

***Book Review***

Fleming, K. (2016). *The leader's guide to emotional agility: How to use soft skills to get hard results*. New York, NY: Pearson. ISBN: 9781292083070 (Paperback), \$16.23, 208 pages.

Technology education is often discussed as a dying profession. According to Volk in his 1997 article reviewing technology education teacher preparation programs, “the demise of the technology teacher preparation programs will occur around the year 2005” (p. 69). The number of technology education teacher preparation programs across the United States, programs that train educators to teach critical thinking about technology tools, are disappearing at an astonishing rate. Without teachers for the programs, tool-based instruction will cease, and our society will not be educated to look at tools in a critical manner. The number of technology education teacher graduates has decreased by 68.35% between the years of 1995 and 2008 (Moye, Jones, & Dugger, 2015). Currently, only 24 undergraduate technology and engineering teacher preparation programs with an enrollment of 20 students or more exist in the United States (Litowitz, 2014). The steady decline of programs that prepare technology and engineering education teachers has been a consistent issue for over 40 years (Moye et al., 2015). In the Commonwealth of Virginia, there is currently only one program that trains students in undergraduate technology education, which is housed in the STEM Education and Professional Studies Department (STEMPS) at Old Dominion University (ODU). Virginia was instrumental in the creation of the *Standards for Technological Literacy* and has been a leader in technology education since the name change from industrial arts in 1978. However, the undergraduate technology education programs at Virginia Tech, James Madison University, Norfolk State, and Virginia State University have all become inactive, making the technology education program at ODU the last remaining program in the Commonwealth.

In order to change this trend, our leaders must begin to re-envision the curriculum and implementation of design. According to research, our field has had a steady decline for over 20 years. Instead of arguing about the reasons, we, the leaders in our field, need to develop new ideas and pathways to implement this valuable curriculum. We need to have discussions that go beyond dismay at our demise and suggest changes that will allow our teacher preparation programs to grow.

My recent read of Kerry Fleming’s book, *The Leader's Guide to Emotional Agility: How to Use Soft Skills to Get Hard Results*, helped me to frame our field in a new light. The book caught my attention with its development of emotions as part of a leadership plan. The concept of *emotional agility* was introduced by David and Congleton (2013) to describe the ability to recognize and use positive and negative emotions and the inner voice to develop thoughtful and productive

actions. Fleming uses the concept of emotional agility to outline how to become an emotionally reactive leader and how to develop applications in which leaders can use their understanding of emotions in order to develop teams, motivate, and promote innovation.

### **Key Concepts**

Fleming outlines seven steps to becoming a more emotionally aware leader in the first section of his book. The steps include becoming authentic, becoming self-aware, becoming aware of others, using and understanding emotions, managing your own emotions, managing the emotions of others, and creating awareness. The book is written with reference to current research in the areas of emotional intelligence and agility. Each chapter provides background and research on the topic discussed, a case study, an exercise, and a summary that reviews key points of the chapter.

The second part of the book explores the application of the concept of accepting and recognizing emotions in the workplace. Part 2 is written in the same manner as Part 1 with research-based psychotherapy activities and background that lead to exercises and case studies. Part 2 also includes performance tips for the application of each chapter's concept. Part 2 concepts include using emotional agility for difficult performance appraisals, motivating a disengaged team, promoting creativity and innovation, making changes in your organization, and becoming a more effective leader.

### **Application to Our Curriculum and Leadership**

Although this book may be an easy read, it includes many new concepts that could enhance our field. In the age of cutting costs and going digital, our leaders have forgotten the most important aspect of our field: the passion of our teachers for their work. That passion has gone unchanged since the writings of Dewey. "Dewey's concept of experience allows a holistic approach to education, in the sense that it is based on the interaction between the human being and the world" (Hohr, 2013, p. 25). Dewey promoted the idea that learning should be experienced. The human experience includes not only knowledge but also emotions and feelings. Design is not only based on acuity but is also based on the abstract concept of aesthetics. What is beautiful to one person is not to another because of their emotional reaction to or feelings about design. Teaching design-based learning requires the curriculum to include less concrete concepts such as aesthetics and human interactions with the product. In a field based in human emotion, leaders in our field need to recognize and speak to these emotions in our meetings, literature, and lobbying efforts. We need to share our passion and create a stronger, more interactive environment for curriculum training. We need to recognize the need for human interactions when developing meeting schedules and care about the people in our field. In new endeavors to save money by creating online meetings, we still need to connect

with our members on a personal level. In the face of dwindling teacher training programs, we should change the tactics that have brought us to this point. Focusing on curriculum and content is important; however, the strength in our curriculum lies in the human (and emotional) connection to design. Concentrating on the value of passion in our curriculum may be the key to strengthening our field and bringing technology education to the forefront again.

#### References

- David, S., & Congleton, C. (2013). Emotional agility. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(11), 125–128.
- Hohr, H. (2013). The concept of experience by John Dewey revisited: Conceiving, feeling and “enlivening.” *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32(1), 25–38. doi:10.1007/s11217-012-9330-7
- Litowitz, L. S. (2014). A curricular analysis of undergraduate technology & engineering teacher preparation programs in the United States. *Journal of Technology Education*, 25(2), 73–84. doi:10.21061/jte.v25i2.a.5
- Moye, J. J., Jones, V. R., & Dugger, W. E., Jr. (2015). Status of technology and engineering education in the United States: A fifth report of the findings from the states (2014–15). *Technology and Engineering Teacher*, 74(7), 30–36.
- Volk, K. S. (1997). Going, going, gone? Recent trends in technology teacher education programs. *Journal of Technology Education*, 8(2), 66–70. doi:10.21061/jte.v8i2.a.5

---

**M. Kathleen Ferguson** (mferg010@odu.edu) is a graduate teaching instructor at Old Dominion University.