

MC Forward Podcast
Lauren Landau
Transcript

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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 Lauren Landau, Interim Director of Strategic Talent Management and Organizational Development. Lauren, thank you. I appreciate you joining me.

LAUREN

Thanks for having me.

MIKE

The past two years has been, uh, interesting to say the least. You know, the pandemic has...has turned our world upside down. I can imagine from a Human Resources standpoint that you've felt those challenges. From a leadership perspective, what...what have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about leadership during this time period?

LAUREN

That's a great question. Um, I think that one of the...the big things that we've learned is just that how agile we need to be and how we all need to be able to pivot based on circumstances at the last, you know, that come up, and we aren't anticipating and things that we never could have anticipated happening. Um, so I think that, you know, just kind of being able to meet the demands of...of what we're being hit with at that, at the moment is...is what we've really tried to focus on. And there's just been tons of challenges trying to keep our employees safe, still trying to provide, you know, what we need to...to our students and the community. And it's, you know, it's...it's been a challenge.

MIKE

Leadership oftentimes is a balancing act, so in the pandemic, there's been this balancing act of keeping people safe but also being productive and keeping the organization running. That's been a challenge for...for a lot of us to do that.

LAUREN

It...it has been. Um,, you know, one of the things, you know, what we did when we focused on employees was we...we created a Talent Share program for initially so that employees that weren't able to work in their job, um, during the pandemic, we found, you

know, and there were departments where additional supports were needed. So, we worked to kind of transition employees where we could. Um, but it, you know, there's just so many pieces to...to all of this, you know. There's...we have employees that we have to have onsite. There's some that we, you know, don't have to be onsite. And I think we were all kind of moving in that direction with remote work, but I think we were able to see that we were able to do more than I think we thought we could remotely. But there's still some pieces that we need to work out.

MIKE

Well, and that whole changing nature of work while we were discussing that before the pandemic, it certainly has come full force during the pandemic for not only Montgomery College but every organization in the world at this point.

LAUREN

Yeah, I mean you see that, you know, everything that you read about what people want from an employer is they want that flexibility, and there's just so many changing dynamics in the...in the labor market. And, you know, who's even in the labor market and who's leaving the labor, you know. So, it's...it's going to be a challenge, you know. We really have to think...think about all of our internal resources and developing internal, you know, candidates and employees. And...and, um, but I think, you know, I think there's a lot of opportunity. But I think there's some challenges too.

MIKE

One of the things I know about you is that you like to ask a lot of questions. Why is that important for a leader?

LAUREN

[Laughs] I have. I like to ask questions because I want to make sure I understand how things are working or what, um, because-- I don't know. I think my brain just goes really fast ahead of where I should be. [Laughs] But I think, you know, I think asking questions and really understanding and being willing to think about, why do we do it this way? And, you know, is there a different way we can do it? I think everybody kind of really needs to think about their job that way. And, you know, it's not anything accusing...accusatory or, you know, questioning [Pauses] the, you know, the validity of what we're doing, but just, is there a way we can be doing it better? And, you know, I think a lot of times we get, we're so busy that we we're thinking about, you know, we...we've always done it this way and it's easier to kind of keep doing it this way than it is to question and start thinking about doing it a different way. And so, I think, you know, that's just something we all have to kind of think about, how can we work better?

MIKE

Do you think some people view leaders who ask a lot of questions as...as not necessarily having leaders or having answers? We...we want often that our leaders to

have answers to...to have all the answers to be all knowing. Can it be seen asking questions as a sign of weakness?

LAUREN

I mean, and perhaps, I don't think it should be because I think that we really should be getting, you know, everybody's voice. I mean we, all of our constituents and customers, they're a diverse group of...of individuals and we should be, you know, looking at everything that we're questioning from multi-perspectives. And sometimes there are people, you know, that maybe, what you're doing right now affects them, you know. It may have an impact on every single person differently and we should take that into consideration. It doesn't mean that we are going to necessarily have to change something, but I think it's something we should think about. I mean there's always ways we can work smarter and better. And, you know, be more inclusive. So, I think we just need to, you know, to kind of constantly be questioning in that way.

MIKE

It's gathering all the information and then making it an informed decision- based on that information that has been gathered.

LAUREN

Much more eloquently put than i had said it, but yes. [Laughs]

MIKE

When you look back on your career from a professional standpoint, what did...what have you learned about leadership? Or what did you learn early on about leadership?

LAUREN

Um, I think, you know, I think a big thing is just kind of working collaboratively. Um, building my own cre---, you know, trying to build my own credibility, um, through relationship building and making sure that I follow through and follow up with what I've committed to, um, and fully understanding. So, I think it's just, you know, kind of really doing what you say you're gonna do and people can trust you.

MIKE

Why is that important for a leader?

LAUREN

Um, because I think you are-- That's a good question. I mean I think it's something that if people know that they can trust you and that you are going to have their best interests and the best interest of the organization, um, in your mind, that they are more willing to be collaborative and work with you and understand, you know, all the pieces. So, I think that we-- That's a really hard question to like-- I mean it doesn't sound like it should be a hard question, but it kind of is like, you know, I think it's just something I haven't really thought through why it's important, but I know that it is and i just kind of assumed, you

know. I don't know, does that make sense? Like, I really...I think what you have to show at the end of the day for the work you do is your relationships and your credibility and what you've done and, um, where you've been able to make an impact as an individual, and people need to trust you that you're going to do the right thing.

MIKE

And that doesn't always mean that they're going to like the decisions that you make, right? It's just that they're going to trust you that you're going to make the decisions that's in the best interest of the institution or the individual.

LAUREN

Right! And then, the situation at that time, but I think, you know, there are a lot of decisions people don't like. And...but I think that we also, you know, if we can explain those decisions and then I think that can provide some framework to..., which goes also back to the asking questions and understanding so that... You have to understand fully this situation so that you can explain what, why the action's being taken...that's being taken and how that decision was made. And I think that goes a lot farther with people.

MIKE

This idea of credibility being such a vital part of leadership, um, makes me think that you can you can work so hard at being credible. And then, one instance that can all come falling down and then you have to build all that credibility back up. And it takes a lot of work, doesn't it?

LAUREN

It does. And hope— You know, I mean I think we're all human, so hopefully, there's some tolerance for people to make mistakes and that someone's, you know, one action or one situation isn't going to completely destroy someone's credibility. But I think as long as you're act— You know, as long as you're making decisions that you...that are in the best interest of the College and you've got a sound foundation and you've thought through them, then, you know, as long as we're doing the best we can at that point with the information that we have, I think that's all we can do, you know, as an individual. You know, hopefully, you're judged on all of your [Laughs] actions not just, you know, maybe one mistake.

MIKE

I think, you know, what I have seen in my career with leadership in a number of people is that they...they try to be liked more than they try to be credible. And while they...they can work in concert, they don't necessarily have to. And I've seen people who will bypass the credibility part to be liked and then you get people talking to one another and they realize, oh, this leader said this to me, but he said this to someone else, and then everything comes crumbling down.

LAUREN

Yeah, and...and I think if...if that's your MO, then you're gonna get caught. [Laughs] Like, you know, it's gonna catch up with you. So, I think if, you know, if--- Be consistent with what. how you're...you're treating people and decisions you're making. And there shouldn't really be any...any problem with your credibility because you're consistent if nothing else. [Laughs}

MIKE

How much energy and time do you put into being a good leader? is it something that you...you work on every day>

LAUREN

I think you have to work on it every day. Um, I think it's hard, but I think you also, you know, I think it goes back to if you are being credible and, you know, making sure that you understand fully the situation and making decisions that are in the best interest of the College and the people that are, you know, affected, then that piece of the leadership doesn't take as much work because it's just kind of ingrained in who you are and how you behave.

MIKE

What kind of leader is Lauren Landau?

LAUREN

Oh god, I knew...I knew you were gonna ask me something, like one of those throw-me-off questions. Um, I try to be a, um, consistent, um, thoughtful. Um, what else? I don't know. Consider the big picture and fair. Um, but I...I make mistakes too, but I try to, you know, make the best decision that I can be. You know, kind of understanding all the pieces.

MIKE

What part of leadership is hardest for you?

LAUREN

I think it's... I think what's hard for me is when, you know, people are really trying to do a good job, but they're just not getting it. And even with coaching and all of that, they... I think that's...that's hard for me. Just, you know, you can work with someone and work with someone, and if...if they really aren't getting it, I think I...I struggle with that. Although, I think, you know, it may just be that, you know, in those cases, you need to kind of...kind of talk to that person about maybe that's not....they're not in the right job to...that they're in. And maybe there are ways that, you know, you can address that. But I... but when someone's really trying and trying to do the right thing and just doesn't get-- that's hard. I, you know, I struggle with that.

MIKE

One of the things that I have found difficult over the years as teams have grown is that treating each team member differently because they all have different personalities and they have to be treated... all have to be treated fairly, but not everyone needs to be treated the same. And the situations may vary and...and that's been hard for me because I'm not sure at times that the individuals see it that way.

LAUREN

No. We...we struggle with that too. And it's, you know, fair equitable—equi—equity and fairness are not the same. So, you know, it may be not the same situation, but it may be a similar situation for a different employee. And we would just do, you know, we're going to try to do the best we can for every employee and understand their search situation and their circumstances. And, you know, everybody's got different needs, you know, different, you know, abilities, skills, everything, you know. And everybody bri— And that's what we want is we want people to be bringing all those differences here. And so, you can't, you have to be able to...to treat them and handle them and accordingly.

MIKE

The...the best leadership training I think I had was raising three boys. [Laurin laughs] Because they, they're all different. They all have their...their strengths. They all have their weaknesses. But trying as a parent to...to get them to work in concert as a team was probably the best training, leadership training that...that I could have ever had. And it's still ongoing. They're...they're all adults now and it still hasn't stopped.

LAUREN

Yeah, I know. I've got three myself and a daughter and two sons, and you would never know they all came out of the same house either. [Laughs] Like, and what they're expecting. And they all have very different expectations of what they expect from us also. So...

MIKE

Well, and that's just like...like our employees, right? Our team members, they all have different expectations of us, and as a leader trying to manage that and juggle that can be not only hard, it can be tiring, exhausting.

LAUREN

It is exhausting, but I mean I think it's, you know, I think it's a great opportunity. I mean that...that we have to, you know, help and support and develop people and, um, you know, what— And I think that's kind of what we need to do throughout MC is to be looking at, you know, how we can support, as a manager, how you can support your team and help them because it only helps all of us if our teams are doing well.

MIKE

What's next in the leadership journey for...for you?

LAUREN

I have no idea. I mean I love challenges, so I, you know, right now, it's...there's just a lot, you know. We've got Workday. We've got, you know, all of the...the challenges with the workforce. And so, right now, I am...I'm happy like trying to, I mean I think it could...could get a little stressful at times, but right now, like, I love all the challenges that we have ahead of us.

MIKE

You...you mentioned stress, and as leaders we all feel the stress at times. How do you manage that stress? What do you do to reduce the stress?

LAUREN

Um, I think it's exercising and, you know, trying and...and really disengaging myself for a couple days on the weekends. Really, you know, I think the pandemic and working from remotely has kind of tied a lot of us to our computers and technology way more than we need to be...to be healthy. So, I really make a concerted effort to disengage, um, you know, for a couple days just to make sure I can kind of be back to focus when i need to.

MIKE

Lauren, thank you. This was...this is good. This was exciting. I appreciate you taking time out to talk about leadership with me.

LAUREN

Well, thank you for having me!

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.