even the business types to talk to each other about innovative projects that might lead to important new advancements for our society.

**Luke Auburn:** Fantastic. Dr. Destler, thank you very much for your time. This concludes this edition of the RIT Professional Development podcast series. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit [rit.edu/cpd](http://rit.edu/cpd).