Moving the Needle 2014
Keynote Speakers Day 2
Mr. John Streitmatter, LRI and Dr. Tonjua Williams, SPC

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Keynote Speakers: John Streitmatter, LRI and Dr. Tonjua Williams, SPC

Dr. Coraggio: I'll introduce our two keynote speakers. John Streitmatter is the Director at the Leadership Research Institute who specializes in building leader credibility in the midst of turbulent market and organizational dynamics. He is a gifted facilitator, an executive coach with a track record of results in line management positions, and an entertaining and impactful speaker. He serves as an executive coach, trusted strategic advisor, and facilitator to leaders to enable them to clearly articulate a future vision and strategy, and then engage their followers to achieve it. John is known for his ability to synthesize discussion to its essence and integrate seemingly disparate data and points of view together into agreement and action.

Dr. Tonjua Williams has over 20 years of experience in higher education, ranging from student affairs to academic and college-wide administration. Currently, she serves as the Senior Vice President of Student Services at St. Petersburg College. Her passion is to participate in initiatives designed to help others overcome obstacles and succeed in life. As a recipient of community outreach services and a member of "the village," she understands the importance of reaching out to others and helping them realize their full potential. Being the first in her family to attend college and earn a degree, she strongly supports any initiative designed to help our youth understand their ability to be successful. She believes that if one person is successful, he/she will bring along others and will make a difference in our society.

The presentation is available online at:
http://prezi.com/z60kt0ezbzek/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

John Streitmatter: We decided to take a little different approach. A tag team approach. This is a team sport, so we felt like it was appropriate to lead it as a team. First let's talk a little about the College Experience.

Dr. Williams: It is not a project. It is a set of values. We remove the barriers that prohibit students from succeeding and support them while they are in school. We seriously collaborate with the deans, the provosts and the front line staff.

John Streitmatter: You are talking a lot about a team. We are taught about "managing" or "leading" my area - I need to think about taking care of my stuff. That's important, but for the cultural change, the most important role is to be part of the leadership team and to think about the college overall and look at the area I'm leading for the sake of the whole college. Secondly, productive conflict. There is an idea that gets in the way of productive conflict - artificial harmony. If I can't express what I think, then all the ideas don't get on the table. We spent a couple of days talking about disagreeing without being disagreeable.

Dr. Williams: The provosts at the time that John and I met had just been given the responsibility for overall college student success. Until that time, they were just focused on their own campuses. When we called, John, what were your thoughts?

John Streitmatter: Getting the team to think beyond their own responsibility and getting them to adopt a customer mentality. Our job is to change students' lives. How do we do that? Accept some responsibility for the student who isn't doing his/her part. Go beyond thinking that if the student didn't get it, they didn't get it clearly. It's ultimately up to them, but get them to think beyond just putting on the class. It's about moving the needle. Let's talk about the results.

Dr. Williams: The president said earlier in the conference that the first time we looked at the results, they weren't that great. After a term or two, we started to see some results. The biggest take-away, our success rates went up for gateway and developmental students. Our success rates improved even for students of color, particularly Hispanics and African-Americans. We didn't have a boutique program. Once we got the data, we realized that this was the type of help they needed. Double digits for African-American males, Hispanic males and African-American and Hispanic students in general.

John Streitmatter: Across the board improvements.

Dr. Williams: We also closed the achievement gap in this systemic change. The gap is still there, but it is definitely beginning to close. The minority students are definitely benefitting from our work.

John Streitmatter: You can see how that closed. It started with a gap of about 14%. It's only about 7% now. Obviously our goal is 0, and we'd like to see achievement rates for everyone go up. Overall, success rates went up. Let's talk about overall first time in college, particularly males.

Dr. Williams: What we wanted to do was be sure that all students started at the same place. We knew we had under- and unprepared students. We had to be accountable for who came, how to reach out to them and how do you help them. We found that our minority students reacted to that. Particularly the DevEd students.

John Streitmatter: Very dramatic increases. So, what was the work that caused that to happen? A lot of this work sounds pretty simple. It is. But don't confuse simple with easy. A lot of this was simple, but difficult. We had to change our perspective and so did others. How do we think about getting the work done? That was a different mindset. There are six aspects of this effort.

The first one is about getting the group to think about working together. We had the president and the provosts together for two days to talk about who they were and where do they come from. Now they began to understand each other. Secondly, setting expectations. Tonjua did a beautiful job for saying it's ok to have a difference of opinion. That's not a violation of collegiality.

Dr. Williams: What I learned about myself is that I have to be comfortable with who I am and let others lead. Let them say, I don't agree. I think we can do it a different way. John let the provosts tell me what their expectations of me were and vice versa. We talked about having "meetings after the meetings." We don't do that. Bring it up in the meeting, not afterwards.

John Streitmatter: There was a full impact to the staff as well.

Dr. Williams: The provosts meet once a week as a council. Every other week, others throughout the college come in. They get a chance to actively participate in the meeting. The first two or three meetings, people were uncomfortable because the provosts were brutally honest. After a while, people were more comfortable coming to the meeting and saying they disagreed. They also began to be active participants, not just sitting on the sidelines. We need everybody's participation.

John Streitmatter: If you are leading major change and there is not a significant disruption, you should be terrified. Either nothing is changing, or it is changing and you don't know about it. Tonjua could have said, wait, we're getting tons of feedback from how the provosts are different. That's a good thing. You want to handle it, but it doesn't mean it's wrong.

8=1 – eight provosts equal one. This became a theme.

Another element is that you have to look through the students' eyes. You are a leader of a group. Wait, I need to think about the student experience. What does it look like to show up on campus, go to class, and use a whole different language? I saw this come to bear as a shift from "my job is to produce a class" to "my job is to facilitate learning." The second thing is that even though I am responsible for a campus, I am responsible for the whole college. That's now how a student thinks about it. They think of the college as a whole thing. If I'm just thinking about my campus, that's different from how the student sees it. Who's in your village? Who are the students? Where do they come from?

Dr. Williams: One of the things we had to deal with was the lack of access to data. When you don't have data, it almost makes you feel like you are not responsible for what's going on. We'd walk through advising students the first week of school. It was crazy. We got all different answers than what we thought. We started to use data to find out what were the problems. Forty percent of our applicants never enrolled. They just fell off the map. We became more responsible for it and being honest that it wasn't so great.

John Streitmatter: Widening the funnel at the very beginning. We just missed 40% of the population if you are not thinking like a student. What did you discover when you looked at the number of folks – did they think about it as a campus by campus thing?

Dr. Williams: No, our students take classes at multiple campuses. The experience was confusing because it wasn't the same across the college. The provosts helped turn that around.

John Streitmatter: Let's be honest, that involves some trade-offs. It meant moving resources

and giving stuff up.

Dr. Williams: An example. We are getting our budget ready. I recently had one provost say to another provost, "You need this advising position more than I do, take it." Who does that? That's collaboration.

John Streitmatter: The idea of one college and shifting to the students' view of the college. Another thing was "finish what you start." How many times have you heard that?

Dr. Williams: About a million.

John Streitmatter: That's a mindset shift. The key to that one is this idea of data – how do you know right away who is struggling? That's a great predictor of who is going to finish. What was the difference?

Dr. Williams: We had an early alert system that was in place, but the faculty didn't like it. In order to collaborate, everyone needs a say. We got with faculty, they shared what they wanted, we added their spin, and it's working. The dean's, provosts, AVP's and front-line staff. We value them. They know way more than we do. Those that don't work with your front line, you're missing a lot of data and information. We can't work in silos and bring everyone in from the ground up. The faculty needs to like and understand it. The faculty is now ready – they are asking, "When are we expanding to my subjects?" We need it. That's a huge take away. The gap in academic, admin, technology, student services – we're all coming together as a family.

John Streitmatter: I see students struggling in my class and I trigger an early alert – how did you handle it?

Dr. Williams: We've had students call and ask why were are calling. Our job is to make failing difficult. If you failed, it's because you really missed the boat. The State of Florida is starting to look at performance-based funding.

John Streitmatter: It's an observation I've seen in the process. Outside of the academic world, I see leaders say this all the time. The framework is the same – let's be clear: there are a set of expectations that we need to deliver – advice, counseling, coaching. It's the same here. We're not asking people to take ownership beyond their role, but further than perhaps they were. Make failure difficult. Did you do what you needed to do? Put on an awesome class, and reach out and know who's in your village. The data shows that there is a significant change as a result of that. The aggregate ability levels might be the same, but the results are radically different because we collaborated more. Everyone extended themselves to ask how they could help and students reacted to that. It was easier to adapt to the system.

Dr. Williams: The other piece was for the college employees to care. To care that they are there, to care about the students. It took a long road for some students to get to that front door. We needed to care about that. You've heard "it takes a village to raise a child." You need to know that the child is in the village. The data helped us see them. We could see what was working and not. The village was not functioning.

John Streitmatter: Whether you are in facilities, working on the grounds – you have a role in student success. If the environment is created to allow students to succeed... Let's get all the way away from the classroom and have the mindset that everybody can help.

Dr. Williams: Then we realized how hard it was to bring a student on board. I learned that from Bill Law – go see for yourself. Oh man, it was hard. Have any of you looked at your on-boarding? We looked at everyone's role in this. Everybody needs to take ownership.

John Streitmatter: You need to go down and ask to make sure everybody has a voice. I talked about expanding the funnel at the front. Graduation used to be the end. The college said that wasn't true. It's not the end. What happens when they leave the village? Job, graduate studies – go beyond graduation. Set them up for that process.

Dr. Williams: We have not cracked the code on that. We're are expanding our internships, our transfers to higher education, job placement. We're just touching that place. We're going there. Think beyond the village.

John Streitmatter: The last thing is the Four Disciplines of Execution book. There has to be a way to cause things to be different. The College Experience got really focused on implementation – weekly meetings, looking at metrics, what gets measured, gets done. Analysis of those metrics. It's a data-driven way of looking at issues. How can we resolve that problem as opposed to just the person being blamed. You have to do the other stuff first to make sure everyone is on the same team so you can figure out how the team can address the problem rather than looking to blame someone for the problem. Combine the data and the team, you have a really good chance to fix it.

Dr. Williams: Each of us could go back to bookshelves of plans at our colleges. The hard part is executing the plan. We don't need a whole lot of plans. We need a lot of executing the plan. How many of you have staff say, "Don't worry, it will die down. It's just the latest fad." Sometimes we get excited about a plan, it's not written by the people who are involved. In order to execute, you have to be focused. The weekly webinars help us stay focused. The College Experience was a guinea pig for using the Four Disciplines. We're now working on enrollment. Execution keeps everybody focused. Everybody gets to see everybody else's numbers. It makes people really go back and analyze their numbers. It's transparent. If you don't execute the plan, you will lose ground with your staff. They won't take you seriously.

John Streitmatter: We have time for a couple of questions.

Question: Very nice discussion. Do the provosts council ever have private meetings? How long have they reported to you? What do you do with the senior leaders who are undermining efforts?

Dr. Williams: Every other week, the provosts have private meetings. The also have monthly meetings with the provost and deans. Every other week it's open. They've reported to me since 2011-12.

John Streitmatter: The last question – make clear what you expect. Coaching, advising and counseling. Then see what happens. Not everybody comes along. Success means that not everybody comes to the new world. Your job is to be clear about what you expect and I'm going to do my part to help you get there. It's unusual in this type of cultural change, that everybody makes it. In this case, they did.

Dr. Williams: We have team members that struggle. We try to pull them. Either they will be part of the team or not.

Question: Diane Snyder, Alamo College: 4DX. It's kind of a project management model, having the metrics, accountability. The 4DX model in the book is a little different, but I like where you are going. The 4DX sets a broad goal and it is letting teams build their own strategies. It allows creativity and innovation from the bottom. How did it work to develop this plan, to do the training, to move into the accountability and metric review? What was the timeline to develop the plan and training?

Dr. Williams: It took us a year to develop the plan and we did the training in that year and we launched it in 2012.

John Streitmatter: It's doing real work together. Spend time hammering it out.

Dr. Williams: We were writing white papers, visited colleges. Looking at things.

Question: The organization structure – now you have rotating deans who are moving around the campuses. What did that require in terms of change? How does that change the dynamic of faculty going to one person on campus?

Dr. Williams: We have rotating academic deans, but we have campus chairs who are stable on their campus. Let's get the best dean in composition and spread best practices throughout the college. The provosts work with any and everybody on their campus regardless of who they report to.

John Streitmatter: I hope what we've demonstrated here is that Move the Needle is about having the data and the access to the data. But it has very much to do with what you do with the data. Don't underestimate the work to do that. How do we act differently to move the data to where we want it to be? I hope we've given you some perspective on how to do that this morning.