

MC Forward Podcast
Season 3, Episode 8
Antonio Vidal
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 Antonio Vidal, Data Coordinator for the Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages and Literacy Grant program in Workforce Development and Continuing Education. Antonio, I appreciate you joining me today.

Antonio

Thanks. Good morning, Mike. Thanks for inviting me. It is a pleasure for me to be here with you to share my experience and my thoughts about leadership, and I hope that it helps others in the same journey.

Mike

So, speaking of journeys, you've had an interesting one. You came to this country from Venezuela. Talk a little bit about your journey and how you ended up at Montgomery College.

Antonio

I came to the United States on February 25, um, 1998, after working in one of the Sony of Venezuela and also at one of the biggest chain of supermarkets or grocery stores in Venezuela. So, I decided to come because I had an interview that could be taken easily into an advertising of an English school in which I was called to talk to the general sales manager. And when they interviewed me, they called me and said Mr. Vidal, the interview is going to be in English. He said. What? Yes, he said in English. Don't you speak English? I said no. I don't. Nobody told me anything. So, they told me, uh, well, Mr. Vidal, we are going to call you. I am I still waiting for the call. I knew they were not going to call me. So, the interview was with, um, 3M, one of the best Industries in Venezuela at that time. So, I decided to come to the United States and to study English. So, I came with the idea that everybody, you know, shared over there saying, come on, Antonio you go to the United States and in six months you would be, uh, 100% bilingual. So, I came here and at the fourth month, I realized that I wasn't going to be close to being bilingual. I mean, I have been here for almost 25 years, I still I'm not. So, um, you know, I started my... my English classes as a tourist, then the school offered me the possibility to apply for the F1 Visa, which I did. When I was ready to go, the school offered me the possibility to hire me as an H1 worker, and I said, well, I can't stay with you but only if as you as you said you hire me legally. So, I started working for the school and also taking some to offer classes, and my experience took me to be the school's designated official

of the INS, now it is the Bureau Citizenship and Naturalization Services. Then, um, you know, with the interaction with the students, the students wanted to transfer to Montgomery College. I had the opportunity to talk to Marlon Vallejo several times and I talked to myself, I said, I have to work in Montgomery College one day. So, my goal was to work at Montgomery College. Um, you know, I did apply to a position in 2000 or 2000, 2001. It was an international position. Uh, um, international position, coordinator at Tacoma Park. I went to the interview, and I wasn't selected but I didn't stop with my hope to get into Montgomery College. So, one day, I was working in a bagel store in Frederick, yes, I was the supervisor and, you know, the baker and everything. So, I had a commute... I commuted at 100... 100-mile commute every day. So, one of my friends called me and said, Antonio, I just had an interview with my supervisor and she is very interested in talking to you. I said, okay, but where, when can I go? He said right now, and I remember that I was driving down from Frederick to Arlington. And I said, come on, I am full of flours everywhere, you know. I... I am not going to go to an interview like that. So, he said, okay, Antonio just get ready and maybe one of these days, we'll interview. And I started on March 2, 2005. They told me, Antonio, this is your computer. This is going to be the room. Uh, I believe the password for the computer is the word Password. And please forgive us, it is a little dust here and there. So, I started my journey with a program... a program that I love, that has given me, um, all what I am right now in the U.S. If there is a dream, you know, um, an American Dream, I can tell you, Mike, that this dream was facilitated to me by Montgomery College, and the work that I have been doing with the College, for the students and to all of the immigrants that we serve.

Mike

I absolutely love that story, and you have shared that with me several times, and each time, it brings me chills that I get goosebumps over it because of your perseverance, uh, your determination. Talk a little bit about how that determination has led you to view what kind of leader you are because it takes great leadership I think just to say, look, I'm packing up. I'm leaving my home country to go to another country. Uh, that... that's special. That's special determination, Antonio.

Antonio

Yes. Well, let me just tell you, I didn't know that I was going to be here. I came here for four months, then when I realized that I couldn't go back, and say, hey, you know, I am fully bilingual and saying I do speak English more or less. It was not going to help me there. So, I said, no, no, no. I cannot go back, and then, you know, things were happening step by step. I got into an apartment without knowing how, you know, sometimes I think that, I told you, this, it came from heaven. I remember that I apply for a co-op and they told me in order to apply for the co-op you need to be a permanent resident and you haven't showed your green card. And I said, no, I cannot show you my green card because I am... I do have a work permit. I am an H1 Visa holder, so. He said, well, we cannot give you the loan or the mortgage because you are not a permanent resident, and unless you give us 30 percent down in 1999 meant \$12,000. And making

\$10 an hour just to be able to save \$2,000 in less than a year was not possible. My supervisor at that time called the bank and said, hey, do you accept give letters? And the bank said yes, we do. He took his personal checkbook, wrote me a \$12,000 check and said, Antonio, go and buy the apartment. Pay me whenever you want. Ah, and by the way, I won't charge you any interest or that. So, it took me to my first leadership experience, which is a compassionate experience. I would call it a friend leadership, you know. Um, my supervisor at the time helped me not only with my English, but when someone comes to learn a new language, many people think that it is a process of learning the language. No, it is not only the process of learning the language, it is also the process of learning the culture of the country in which you are. I had very hard times. You know, in Venezuela, we hug everybody, we kiss everybody at work. For us, it's an open environment. Here, the first phrasal verb I learned was, put down, put it down. The second one was back off, you know. So, uh, for me, was very difficult to adapt to all of that. Remember, I came here when I was 38, and I had already a life in Venezuela. But I went step by step with all of the leaders that I had. I had, you know, my friend Dan Katz, who was my first supervisor. Then, I have another leader that was very nice, but she was autocratic. She was the kind of person that when I made mistakes, told me, Antonio, you must have had a senior moment. And, of course, I was like, senior moment? What is this senior moment? I was learning. And every time I talked to somebody about senior moment, people told me, she shouldn't have told you that. Okay, so, but she told me that. But, um, you know, besides all of these things, I can tell that she had helped me a lot because she also extended my H1 Visa. I... I did a lot. I did give a lot to that school too. Um, it was an English school, a non-profit organization in Washington, D.C., and I worked for them for 7 years before coming to the College after having a previous experience with the bagel store that I told you in Frederick. And then, I came to the College scared because I am a civil engineer. I was then, I was never a data coordinator but a civil engineer. What I said... what I thought was, okay, Antonio, the first thing you need to do is learn how to work with SQL. So, I took classes at the College with all of the possible things and programs that involves databases. And, of course, I did it at Montgomery College, and I prepared myself. So, it has been a long way, a long journey since I started here, and I see myself today. But I can tell you, Mike and I can tell everyone that it has been a wonderful journey in which I had wonderful co-workers and not only wonderful co-workers but a lot of love as well. And also people who have helped me. People who had taught me. Um, I think that I should mention one of the best leaders that I have found, hasn't been my supervisor, but I think that I need to mention her, is Cynthia Mauris. I did have an excellent, excellent experience. I was part of the 20th LDI, and all of the leadership that I know, all of the theory and all of the thoughts that involve leadership, I learned them from her and LDI. And she does a very wonderful job. My current supervisor, Emma Wilson. My former supervisor, Donna Kinerney. The three of them have done an excellent work. Each of them with their style because each of them has, you know, a different style, but we have formed a wonderful team together. And I have tried during this time to take all my experience from Venezuela because I was a General Sales Manager, then a General Operation Manager. As you see, nothing related to education, but I have brought this into my employees, and I called my

employees because I feel them as part of me. Not because I feel ownership, but I feel them as part of me.

Mike

So, Antonio, as you take those experiences that you talked about: the bagel shop, you getting the apartment, and your experience with the College's LDI program. How would you sum up your leadership style as a result of all those experiences?

Antonio

Um, I would say that leadership is not a theory that you learn to apply it exactly as it should be. I would say that all of my experience has taught me that there are moments in which you should move from one style to another. I do remember in one of the LDI classes, someone that said if you have applied all of your leadership techniques and, uh, nothing work, there is a moment for you to apply your dictator leadership. [Laughs] So, of course, there are things there are moments in which you should sit with your people and talk to your people and show what you are able to do, and more importantly, what they are able to do because the first thing you need to show your people is you are able to do this. Because if I was able to do it, you were able to do it as well. So, this is more or less what I try to practice every day, you know, giving positive message, listening to what they have to say, taking.... um, uh, taking criticism when that happens or when that is needed. Depending on my position when I have to depend, but I mean defend my position. I definitely believe in what I do, and unless you show me that what I'm doing is not the right way to go, I will, you know, uh, keep doing what I do. Of course, I do respect, um, my supervisors, and I do respect the chief of command, but I think that it is important... the most important thing about leadership is value the people that you have under you.

Mike

Where do you see yourself growing in your leadership journey from here on out?

Antonio

Well, um, to be honest with you, Mike, um, I see my retirement about four or five years away. So, if I enjoy good health until then, my dream is going to help immigrants at the hospital. You know, I did have a surgery a year and a half ago. I went to a procedure and suddenly they told me Mr. Antonio you have another reason in your artery, aorta artery, and you need surgery. And since your grandpa died because of that, you have... you need to have the surgery in a month. So, I had surgery on May 20, 2021, and going through that process teaches you, hey, you know, I'm not going to be here all the time. So, something may happen. But as I told you, if I enjoy good health, what I would like to do is help those immigrants. I went to those hospitals and I see people that they were not able to be helped because they don't have the language skills, and I always tell my wife that I would like to work as a volunteer, you know, being, uh, being able to... to help those that don't know how to express themselves.

Mike

Well, my friend you are such an inspiration to me. I... I absolutely love having conversations with you. Uh, I... I come away from every conversation inspired, uh, as to what I can do because of what you have done. And I just cannot thank you enough, Antonio, for coming on to this podcast and just sharing your... your journey with me and... and your, just your... your wisdom. Uh, you are such an inspiration. So, I very, very much appreciate it.

Antonio

Thank you. Thank you very much Mike. And I want people to know, and I think that I told you this. Um, I do have a car to show you and I have been trying to do it and I always forget the car, but this is a task that I have for you. Uh, look, if I have done it, everyone can do it as well. You know, I haven't had any crowns. I haven't been the son or the daughter of a king, so I came here as an immigrant, and yes, I have played hard. I have worked hard. I have tried to be responsible. I do remember that when I had the surgery, it was close to the fiscal year, and I told my supervisor I am going to be here at the end of June to close the fiscal year. Don't worry that I will be. And three weeks after the surgery, I asked for permission to my doctor to work at least part time, and he gave me permission. And in July, I was working from home full time. So, with effort, with hard, work with responsibility, with a little bit of enthusiasm because the enthusiasm is needed. I call my corner in the office the Happy Corner because we are always laughing and having a joke, or having something to laugh about that because laugh is free. You don't have to pay for that, so doing that you will succeed because no one can look, you know, away from you when you have all of this, you know, um, features... all of these, um... and you are in this way.

Mike

My friend, be well. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Antonio

Thank you, Mike. 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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