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[Mike] Welcome to this episode of MC Forward. A podcast that focuses on Montgomery College individuals who are leading from where they are. I'm your host, Dr. Michael Mills. Joining me today is Angela Rhoe, Director of Academic Alliances. Angela, thanks for taking time out to talk to me today.

[Angela] It's my pleasure, Dr. Mills. Thank you for having me.

[Mike] So we're entering the holiday season and I want to run a scenario by you. You're going to host a leadership party. And who are you bringing to this party? What kind of leaders are you bringing to sit around the dinner table to talk about leadership? What kind of traits do they have?

[Angela] Okay, well. I'd like to invite one, two, three, four; I can think of four specific types of guests that I'd like to have at my dinner party. I'd like to have someone who is strong in a visionary leadership style; someone who's good at setting expectations and engaging with people, engaging with others, and offering choices. I'd like to have someone who has a democratic leadership style, who is good at listening and seeking the opinions and inputs of others... the... their team members, their peers, their superiors. Just good listener and... um... yeah, good listener. Next, how about an affiliative type leader styles? Someone who supports the emotional needs of the... their team? I think of that right now especially in this... uh pandemic environment that we're in, someone who is good at forming collaborative relationships. Next, I want a leader who's a servant leader. Someone who feels that it is their... their duty, their obligation to serve their team; to make sure that their team has opportunities to grow; and who leads by example. For example, someone who says, okay if this center has to be open, let's say it's a learning center, seven days a week and Saturdays it's open, like nine to five; and you know people are going to balk and cannot necessarily do that shift. I'm looking for that servant leader who says, you know what, I'll take Saturdays. I'll handle that for the first year. Because once the leader says that they will do that, then the team is more likely to acquiesce and realize, okay this... if the boss will do it then... or the leader on the team, because it's not always the manager, we'll do that if someone steps forward and says I'll take it first then you're more likely to have team members that are willing to do whatever that thing is too. And lastly, I want to invite someone specific. I want to invite Adam Grant, out of the University of Pennsylvania. I follow his work. Read all his books. He has podcasts, he's done some work with Brene Brown... um as well as Angela Duckworth, out of the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book, Think Again, is about acknowledging what you don't know. So, he always makes you think and realize just because you're a leader you don't know everything, and you have to be willing to ask the hard questions and even hard questions of yourself and be honest about it. That's my party.

[Mike] What are we serving at this party?

[Angela] We are serving wine, no food. [laughs]

[Mike] No food, just wine? [laughs]

[Angela] Just wine, sorry who needs food?

[Mike] And what... what kind of leader is on the outside looking in? Who... what kind of person is peering through the window saying, oh I'd like to get into that leadership party, but Angela says, not tonight?

[Angela] Can I switch that up a little bit? Can I tell you the leaders... the leaders... leader that is standing on the outside? That's like not too clear on whether he should want to be on the inside but knows he's been left out for some kind of reason. That's that authoritative leader. That leader who thinks that his or her role is to make all the decisions and everybody else is just supposed to fall in line. The one who does not actively listen. The one who just dictates. He or she, they can sit out there. They can look in. Not even let them listen. They can just look in and wonder what we're doing. Okay... I'll let them... they can listen... I'm sorry they can listen too.

[Mike] Well they... they might learn something if they listen.

[Angela] That's right. You're right. See there I was... I was wrong, so I should let them listen. [laughs]

[Mike] You've had plenty of experiences. You've had plenty of different positions... at MC...outside of MC. Have you come across that... an authoritative leader a lot?

[Angela] Enough. Yes. Yeah.

[Mike] Too many times?

[Angela] Too many times. Especially in my corporate life... I've had... I've had bosses or leaders or program managers who were so interested and appearing to be the strongest and the brightest person in the room, and did not care to listen to the input of anybody else, and could never admit that he in this instance was wrong, because that was a sign of weakness so it was just... just do as I do... do as I say not as I do. Do not ask me any questions. And that... that's tough. That's tough to work with, but let me tell you, I did it for as long as I could. But I didn't stay there that long, Mike.

[Mike] Okay, so you... you ...you emphasize the he and... and I... I want to go down this this gender route with you.

[Angela] Okay.

[Mike] In your corporate life, was it mostly males that exhibited that authoritative behavior or did you see females exhibited as well?

[Angela] Absolutely men! Every time, Dr. Mills, every time. I can even... if I can just... uh draw on an experience I had as a software development program manager. So we're talking about a whole team of engineers here. We had about 33 engineers that reported to me and I was part of the senior management team. The only woman on the senior management team... in... my... that. We did... we had different units, so the only woman in my unit on this senior management team, but the only black woman in the company at this level. My peers were all white men in my unit team. And... wow... just wow, Mike. The way that they would talk to the engineers that worked under us, especially the women, the comments that were made about the women being ditzy or not as intelligent and we're talking these are some strong recruits of engineering programs out of Georgia Tech, North Carolina State, Virginia Tech and they demonstrated their ability. But something... the men would just really nitpick on the women. They enjoyed bringing the women into a meeting and making them cry. That was their goal. I knew that because I was in the senior management team where they're like watch this we're gonna... we're gonna get her... we're gonna make her feel stupid and sit there watch this woman cry. No matter what I would say to them...you guys, you know we can't. This is not professional, you know. We can't get away with this. I'm gonna bring this to HR. which I did bring to HR, but it meant nothing because that was the culture of the company. It was mostly men, again engineering and telling the direct reports what to do. Not asking for input and always reminding them, you're young, you're new, you don't know anything that you're talking about, we've been running these reports in these programs for years, and it was it was hard to watch and that's why... the... it was about a three-year mark before our... um consultants would roll off and try to find new jobs because it... it was... it was hard... it was hard for many of them. And I keep in touch with them to this day those... those engineers that reported to me who have gone off to other organizations. Because they felt like what they got from me was I was actually trying to develop them, while the other the men on the management team were trying to destroy them.

[Mike] So over the years, how has that influenced and impacted your leadership style?

[Angela] I think I started off being a little hardcore as a manager. I was... and as a leader I was tough, but I listened. I was always known as an active listener, an engaged listener but as time has passed, I think I've become more of a supportive... especially when it comes to the emotional needs of my colleagues... I've been more supportive than I was let's say that 10 years ago. Because life happens and I've seen things, I've seen people treated unfairly, I've seen people demoralized and demeaned, and let's be clear, I've been on the receiving end of it. And I had to get to a point that I realized, as crazy as it sounds, as I started to adapt some of those behaviors because that's the way I was treated and I thought well this must be what they're looking for in a leader. I had to

realize, Angela, but that's not how you want to lead and it's not how you have to lead because, Dr. Mills, sometimes I feel like that's what I had to do this in order to be seen a certain way. In order to be seen as an accepted or acceptable leader in certain environments. But at this point in my career now I am all about being more of a democratic leader, a visionary leader, who is trying to engage others and get ideas from others and... and get people to be in creative spaces and feel safe having ideas, to feel safe talking to me, expressing even things that they know I do not or may not want to hear but it's not about that because it's not about me. I am more focused on empathy now, but not ruinous empathy, okay but I am more empathetic as a leader now as well.

[Mike] And that comes with maturity right...

[Angela] Yes... yes.

[Mike] I think we all get to a point in... in our career where... where that light bulb goes off and says I don't have to be the type of leader that was imposed upon me when I was younger.

[Angela] Exactly.

[Mike] And... and maybe when we were younger we needed that type of leader.

[Angela] Maybe.

[Mike] You know at certain times... um but I think we also become the type of leader who says I also don't need to get credit for everything.

[Angela] absolutely... absolutely. I don't even know there are a lot who still feel that way. I think that when my colleagues shine, I shine. When it works well for the institution and in this particular instance of course for the students, then it's going to work for me. It's the triple win, it works for me, works for my colleagues, works for the students and that's what I'm always going for now it's... it's... it's not about me.

[Mike] Why is it so hard Angela, for people to get to that point?

[Angela] [laughs] I think it's just our society, like we are always talking about getting ahead right? Who can get ahead the farthest? Who can be the busiest? Who can accomplish the most? If we even look at... um have you ever taken the Gallop Strengths Finder?

[Mike] Yeah.

[Angela] Okay, so my number one... no, my number one is learner... my number two is achiever and it's something I have to control it... it. I have to be like okay, back off Angela

you don't have to do everything, you don't always have to be the best, you don't always have to be number one. You can take that energy and channel it into somebody else, and help them to shine. I... I think that we it's just how we are in this country. This... that... that's something that we value. It's the attention, the success, and us getting ahead more so than other people. I just think we're... I don't know... that we're made that way. We just turn out that way, after we get out here and get a job especially.

[Mike] But that doesn't mean when you say we don't have to be the best. That doesn't mean you don't want your team to be the best?

[Angela] Oh no... no... no... no... but it doesn't have to be Angela is number one. Look at what Angela did right? Why can't it be, oh you see what Justin did? Look at all those articulation agreements that he had! That's awesome. Then that's great, because there's a positive reflection on the Office of Academic Affairs. It's positive for the students. It's positive for the institution... it's... I...it doesn't take away from me. My focus is not myopic on just Angela, it is on how can I serve, who can also be supported, who can benefit from this, who would be who would love to have this opportunity, I'm gonna recommend this person, because I've had three opportunities already and they haven't had any. What's wrong with giving somebody else the limelight? I do not need to be in it all the time. Absolutely not, in fact I don't want to.

[Mike] As we... we begin to... to wrap up... um

[Angela] ...it's been 20 minutes?

[Mike] Not yet. By the time this airs Halloween will have passed.

[Angela] Okay

[Mike] Okay. I want to give you an opportunity to tell us a leadership horror story. So we're in... in between Halloween but we're pre-holiday where you've had this this party. We're in this middle ground now. Right? I want you to give us a... a leadership horror story.

[Angela] All right. Well, once upon a time I was recruited for a management position as a consultant at a government agency. And I... actually... I love interviewing, I love the questions, I love being put on the spot, coming up with scenarios, so I appreciate challenging interviews. But this particular instance I was interviewed by the director everything went well. Then he calls me, says Angela you're gonna have to talk to the vice president next, and it can be a little bit challenging sometimes so just be aware of that. And so that's fine, it doesn't bother me. During this interview with the vice president, he raised his voice at me he told me I wasn't answering his question when I knew I was answering his question. But apparently there was some breakdown and it got to the point that then I got very curt and I kind of raised my voice at him. The call ended. I got a

phone call within 30 minutes to tell me I had the job because the vice president wanted somebody who was going to stand up to him, because he had too many sycophants. So I was like okay that's not a problem but it was also like a red flag. I get this job, Dr. Mills and within four weeks of being there, I'm told about this one individual on my team who the vice president didn't like. In fact he flew me up to New York to talk to me about this particular person. And he's like Angela she's been a problem for a couple years now nobody's known how to do the right thing to get to her the reason I picked you is because you're gonna fire her. Okay well I didn't know about that and how do you get somebody new to come in that hasn't worked with this one long enough to fire her. And it's like not my problem, I hired you to do it so go figure it out. I had to try to devise an exit strategy for this person that I just didn't even know enough about her work. And that right there kept me up at night. I reached out... I have a couple of people who are mentors... I reached out to my mentors and they were just like okay, this is insane you you've... you've got to go talk to the vice president and tell him you... you cannot do this. So I went back to the vice president, I'm like well you know what, it's not that I... I'm not afraid to fire or to terminate, I'd rather use that word terminate, someone. but I just can't do it because you say so, I really need some evidence. Three months later this particular employee did something that she shouldn't have done. In my mind it would not be something that would uh lead to termination. However, the vice president did find out she did it. next thing you know I had a meeting with the lawyers in HR to talk about my plan for terminating this woman. Within 24 hours, I had to sit down with her, attorneys and HR in the room, and explain to her why she was being terminated effective immediately. As I had IT disassembling her computer, her station... her workstation, somebody else is packing her box, and the woman is looking at me, like are you kidding? She's like, this is the first thing I've done wrong since you've gotten here. Like, well, it's not about my tenure here, it's about everything that you've done wrong the entire time. I'm really sorry. I enjoyed working with you. And that was a wrap. And this woman was so livid. I didn't even want to go back there to my desk Dr. Mills because I'm like, oh my God... and then I had to come out and my whole team is like, did you just fire her? And now they're looking at me differently like wow so that's what she's doing she's coming here to get rid of people. It was such a tough road. I had to build their confidence...build their confidence in me again. And show them that I am trustworthy, that I'm really not out here just to try to come in and fire people. But that... I never got that relationship where I wanted with my team. Because they absolutely feared me. That was horrible for me. I lived through it, but I did not stay at that position long either.

[Mike] The person who hired you is not on the inside of your party, is he?

[Angela] [laughs] That person who hired me is not even at the window. He is thousands of feet away. Because if he got close enough, he would break that window and try to come in and tell us how we were all weak and wrong. No sir, he's not at the window, not in the party. No. No. Hah!

[Mike] Well and with that Angela I want to thank you for joining me. I... I hope at least I get to the window of your party.

[Angela] You would be in my party, okay? And listen. To everyone who's listening, I highly recommend checking out Adam Grant. If you don't have time to read the books, he's got several podcasts out there that would be valuable. it won't be a waste of your time, I promise. And that's it I...I'm so glad you let me share my experiences with you, Dr. Mills.

[Mike] If you know someone who you think would be a great fit for this podcast, have them reach out to me at michael.mills@montgomerycollege.edu. Meanwhile, keep moving MC Forward.

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