

MC Forward Podcast  
Season 4, Episode 5  
Kristen Roe  
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 Kristen Roe, Director of Americans with Disabilities Act and Title IX Coordinator. Kristen, I appreciate you joining me. Thank you.

**Kristen**

Good morning, and Happy New Year.

**Mike**

So, you oversee a couple of areas that have high profiles, and not only high profiles at Montgomery College, but institutions across the country, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Title IX Coordinator. What type of leader is needed, and what type of leadership traits are needed to help people navigate those two areas?

**Kristen**

Great question. I would say in order to effectively lead ADA and Title IX Compliance, a leader has to really have true respect for the federal regulations that they are tasked with enacting at the institutional level. So, there really can't be a personal agenda associated with it. It has to more be a desire to fulfill the statutory requirements and to ensure the general fairness and equity that is baked into both of those pieces of federal legislation.

**Mike**

I would imagine that you have to have some mobility, some agility, some flexibility, because those federal regulations seemingly change on a dime, you know, they certainly change with administrations.

**Kristen**

Absolutely. I would say the Americans with Disability Act has been a little bit more stable over the years. It's really hasn't changed significantly other than some building codes and things related to slope and all those architectural things that are important to ensuring our facilities are not providing barriers to accessibility. However, Title IX has gone through tremendous changes over the past couple of presidential administrations, and even right now, the current Department of Education is rewriting the rules, and we are anxiously awaiting a new set of regulations this spring, which will cause us to fast

and furiously rewrite our policies and get into alignment with what the federal government has laid out for us in terms of the new path forward on Title IX.

**Mike**

How does that task your leadership?

**Kristen**

Well, it requires a lot of work with leadership now, getting people prepared, right? So, when you know change is coming, there's a lot of work to be done to socialize the concept to provide whatever kind of information can help everyone understand what might be required of them in the future. I think it's about setting expectations. It's about being very clear with colleagues across the institution, about what needs there may be, and working really hard to make sure that all of those things are in place when the time comes.

**Mike**

You sound like you're a collaborative leader. [Kristen laughs] Would that be a way to describe you?

**Kristen**

Absolutely, because there is no way to do this alone, nor should it be done. Really think in order to be really true to the principles of ADA and Title IX compliance, it requires really empowering everyone across the institution to see themselves as a stakeholder. So, while I may be a leader in providing clarification and ensuring that we hit certain markers, I know that the work is not done by me alone. For example, right now, we're doing an ADA self-evaluation that looks at literally every single facility across all of our campuses, and I am deeply engaged in partnerships with our facilities teams on each of the campuses because they are the ones who I can turn to to correct a deficiency that we find, you know, perhaps it's an issue where we need a new automatic opening door. That's not something I can do on my own, and so, my partners over in facilities really are key to making sure the College gets into compliance.

**Mike**

What in your background has helped you hone those collaboration skills?

**Kristen**

I came to DC from California to work for the US Department of Justice Office on violence against women, and in that role, I served as a Grant Administrator. And so, that really requires partnership with local jurisdictions and tribes and territories across the United States to make sure that we have a good partnership for enacting the legislation for distributing the money. And so, that was never something that could be done alone. So, I really learned very early on in my career that collaboration is key.



**Mike**

In your past, what types of leadership traits have impacted you? And what types of leaders have impacted you?

**Kristen**

I've always been drawn to public service and to mission-driven institutions. Uh, I really have never worked for a for-profit entity that is working just to increase the bottom line. And so, in order for me to feel like I can invest my leadership skills, I need to feel like I'm a part of something that is helping others and fulfilling a mission that I find personally rewarding and satisfying.

**Mike**

Now, correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm gonna shift gears here just a minute, and... but I think I'll make a connection, but correct me if I'm wrong, you have three boys?

**Kristen**

I actually have four.

**Mike**

Four boys? Okay, I have three. Uh, all adults all. All out of the house, but here's the connection, is running a family household with four boys... how does that help your leadership skills? Because it helped mine tremendously.

**Kristen**

Sure, absolutely. And I just had a conversation with someone about this the other day. Um, I learned very early on that not everything I do is gonna please everyone, that I'm never going to be able to, or very rarely I should say, be able to do something that's going to make all of the members of my family equally satisfied and happy. And as soon as I let go of the need to feel like my job was to make everyone's dreams and wishes come true, I realized that I have to be strategic. I have to be fair. I have to be reasonable. I have to have, um, realistic expectations. And so, as soon as I learned how to approach parenting and managing my household in that way, I realized that also is how I preach... approach my work. I decide what is important. What are the important wins? Because everything's not going to be a win. And as soon as I can figure out what the important wins are, I can focus on those and sort of let the other things go.

**Mike**

I could not agree more. And like I said, my boys are all grown and married with kids of their own, but I learned a long time ago that battling with them was not good for anybody, and battling with people at work is not good for anybody. You don't accomplish the end goal, and I think the end goal is most important. Um, what does Kristen Roe need to work on as a leader?

**Kristen**

Um, as a leader, I am spending time thinking about how I can be most effective in my new role. As Director of ADA Compliance and Title IX Coordinator, I've been in this role since March, so I'm in my first year of this particular leadership position. And I am working hard to, as a new administrator at the College, let people know what they can expect from me. Let them know what I am passionate about. And so, really defining my role here at the College within this first year.

**Mike**

Has it been harder than you thought? Is leadership harder than you thought?

**Kristen**

I would say that I'm never been shy to be a leader. Uh, but I am learning how to fill my new shoes here in this role. Again, I have lots of interests and... and could see myself getting involved in lots of things here at the College because it's an exciting place and there's exciting work going on everywhere, but I am committed to establishing myself as a leader within my spheres of influence because I don't want to burn out. I don't want to stretch myself so thin across other areas of interest that I'm not able to really maximize my leadership in my areas of responsibility.

**Mike**

Let's talk about that idea of burnout because I think the pandemic certainly impacted every single one of us to some degree, some more than others, how do you as a leader help your team recover from that burnout? And how do you as an individual recover from that burnout?

**Kristen**

Yeah, that's a great question. And... and I don't know that any of us are really sure yet. I think we're all trying to figure this out as we go. I think as we turn the page into 2023, I feel a great sense of optimism as we've had students return to campus in more and more numbers. I think that is also energized a lot of us. I think, again, from a leadership perspective, coming out of the pandemic, it's really focusing on, um, knowing what's essential in our work duties. You know, the pandemic forced us to really distill down to our core responsibilities and making sure that we are performing those at a level of excellence. And I would like to see that continue going forward.

**Mike**

In your leadership journey, have you benefited from various mentors?

**Kristen**

Absolutely. I thrive under great leadership. And I've had the opportunity to work with incredible directors and leaders throughout my entire career, and that is really what keeps me going. And so, right now in the office, we have an interim director that's working wonderfully, but I'm looking forward to a time when we onboard the new Chief

Compliance Risk and Ethics Officer and understand what their vision is and can get into alignment on under their leadership. Similarly, I'm so excited about the new president, Dr. Williams here, and knowing now sort of what our focus is going to be as an institution. I get a lot of energy from that because I know where to focus and where to prioritize my work.

**Mike**

You've mentioned that you thrive under great leadership. What have those leaders provided you to make you feel that way? What traits have they had?

**Kristen**

Well, as I mentioned, I've always worked for mission-driven organizations. And so, really principal leaders who are genuinely dedicated to the mission, that you can trust is really important to me. I don't thrive under leadership where I have the sense that it's disingenuous, or that there really isn't a commitment from the leader. And so, when I'm able to look towards someone in a leadership position and sense that they are genuinely invested in the same goals that I am invested in, that gives me the energy to continue to, you know, put more of myself into the work.

**Mike**

Do individuals have to have respect for their leaders to do good work, do you think?

**Kristen**

I think it helps, and it's not idea, but I don't think it's essential. I think, as much as I say I've had the opportunity to work under great leaders, I've also had the opportunity to work for leaders that I wasn't so inspired by. And I think in those moments, again, I've always just turned towards looking at what can I control and what kind of impact can I have and make sure that my core responsibilities are being implemented even if I'm feeling sort of less than enthusiastic about the larger mission of the leader.

**Mike**

The reason I ask is because years ago I worked under a person who I just lost respect for, and that made it very difficult for me to want to continue doing that work. And the older I've gotten, and the more experiences I've gotten, that respect is important to me. I don't know exactly why, but if I just... if I don't respect the person with whom I'm working with then it's very difficult for me to get excited about coming to work. Fortunately, I don't have that issue but now, but I did before.

**Kristen**

I agree, and that would be a really difficult working situation for me as well, but again, looking at Title IX and ADA, I sort of... I can't get my leadership from ADA and Title IX, you know. What they require me to do and the expectations are very clear in terms of the framework of my work, the mission of it. They're both focused on equity and justice and inclusion and making sure that there's fairness for all members of our community.

And so, even if I was working under a leadership that personally I wasn't feeling connected to or inspired by, I can always draw inspiration from the subject matter that I have responsibility for because I am very passionate about those.

**Mike**

Let's talk about Title IX because most people see Title IX as the sports equity issue but it's much broader than that. How do you as a leader get people to understand that there are many components to Title IX?

**Kristen**

And that is a constant battle. While I agree that many people do see Title IX as the equity in athletics, which is really what the focus was 50 years ago when the legislation was passed, over the past decade and a half, focus has really been on sexual harassment and sexual misconduct, which are tremendous issues in higher education because of the barriers that experiencing sexual misconduct can place towards someone participating equally in the educational program of the college. So, I think that people tend to see sort of the two buckets, but I'm constantly trying to get people to see that there's even more. We in Title IX must always focus on protections and access for our students who are experiencing pregnancy or pregnancy loss because there are lots of rights supported under Title IX related to that, and we have a lot of students who are experiencing pregnancy. Also, really on the horizon of Title IX, as we go into the new regulations, is an emphasis on focusing on gender-based discrimination, which is of course rooted in sex. And so, there's a lot of exciting work that's going to be happening in terms of gender equity and an emphasis on the fact that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity also is something that our institutions must address because the disparate treatment or impact on individuals based on that type of discrimination creates tremendous barriers to benefiting from our educational programs. So, there's a lot. There's the athletic facilities. There's lactation spaces. There's a grievance process for sexual misconduct. And there's ensuring that no one in our community is experiencing discrimination based on their gender or their sexual orientation.

**Mike**

Your passion is evident.

**Kristen**

Thank you. Thank you. It's easy to get passionate about it because it's about fairness and about dignity and really honoring people in how they come into the world and ensuring that they can benefit from the mission here at the College, which is to, you know, come here set a goal for yourself to maybe get a certification or a degree and to progress through freely without experiencing any discrimination. So, yeah, I feel really privileged to get to be able to be a part of that process.

**Mike**

And that passion has always been part of your leadership trait?

**Kristen**

It has. It has been. Um, I don't... I don't where does this come from, you know, being raised in a church community where we really spent a lot of time focusing on service to others. Maybe it came from being a Girl Scout or a Sea Scout where I was focused on a code of responsibility and fairness to others. But whatever it is, I know that it is always baked into me. I do have a slightly famous relative. My great great great great uncle was Samuel Gompers, who was the founder of the American Federation of Labor, and sometimes I like to think that there's just a little bit of his activism to ensure equity for workers in the cigar making industry in New York City, which later led to protections for workers, is something that sort of runs through my family line, and perhaps brought me to the work I'm in today.

**Mike**

And as we begin to wrap up, how do you instill that passion into your own children as servants?

**Kristen**

One of the things that they see me do is they do see me in service outside of work. They know that I'm been a mentor with Generation Hope, which is a great organization that provides academic and mentoring support to college students who are parenting. And they've met the students I've mentored, and they've been with me on this journey, and they see that I make that commitment in my personal life. And so, I try to lead by example.

**Mike**

Well, Kristen, continued to do a great job. I love the passion that you bring to the work you do, and I appreciate you taking time out to talk about it.

**Kristen**

Thank you so much. I've enjoyed it as well.

**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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