

MC Forward Podcast
Season 4, Episode 2
Ramon Valenzuela
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 Ramon Valenzuela, Instructional Assistant in the Testing and Assessment Center on the Rockville campus. Ramon, thanks for joining me today. I really appreciate it.

Ramon

Thank you, Dr. Mills.

Mike

So, I came across an article that was highlighted in MCRPA in July of 2022. And the question was: What are some advices you would give to new employees who just started working at the College? And I really liked your answer because you changed the question, and you revised it to say: What advice would you give to your former self when you were still new to the College? And I want to take the perspective from a leadership angle. What advice would you give to yourself as a leader now compared to 10 years ago? How has your leadership evolved?

Ramon

Um, it's real tricky, Dr. Mills. I don't want to say... I don't really see myself as a leader. I'm more of a follower, but at the same time, um, I want to say that I'm a leader of my own life. So, if I am to give advice to my former self as a leader, I'd tell myself to just be out there, to not be afraid to make mistakes, to take on new challenges as they come, and, you know, meet people, listen to other people's stories and get inspired, be motivated. And I would say that in my life as an employee here at MC, being around people who are so motivated and passionate about what they do helps me be motivated as well to do better.

Mike

Why don't you see yourself as a leader?

Ramon

I'm not sure truly. It's like my colleague here, I've mentioned to you through email that I'm currently on a professional development, and my colleague Susan and I were talking

earlier, um, and she said to, um, not focused on what I'm not but focused on what I am. And I'm in the transition of how do I say it, um, just focusing on what I can do.

Mike

Leading from where you are.

Ramon

Right, right. And just trying to be a role model to others. So, yeah, that's where I'm at right now. I'm still trying to change my mindset and not say out loud that I'm not or I'm not this. I'm not that. I want to say, oh, I am this.

Mike

Is that changing of the mind difficult? Have you found it hard?

Ramon

It is. Just being here today, like that adrenaline is here. I feel so overwhelmed, but at the same time, when you sent me the invitation, it's like one of once in a lifetime opportunity, and if I don't do it, I'll regret it forever. So, yeah, I'm here. [Laughs]

Mike

Well, I appreciate your accepting the invitation. When you look back, or currently, at people who you've been inspired by as leaders, what traits do they have? What do you want to emulate?

Ramon

They're calm. They are welcoming. Um, They're open to new ideas. They are confident, and, how do I say... um, they're just very knowledgeable about a lot of things and not just at work but also outside, and I aspire to be like them.

Mike

Well, you've been at the College for, you told me earlier, five years. You're embarking on different professional development opportunities to enhance those leadership skills. What have you learned?

Ramon

So far, I've learned my personality type and what I'm good at, supposedly. [Laughs] I've learned that there are times when I focus too much on what I think is valuable, that I forget that not everybody thinks that way and that I should be open to new ideas. I would say that I'm pretty flexible, and sometimes people find me gullible actually, but every now and then, I find myself valuing what I think is right and forgetting that not everybody sees it that way and that I need to be open and what others value.

Mike

In your past, who jumps out as a leader that you've admired?

Ramon

Ms. Debbie Crutchfield. She's just open to new ideas. She helped me be comfortable with my own decisions. And she just, I don't know, she helped me build more confidence within myself, and I want to be like her someday. She has this confidence within her like, I don't know how to say it, like she just knows everything, and if she doesn't know one thing, she'll get it for you.

Mike

When you look at leaders that you admire, you had mentioned this idea of confidence and knowledge. What jumps out about the confidence part?

Ramon

When you say jumps out, like, can you elaborate on that?

Mike

Sure. What makes them good leaders? Is it simply because of the confidence? Or, is it because of the way they handle themselves with the confidence and the knowledge?

Ramon

Yeah, I think it goes side by side. And I'm actually learning that to be confident myself, I need to be very knowledgeable on whatever it is I'm talking about. And yeah, I mean, it's not just confidence. It's also, I think, it's also passion, and you can really tell like, Dr Ja'Bette Lozupone. When I listen to her, there's so much passion in there and that she really knows what she's talking about. So, I admire leaders like her.

Mike

How about the idea of mentors?

Ramon

I would love to have a mentor?

Mike

What would you expect to get out of having a mentor? What kind of leadership skills or traits could a person help you develop?

Ramon

Um, self-confidence. Time management. I would say they can guide you on what they've done and maybe that's something they can... I could do myself.

Mike

So, I'm listening to you right now. You're downplaying, I think, your current leadership traits because I know in being in the Testing and Assessment Center that you have to

take on different leadership skills. You're working with faculty, you're working with students. So, I think you have some of those traits already in place.

Ramon

I hope so. I hope so. And I'm still trying to be better. I think a lot of it is just self-confidence and just... I don't know how to say it, Dr. Mills.

Mike

When you look at your own leadership journey? Where do you see yourself going? What kind of leader do you want to be?

Ramon

I want to be a leader who let others express themselves. Um, I want them to know that they can count on me whatever happens. And enable people to just be themselves, be their authentic selves. I think if people are able to be their authentic selves, they will be more happy and not see work as work but it's just life, I think.

Mike

Is that the goal of a leader at an educational institution to help people see the passion in their work and not just see it as a job?

Ramon

In a way, like, I feel like we as educators we need to help others like realize their potential, their... what they're passionate about. Um, and you know, growing up, I always felt like I was left out because I learned things slowly, but then, I've had teachers that were... how do I say it? Look very engaging. They've incorporated a way to make learning fun. And because of that, I learned the topics that they've given me really well, and I did really well in those classes, and I aspire to be like them.

Mike

Well, and I think you are. If you look at your position and the unit you're in, in many cases, when they come in to do a placement test of some sort, or have to take an academic assessment for a class, you're on the front lines of helping them meet their goals, especially those who come in for a placement test.

Ramon

Yes, yes.

Mike

How does that make you feel knowing that you're at the beginning stages of their academic journey?

Ramon

It can be overwhelming. You have to be calm and you have to know what... how to

provide help to these students. Um, sometimes when they test their anxiety, well, I'm feeling I'm very anxious right now, but like sometimes I just tell them, I feel you but I'm here for you if you need me. Um, just, you know, just being there.

Mike

Um, and you don't see that as a... as leadership? I'm gonna answer for you, it is leadership.

Ramon

I mean, I do see it... I guess I do believe it on myself. I don't know. I just I feel like there's actually one of the things we learned in LDI is, well, I'm still in LDI. I'm part of the 29th LDI cohort, and one of the things we learned, or one of the things we discuss, is we need to stop, I can't remember the exact quote, but the person, it was a TED Talk and he said to stop making leadership as something that is has to be like a worldwide... no it's not worldwide, I can't remember the exact quotes, I wish I had it with me because it was really life-changing. Like, if we keep making leadership as something out of this world or something bigger than us, we keep making excuses not to do it. Something around those things.

Mike

Well, and I think that is so accurate that we... when we think of leadership, we think of it in terms of having to take a class on leadership or get a degree in organizational leadership or take a graduate class on leadership, and I think we can drill down where it doesn't have to be that way at all. It's being, I think, as you mentioned, your authentic self, helping guide individuals and helping them see what can be the best for them. I think that's what leadership is, and I think you demonstrate that on a regular basis.

Ramon

I sure hope so, Dr. Mills.

Mike

So, as you move forward. You want to build on your confidence. What other leadership traits do you want to develop?

Ramon

Oh, um, I would say public speaking. The leaders that I have admired the most speak really well in public, in front of a lot of people. And I think the way to do it is just to be out there, push myself to be out there, um, doing podcasts like this.

Mike

Well, I appreciate your doing this podcast because I know it wasn't easy for you.

Ramon

I was really surprised when you sent me the invitation, but I'm a huge fan. Uh, I listen to each one of them every time you upload one. So...

Mike

Well, you will be part of Season 4, and now people can start to listen to you and hear your ideas on leadership. Ramon, thank you. I very much appreciate it.

Ramon

Thank you so much, Dr. Mills.

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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