

MC Forward Podcast
Season 3, Episode 8
Adam Reid
Transcript

[Music]

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 Adam Reid, College-wide Director of Public Safety Health and Emergency Management. Adam, it's a pleasure to have you join me today.

Adam

It's a pleasure to join you, Dr. Mills. I appreciate the invite and really look forward to participating.

Mike

I cannot think of a better person to have on this podcast talk about leadership than someone who has had to lead Montgomery College through what has amounted to be two and a half rough years. Talk a little bit about that and what you've had to... to lean on from your leadership background, your... the leadership traits you have to help the College get through this pandemic?

Adam

Sure. What a great question. You know. It... it's the pandemic, uh, really for me was, um, I know this will sound a little off, but a blessing in disguise. And here's why. Uh, I joined MC in April of 2019. So, uh, not even a year had gone by and then we found ourselves in the pandemic. So, as large of an institution, uh, presence that we are, the pandemic quickly gave me the opportunity to really connect with so many folks across our, uh, our community, internal and external. So, I'm very appreciative for the opportunity that the pandemic had inadvertently created, right? From the sense of leadership, really, you know, my entire career has been centered and based in this work in... in higher education for Public Safety, Law Enforcement, Emergency Response, Emergency Management. So, it was really the time just to step up and... and do what I do, um, in... in that sense, but it's a lot easier when you're in a position where you've been stable for many years right because you have those connections. So, having limited connections, um... I... I had made a good bit of progress and that was first and foremost, it's important, uh, that you, you know, you... you make and establish connections across the board not just within your unit or your immediate family so to say, but, right? What are those broader folks that you have to establish a relationship with in order to be able to serve the community to your best ability? So, this really propelled that in the sense of needing to urgently make those connections and, of course, it was helpful with the

propulsion of that right from Dr. Pollard and putting myself and Dr. Davis really at the... the Helm of this thing. Um, so, you know immediately just making cold call connections to folks around the... the College Community and in some cases they were coming to us and coming to me. So, it was great to be able to rise to the occasion and say it's nice to meet you, here's what we need you to do, kind of a thing. So, especially when it comes to contingency planning and how you make such a large pivot so quickly, but one thing that really from a leadership side is... is your composure, right? And staying calm and being a game manager especially, and, you know, everyone handles an emergency situation differently. Uh, again, for me, it's my nature; it's my career. I've been doing it so being able to just jump in and meet someone for the first time and say, you know, here's who I am and in order to make this smooth for everybody and... and to help your unit get to where it needs to be and how it needs to operate, we're gonna have to do this, this, and this, right? To help get that direction, that candor in place. So, it was really, uh, tireless, uh, constant work around the clock. Some folks, depending on what their role was, did not have the same level, right? That they had to respond, depending on, again, what their job is, right? And where we were, so this was time for us to jump up and being able to connect very closely with Dr. Davis and the other initial members of the core CAT team was great because here we have a multi... multi-faceted team. Everybody with a little bit of a different discipline but so much overlap and connect, so areas where you needed to pull in resources, the College, it was easy because, oh, I know this person, I knew that person. So, um, relationships, uh, building relationships early on, being someone that folks are comfortable with, that's... that's very important. So, you know, presenting myself as someone that's approachable and an open door, that's always been something that I have held my heart, is very... very important. And, you know, when... when folks are looking for guidance and how to handle something, they have to be comfortable, willing to come and talk to you. Um, so that was a piece of cake for me. And I... there's no nine to five hours, right? With my job as it is but especially in the pandemic, there was 11 o'clock at night phone calls with... with a unit, you know, the College manager that's, you know, we're asking for guidance or assistance, you know, all the way to the president. That's, you know, saying, hey, what should we do with this? What direction should we take this? Um, and consulting and meeting with my other members of our core CAT team initially. So, it was great...

Mike

Adam, if... if I could interrupt just for a second. So, I mean a lot... a lot of long hours, I remember in the early days, you know, meetings that were going on within Academic Affairs to 7, 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock at night. It's important, I think, for a leader to be able to unwind from that, right? Because, otherwise, you... it can be self-consuming, and it's... it's non-stop. What do you... did you do... what do you continue to do as a leader to be able to... to step away and help balance yourself and get away from all that stress?

Adam

So, that's... that's probably the hardest question to answer for me. I... I could do a better job at that. I put mission first, right? So, whatever our goal is, our mission is, and at that

time especially it was h really magnified because here was a new challenge, right? No one had faced a pandemic, certainly in... in my lifetime, and... and many folks had not encountered that, so here's a new challenge, right? Where it needed guidance, leadership, and constant attention. So, on those rare times, I would say, it would be going out for a walk, to, you know, try to stay as physically active as I could. So, exercise and of course, you know, you couldn't go on vacations, right? Or take time because hey things weren't open and B, there just wasn't the... the privilege of time. But for me, it was, you know, the... the staying active piece, going for walks, but also staying in touch with my team, right? My immediate direct reports, uh, and my immediate co-workers, uh, pre-pandemic, right? Just, you know, having human conversations, not, uh, conversations that were centered around what we were doing at work, right? That response, but how's your family, uh, you know. How's this... how's... you know, so and so, and hobbies and interests just to keep engaged and really humanize relationships outside of a work requirement, right? So, for me that was very important, keeping it real. I would say with, you know, with that element. So... and... and same with family too, right? Staying in touch with family and, um, you know, you have to take yourself out of it and... and fill in some other pieces, so you're not constantly consumed, but you're still engaging your team and your core values to what's close to you by having those conversations, you know, uh, you know, just that are not pandemic related. It was hard to do but... but you could do it. We would have in... in my team.

Mike

We... we would have regular coffee chats where we would just share what we were watching on Netflix or, you know, what people were streaming, what books were they reading, what television shows were they engaged in, because we didn't have that opportunity to do that around the proverbial water cooler in the office, and I think it helped people stay connected to one another while at the same time humanizing everything that we were going through. And I think that sounds like similar things that you were doing with your team.

Adam

Absolutely. Yep. Very, very similar.

Mike

So we had the pandemic but at the same time we had a lot of social unrest going on, right? And now while we weren't on campus, we... we come back and... and still a lot of social unrest taking place, there's that Public Safety component to your title as well. You have a lot going on my friend.

Adam

[Laughs.] This is true. Um, yeah. This is true. And you're... you're spot on. A lot of, uh, social, uh, issues, and, uh, injustice that occurred during the pandemic. It was... it was interesting how these... these two things kind of coincided and culminated around the same time. In terms of my philosophy and my approach to leadership especially in, you

know, putting that Public Safety hat on, right? Focusing on that uniform side, people first, uh, community relations, community outreach, uh, is my number one priority, and always has been. So, it was a lot easier obviously when we had full campuses, um, to be able to encourage and expect that our team, our officers that we see every day, foster good positive healthy relationships with our community. That's nothing new. So, even before everything that had occurred over the last two years, in my prior department, that was core number one, philosophy, core one, you know. You are a part of this community and, you know, your role and responsibility is... is to keep them safe but be a part of their... their Community and... and really embrace it, right? And it's... it's more than showing up when something goes bad or if something needs attention, but being out and about and participating in... with... with our students, our faculty, our staff, just general conversation, right? And... and being seen as a human and not a... a figure of authority, as the primary, but a, uh, somebody that's a part of this community. So, for me, it was important to constantly reinforce this and how important and critical it is with that lens as the public has this u different view now. You know, we've seen what... we've seen the media but understanding too that it's not all uniforms are... are bad, right? They don't represent bad. There's certainly pockets, but there are certainly some systemic issues that need overhaul big time. And I will plug Campus Law Enforcement and Campus Public Safety and say we've been doing this approach that external policing County Municipal law enforcement has now started to adopt. The Campus Policing philosophy, which is really Community Policing 101, so for us it wasn't as much of making an adjustment to how we do our jobs, it's just reinforcing but also still tweaking. There's absolutely room for areas that we can... we can do better, but it's a lot of the extra... external departments looking in at how colleges have been doing this for years. So, unfortunately, we didn't have the volume of folks on campus to really be able to engage and synthesize those relationships and reinforce what we do particularly, you know, as a uniform of the badge. Now, as we go into the... the fall semester, that's priority number one. And... and, I'll say, you know, my... my officers, my uniformed officers were here through the entire pandemic. Their jobs are not ones that could be remote, and there are also jobs that even if there are not people on campus, they still have to protect the campus and... and they're the eyes and the ears that make sure we don't have, you know,, break-ins or crimes of opportunity that occur and they missed that interaction. They truly missed the interaction because they enjoy interacting with... with our community. So, having that out was, you know, they... you know, they... they missed it. And... and it really took a lot of ways, so they're just as eager as I am to re-engage our community and finding new ways that we can re-engage with our community and foster a positive, trusting, uh, healthy relationship. Um, and... and that really does come from my... my directives. So, to say to the department, reinforcing that because that's my philosophy of how I see Public Safety and one... efficient, uh, and, well-rounded, robust, diverse Public Safety operation to work as there as a beacon of help and not in an adversarial light whatsoever. Um, so, you know, while it does certainly present its challenges, and there's always some residual, uh, pieces with that, um it's on us to prove, right? And to show first and foremost before it even comes a... becomes a question, right? That,, hey wait a minute, uh, the Public Safety team is not operating in

this, uh, you know, this different, um, capacity, right? This militaristic style, uh, deployment that you might see in a... in a different law enforcement sense. So, showing that in the everyday actions of the officers, all the way up to myself, and, you know, just having those conversations and engaging our community in a positive way goes so far. Building that trust, fostering that trust, it's a very easy thing that can be damaged when you wear a uniform and a badge. So, it's breaking down that barrier and saying hey I'm a human first and I'm here and I work in this environment because I like people. I enjoy people. I enjoy being a part of my community. So really fostering that buy-in, fostering that culture, is... is beyond critical. And... and that, you know, that really starts with hiring too. Making sure you're bringing on the right folks that understand that the community they're working in and the environment that they're working in, um, you know. So, there's so many pieces that go to this. It's not just something that happens overnight. It's something that's built and something that continues to be built. So, of course, like I said when you have something that happens at a broad scale like we saw, you know, with some of the horrendous things that just had occurred over the last two years, you know, it does, uh, you know, paint that... that broad picture as a uniform and a badge. But it's my job and it's our job as a Public Safety department to show our community that's not us, you know. We don't tolerate that. We don't... we don't run our shop that way whatsoever, you know. We're here to help and... and we enjoy why we're here.

Mike

As I listen to you talk about the Public Safety aspect of... of your work and the... the Health and Emergency Management part of your work. Uh, it comes to me that the core attribute that you're talking about of leadership is relationships, building relationships. Would you... would you agree with that?

Adam

100 percent. Um, 100 percent. And it's... they're not just internal, they're external. Montgomery County is a huge county with so many facets and partnerships. The pandemic, for me is that opportunity to connect with our county partners, not just the county law enforcement and first responder services but also our Department of Health and Human Services team. So, when it comes to getting vaccinations and getting testing and all of these resources that they can provide to help support our community, that would have never happened if it wasn't for the ability where we got, uh, to... I could just pick up the phone and make a call and boom it happens. So, connecting beyond our community of Montgomery College but to those broader entities that... that also can help us. So, it's... it's a partnership, you know, we... we helped our community I think. At Germantown, you know, we stood up a mass vaccination site which is awesome. We were like the only college in the state to run one at that level. Some had smaller ones, uh, pocketed things, but we held a mass vac that brought people from all over the state and that was all possible because of partnerships internally and externally to bring that in and that brings, you know, uh, trust and... and, uh, and it also brings the College as this... hey, wait, they're more than just, you know, an education, uh, facility. Hey, they're here because they want to help their community. So, um, yeah. None of this would have

happened without those partnerships and some of which... which I was able to form ahead of time. So, again, before the pandemic and then now when the pandemic hits. Uh, you know, when it was Dr. Stoddard. Hey, I need to reach Dr. Stoddard. He was probably the busiest person in Montgomery County for about a year, year and a half, but making those inlets... inroads really helps when we need something to help support our end and vice versa, being able to give back. So, without a doubt, you know, partnerships, connections, um, if you don't have, uh, if you don't have those relationships, uh, you really, uh, you're on your own, and no one can be a leader by themselves. You have to have your team, you have to have your internal/external partners. That's how folks are successful. It's not about I, it's about us. Um, and, you know, I think sometimes egos can get in the way with certain folks, and egos have no place in leadership in... in my humble opinion.

MIKE

As we wrap this up, one final question. What are you continuing to work on as a leader in your leadership journey?

Adam

Okay, good question. For me, it's.... it's constant, making sure that folks that need to get me or get a hold of me always have access to me. Continuing to synthesize relationships, foster an inclusive environment, and staying in touch beyond the work product. So, knowing everyone's name, that's... that's a very important thing to me, and knowing a little something about them at least. It's important that, you know, at least one or two things that you can connect with. So, for me, it's important to put... just to reinforce the human piece behind the work piece because it's very easy to say, oh, yeah, we've got an excellent working relationship but, um, you know, folks appreciate value in a broader context. And, you know, for me, it's just reinforcing and reminding myself always engage beyond, uh, you know, the.... the objective, right? Um, you know, and get to know and understand... and understand where that person is coming from. Understand their background, um, you know, or what's going on in their life too, and... and I think that really helps when it comes time to, um, you know, make a decision or when it comes time to start a project or form something. Taking into account that there is value to us as... as people and humans, and we're not just workers, right? So, uh, ways that we can do that I think really help form a good team efforts and good leadership and cultivating and reminding our folks how to be leaders and essentially get them to where we are. So, it's a succession planning too. So, not hoarding information and sharing information and making sure that everybody is always ready to step up to that next... that next task or challenge. Free-flowing communication, relationships, partnerships, and understanding that we're all human at a core. I... for me those are... those are things that I just constantly reinforce with myself and always, always want to do better with.

Mike

Adam, this was wonderful. I appreciate you taking time out. This was an enlightening for me. I appreciate the work that you've done. Uh, and equally important, I appreciate the work that your team has done during this time. So, thank you.

Adam

My pleasure. Thank you.

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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