



**AUGUST PRACTICING PREVENTION TIP**  
**Jason A. Laker, Ph.D.**

This month, I'd like to offer a multi-faceted tip incorporating a conceptual lens and practical framework. The former helps to reframe tedious elements of our work that sometimes deplete our energy and cause boredom, with a goal toward reinvigoration. The latter is offered to organize meaningful progress on one "big issue" facing your campus, fueled by such renewal. Both are actually simple to understand, which is why we often miss them!

First, the lens is rooted in the mantra that we should not let the urgent get in the way of the important. In practical terms, this means that we will recognize the myriad "to-do" items as ritualized (mostly invisible) acts of care, analogous to watering and pruning a plant. We tend to these things close up, meticulously assuring details that collectively create a hospitable environment, and we retain that sense of relationship between detail and picture. This practice helps us to recognize the importance of, and meaning in, mundane details.

I challenge you to select one of the "big issues" facing your campus and to make a yearlong commitment to building the infrastructure for lasting positive change (see the [SCOPE 2012 Thought Piece](#) for details on strategic planning for prevention). The framework can be used for just about any big issue, but I will use a specific example from my own experience.

In one of my previous positions, I was tasked with developing and coordinating institutional efforts to reduce alcohol abuse among students. The core components of the framework are a coalition and a three-legged stool. The coalition is generated from a model I developed, entitled "Moving from Blame to Invitation." Start by identifying the material stakeholders in the issue on which you will work. Students are obviously one group, but in the example of alcohol abuse so are local government, landlords, parents, bar and liquor store owners, law enforcement, local residents, campus security and perhaps alumni and/or other groups particular to your campus. There are two primary reasons why such coalitions or committees waste time or otherwise fail. The first is infighting or related tensions associated with finger pointing; the second is a lack of specific member tasks that are understandable, meaningful and reasonable. These are the reasons for the title of the model.

To enact it, I first approached an opinion leader from each stakeholder group. In our conversations, I expressed genuinely sympathetic accounts of ways I had seen them unfairly blamed for fueling the problem. I sought their experience of the issues and explained what I understood to be their frustrated point of view. Finally, I proposed that if they would make one incremental and specific effort, I would vouch for their goodwill and contribution publicly; I would invite the opinion leader to be part of the advisory planning coalition. Here are examples for two of the stakeholder groups:

STAKEHOLDER	BLAME STATEMENT	VOICE OF FRUSTRATION	OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE
Students	"They care more about partying than academics."	"People think we're all alcoholics and that's not true." "Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one who doesn't want to drink."	Tell peers it's OK not to drink. Tell your friend when s/he is drinking too much. Seek help for your (or your friend's)

		"There's nothing to do besides drink."	drinking concerns. Take a "vacation" from drinking. Help plan fun alternatives.
Bar & Liquor Store Owners	"Their sales and drink specials promote binge drinking." "They only care about profit and don't check IDs carefully or stop people when they've had enough."	"I spent a fortune to open my business, and students can just go to an illegal house party and drink all night for \$5. How can I stay open if I don't offer specials?" "I do the best I can to stop people with fake IDs, and I get blamed for that problem too."	Offer free/inexpensive non-alcoholic drinks. Use frequent customer incentives, co-marketing and/or entertainment, rather than aggressive specials, to attract customers. Partner with local police to stop fake ID holders.

It is important to recognize that these individual contributions may not make a discernable difference. Rather, it is the synergistic combination that makes a difference, not only in the technical sense, but also in terms of building a collaborative spirit.

The three-legged stool operates from a similar philosophical perspective. Rather than taking the provocative approach of simply and superficially cracking down on policy violations, we utilized a combination of methods. Specifically, we implemented or increased efforts in education, engagement and enforcement simultaneously. The educational efforts included such elements as social norms campaigns, informational presentations at orientation, floor and campus meetings, visiting off-campus student homes and even a social town-hall meeting for off-campus students held at a bar. Engagement efforts focused on the oft-repeated student opinion that there's nothing else to do, so we made sure that every Thursday-Saturday evening had multiple options and implemented a very simple micro-grant program wherein students could plan small events such as movies, sports, live music and so forth. The funding amounts, accessed via a simple web form, tended to be around \$20-30 to cover pizza, movie and equipment rentals or transportation.

In terms of enforcement, I reformed sanctions to do away with essays, fines and forced apologies, replacing them with requirements to plan (and pay for) alcohol-free versions of their initial infraction, attendance at mind-body workshops, required addiction assessment and participation in appropriate educational or recovery programs, probationary restrictions on being in the presence of underage drinking and reflective conversations with those affected by the issue. There were some students who were involved in multiple incidents and I had no choice but to suspend them. In those cases, I made the promise that if they pursued assessment and any required treatment, I would personally buy them lunch when they returned. All but one took me up on that, and every one of them was grateful for the respect extended to them and the way in which it contributed to their recovery.

During my tenure in that former role, in partnership with stakeholders and colleagues, we saw a reduction in reports of alcohol abuse and its associated consequences. We are playing the long game, facilitated by mindful attention to strategy. I will be at the SCOPE conference in October, if you would like to discuss implementing these Tips on your campus.

*Jason Laker is a tenured, Full Professor in the Department of Counselor Education within the Lurie College of Education and a Salzburg Fellow at San José State University in California. Dr. Laker currently serves as the 2013 Inaugural Visiting Scholar for SCOPE.*

For more information about Dr. Laker and his role as Visiting Scholar with SCOPE, please visit <http://wearescope.org/resources/visiting-scholar/>.

*This publication cannot be posted publicly without authorization from SCOPE.  
©SCOPE 2013. All rights reserved.*