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**MIKE:** Welcome to the first episode of season two 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 and I didn't have to look far for today's guests. In fact, just outside my office door. If I can have two right-hand people, today's guests fit that bill. Joining me are Jeana Beaulieu and Sharmini Azeez both of whom help keep the Office of E-Learning, Innovation and Teaching Excellence humming and help keep me straight. Jeana and Sharmini thanks for joining me. I appreciate it.

**JEANA/SHARMINI:** Thank you for having us.

**MIKE:** So, I want to start out and... and Sharmini if... if I could have you talk about this... this idea that you mentioned to me at the start of the pandemic, maybe it was April of 2020 and... and we've just gone to a remote status, and leaders around the... the college were trying to keep their teams engaged and doing a number of different things to do that, whether it was emails, regular conversations, and in our unit we were having, you know, virtual coffee chats and you had mentioned the importance of feeling part of a team. Why is that relevant? Why... why does a leader need to make his or her employees or colleagues feel like they're part of the team?

**SHARMINI:** Well, it all comes down to job satisfaction. If you feel like you have made an impact or a difference or even helped in the tiniest way, you feel good at the end of the day. And at that time, if I remember, it was... there was just so much uncertainty. We were all working from home. We were getting used to new technology and I really felt that ELITE stood together. That we were all stronger because nobody on that... the... the chain link fence was weak. Everybody stood strong and that's... that's how even though we all had very, very different roles to play. I think as far as I was concerned, and I know the others too, we felt like we were all part of a team. We were helping with this new concept. Helping faculty learn a new concept. You know whatever it was... uh so that was that was my main thing.

**MIKE:** And Jeana, you've... you've been part of... of this team for... for a while. You... you were one of the first people I met when I came here about 13 years ago. And yet this... this concept of team has grown since... since you've ... you've been... you and I have been working together.

**JEANA:** That's true. It's grown exponentially [laughs]

**MIKE:** And is it important for you to, as Sharmini said, to feel part of that that larger chain link fence?

**JEANA:** Absolutely! It's... it's important and for all the reasons that that Sharmini mentioned. If you feel part of something, you're more invested in it. Um and we all like to

think we give our best all the time, but I think when you're invested in something and you really feel like you're making a difference that it does give you job satisfaction and it also just makes you want to continue doing that on a daily basis. Once you start you don't want to go back. It's addictive.

**MIKE:** So... so that being said, Jeana, why is it hard for leaders to understand this need to make people feel part of a team?

**JEANA:** Some of its management style. They see making a team lessening their authority, their influence, their power. For some people it's a... it's a struggle. Um because then they're admitting they rely on that team, and like I said for some people it's a struggle. For other people it... it seems as natural as breathing. Of course, you want a team, it's... you know... Dr Pollard always used to say, you know, teamwork makes the dream work and she was absolutely right. And I think just some...some people in supervisory capacities haven't learned that yet.

**MIKE:** Sharmini?

**SHARMINI:** Yeah I agree. People need to know that giving somebody else a job or a duty does not lessen your role or your position in any way. In fact, on the contrary, it enhances it because you're saying okay, I can trust you. I know... and especially if they don't micromanage. You know, if they give you the job and then expect you to be doing it the way you want. It's... it's wonderful. It's a wonderful feeling when your manager does that. Some people like Jeana was saying, are just not comfortable with that with the... the management style that way.

**MIKE:** That... that's a hard concept for me to grasp, especially with you two. You both are so wonderful at what you do, it's easy for me to just give you projects and say run with it and then if you have questions, you reach out. But I...I struggle with this concept of micromanaging, and you know, really having to do all of it myself. I...I would be remiss to say that I don't know where I'd be as a leader if I didn't have people like you who I could turn to. And I think it is a matter of trust.

**SHARMINI:** Yeah it's basically right... yeah... absolutely right. It's you doing... getting the job done twice, because you... that person will do it and then you keep looking over and you know checking and getting updates and, you know, it's... I have had people that I've worked for like that so I...I can easily tell the difference.

**MIKE:** And Jeana I know you've had individuals that you've worked with who... who have been like that as well.

**JEANA:** Of course.

**MIKE:** It's not... doesn't make it fun to come to work does it?

**JEANA:** Not at all, not at all. It... it makes you feel in some ways irrelevant, because if you can't...if you're not... you know if they aren't seeing you as a valued person who can do their job and improve whatever you know is going on within the unit and keep moving forward, then you're not going to be as successful as you think you are by holding those people back, so yeah.

**MIKE:** Well I'd like to... to use the acronym TEAM that... that basically means Together Everyone Achieves More and I...I have not yet seen a unit be successful whether it's here somewhere else not have to work as a team to be successful. Um I don't know of a sports franchise that is successful without people being part of a team. I don't know of any business that's successful without being part of a team. Now to me it just makes... makes sense. Uh I want to pivot, Jeana to something you said a couple of weeks ago. We were in a team meeting, and we were just talking about some... some policies and some procedures and we were talking about this inability for leaders to say no. And... and how hard that is for some people to say no. And I... I commented that I don't have that problem, and you... you readily agreed. Why is it so hard for people to say no?

**JEANA:** I think it goes back again to, it's funny things all seem to circle back to management styles. Some leaders want to be liked and... and I'm not saying that everybody doesn't hope they have a positive relationship with... with everyone they work with. But some people really have a need to be friends with their subordinates if you will. And I liken that to the parents who want to be friends to their children rather than give their children the right guidance and direction to be productive citizens. And I feel that way about some leaders who won't say no, or can't say no, because they don't want to be the bad guy. And sometimes you need to be the bad guy, and it's not a negative thing. It's just saying okay this is the way things are. This is the reason I have to say no to you. I hope you understand I know you're disappointed or whatever the... the request is. but there's you know there's good ways to say it good ways to deal with it but it's something I feel strongly needs to be done because I've seen leaders who won't say no or won't say no to certain people, and I think it does the opposite of strengthening their position with their subordinates. I think it makes it weaker to observe something like that.

**MIKE:** I don't know if you recall but the... the first day that I joined MC I sat down with you and the other members of the team at the time, and I said we're not going to be friends. We'll be friendly but we're not going to be friends. I... I have friends I vacation with. Go out to dinner with, see on the weekends. When we're at work, we'll do the business of work. We'll be friendly with each other, but we don't have to be friends.

**JEANA:** I recall it vividly as a matter of fact you said I have enough friends I don't need any more friends.

**MIKE:** What were your thoughts when I said that?

**JEANA:** I think I wasn't taken aback, and I think with a different person I may have been but... um...I guess from even our first phone call I got a good vibe off of you so I wasn't in a position where I was being warily cautious and you know wondering what's this guy all about. I... I heard you say it. I heard the tone that you said it in, and I said okay this guy's a straight shooter. He lets you know who he is up front. And so he's going to be a lot less likely to not let you know what's going on in life. He's going to be pretty transparent. So it really made me have confidence in you, going forward. I was... I was anxious to see where you were going to go with that attitude.

**MIKE:** Well and I hope that transparency has... has been maintained over the past 13 years. Sharmini, you've had... had individuals I'm sure who also have struggled to say no and... and what are your thoughts on that?

**SHARMINI:** Some have struggled to say no. Some have said no in... in not a... not a positive way, so that you leave whatever the... the... the meeting was feeling very small. You know the main thing about saying no to somebody is that you make them understand that it's not them, it's just that whatever that they requested or whatever they wanted to do was not possible at this time. But if you make people feel small or you know, then that's... that's... you get the complete opposite reaction of what you wanted. So, and I think with and I agree with Jeana that you don't have a problem saying no, but you know it's always said with reasoning or with in a tone that doesn't make you feel bad for asking.

**MIKE:** I'm not sure my kids would agree with you when they were younger, but I... I appreciate that sentiment. Uh, Sharmini what do you look for in a good leader?

**SHARMINI:** A good leader has to give... has to run a tight ship so they have to give good challenges to everybody. Uh if there's a new project you share in whatever you can. You know, if you're taking on something new. If that if you feel that person can help you with it then you... you ask them or you invite them to join that sub group. Or... and then you just constantly keep giving them new opportunities so that they're not... it doesn't become stagnant. But I definitely look for a good leader to look out for everybody on their team. Because no matter how small your position is, there's dignity in work, right? Whatever... whether you're the vice president or whether you're the cleaning lady, if you're working there's dignity in that. So, a good leader has to make you feel that you're a valuable part of the team.

**MIKE:** Well I'm glad you... you mentioned the... the cleaning personnel, because you know my mother was a school custodian and you know I often heard stories from her about people who just looked down on that that position and I remember one time when I was in Germantown. it wasn't too long after I started. I had spilled a plant and dirt went everywhere and so I was looking for a vacuum and I asked the custodian where the vacuum was and was told don't worry about it I'll come down and do it. And I was pretty

adamant, I said, you didn't make the mess, you're not cleaning up the mess. And I think it's important for leaders to understand that everyone has a role in the organization

**SHARMINI:** Right.

**MIKE:** Jeana, what do you look for in a leader?

**JEANA:** Oh I look to see how they lead, and if they're leading by example. Um I also agree a lot with Sharmini about leaders who know how to challenge their staff without over burdening their staff. Leaders who might see a strength in a person that that person doesn't see in themselves and give them an opportunity to learn that strength and explore it and run with it. I think that's really important, and it also builds a better team when you know you make each person a little stronger than that is a really good leader. Um I like a leader who can be consistent. You don't want to know you want to know who's coming through the door in the morning. You don't want that to be a different person depending upon what's going on. If you're a little quiet that's one thing but if you know one day, you're...you know over here and one day you're over there... that strikes me as somebody who really isn't a good leader and isn't really prepared to assume the role of leadership. Because you have to know that people are watching you and seeing what you do. And if they're not seeing positive things then they're not going to react positively to your leadership.

**MIKE:** I remember a time I...I walked into the... the office one time I was on the phone and something had happened, it was either Blackboard or Web CT. We had lost all of our enrollments and... and I was on the phone and... and I was not in a very pleasant mood as I was walking down the hall and now... now you're making me reflect and like, oh my gosh, what kind of leader was I that day. Because it was not a good experience for sure.

**JEANA:** That's different. That's... that's reacting to something that happened to your unit. to some place that you're responsible for. That's not like coming in the door and you know just not speaking to anyone because you know the traffic was bad in the morning or something you know. It's... it's you know that's a work-related thing so I'm talking about when you bring your outside inside with you. I think that's kind of what I mean.

**MIKE:** Yeah. We've all had... had individuals who... who have done that. You both lead from where you are. I think you are classic examples of individuals who lead from where you are. Jeana what kind of leader are you? How would you characterize yourself as a leader?

**JEANA:** That's hard because I don't know that I particularly consider myself a leader... um because the... the things I do... a lot of what I do involves... um helping faculty out with Blackboard issues, helping students out with Blackboard issues. And I don't know

that I'm a leader as much as I feel in a way I'm a teacher because when they have a problem I'm helping them learn how to solve it and I also try to, especially with faculty not so much with students but I run into it more with faculty, trying to give them some tools to so that they don't encounter a problem like that again tell them what... what happened how it can be avoided um you know giving them explanation so I guess that's why I feel like sometimes I'm more of a... a teacher or a guide rather than a leader. I think that more describes how I view myself. If you consider that leading, then that's... that's great too. But you know that's... I feel more... I you know I'm... I become a team member with that faculty member or that student. I'm on their team now and I'm working to resolve their issues. So I guess that's you know I move from person to person and don't necessarily lead them but... but guide them and partner them. So that's how I feel.

**MIKE:** Sharmini, what kind of leader do you see yourself as?

**SHARMINI:** I would agree a lot with Jeana. I...I think it's what I do by example. Like I...I try to imagine how I would feel in that person's shoes and then I try to help them or guide them or... uh show them the way to do it but either by you know having a.... telling them at a one-on-one or just writing up a series of steps so that they can keep it for future reference. But I...I do feel that it is by example. That...and again like Jeana said I don't know if it's considered a leadership role but I do feel that you have to feel how others will react to something when you try to figure out what... how to resolve it. So that would that's how I would be as a leader, lead by example.

**MIKE:** Well, I think you're both great examples of leaders however you want to view yourself - whether it's teacher, guide, leading by example, you... you all... both do a super job of leading and... and I can tell you I couldn't do my job without either one of you. So, I just, you know, want to thank you publicly for... for that and thank you for taking time out of your day to join me here.

**JEANA:** Thank you.

**SHARMINI:** Thank you, Mike. It's nice of you to say that.

**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](mailto:michael.mills@Montgomerycollege.edu). Meanwhile, keep moving MC Forward.

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