MC Forward Podcast
Season 4, Episode 4
Scot Brown
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 Scot Brown, Organizational Development and HR Outreach Manager. Scot, thanks for joining me I appreciate it.

Scot
My pleasure thanks for the invite.

Mike
So, you have a wide array of experience in organizational development leadership development. I know prior to coming to MC, you were in Trinity Health, spent some time at Holy Cross health. In terms of leadership, what makes a good leader and how do you develop a good leader?

Scot
For me, what makes a good leader for someone that's leading me, is someone that makes me want to do it, makes me want to take the next step, you know. That there's some kernel, some nugget, in there that has motivated me to take to make that discretionary effort, and I think that that kernel, that nugget always changes, right? It changes for me, it's not always the same for me, as it is for others. It depends on the project, depending on the, you know, depending on the day, the hour, perhaps right? Nowadays things are moving so quickly. But, for me what makes a good leader is you know, someone that can motivate, inspire me to see the big picture, and understand how I fit into it. Although that's, you know, that describes the things that motivate me. That doesn't always motivate other people, you know. It's like seeing the big picture and how, someone's job fits into it doesn't always motivate people. That is a common one and it's a big one for me.

Mike
In your experience, can you give an example of someone who's provided that big picture before you…who's been that mentor for you?

Scot
Sure, well let's use… um… let's use…about a previous manager at Trinity Health and Holy Cross Health… was an individual named David Schultz who was able to help me see how we were having impact, when I didn't feel like we were. Was able to take me from

feeling underutilized and not really having the impact and lack of interest in the work anymore, to say like, hey this is this is actually really how this fits in and uh honestly, kudos. That was it was very good leadership because, honestly he had applied… he got the job that I applied for… and wanted. [laughs] And he came in as my boss, but still you know, no hard feelings and really was able to see me through that difficult moment. As you know, in a career as a leader… and I think this is really important for leadership… to meet people where they're at, and you know, he was able to do that. He saw where I was and it's like hey, there's a lot… there's a lot of good here, so let's make the best of it. And being able to see how I was impacting a large hospital system when you're just feeling like a small insignificant number, can go a real long way. And… people keep … keeping people motivated on those… um… as I always like to say those cold, dark Tuesdays when no one wants to go back to work right? When you to stay motivated on those hard times.

Mike
That's a really good example because we see time and time again individuals who don't provide that type of leadership because they feel threatened by people. They feel as if that person that they're going to provide help to, is going to overtake them. How do you view that?

Scot
You know, that's a… that's a… great observation. It reminds me of a program, a leadership slash training development program I developed for a civil infrastructure company about a decade ago… decade plus ago, really, and um one of the issues they were running into there was their foreman and superintendents - they never wanted to promote their good guys. They never wanted to sort of bring them up or maybe even share them with another project team that was doing something similar, because they knew they had an ace in the hole, right? Like they knew they had this money-making machine for them and made them look good, so hey, I want to keep this under wraps in a way. So philosophically I come from a "grow the pie" perspective you know like just if you look at probabilities, I like to increase the whole volume of opportunity so that the probability of something benefiting me is greater uh instead of looking at it dividing out. But how do you accomplish that? And how to inspire that in others can really be tricky, and I think that really comes down to meeting people where they're at and taking the time to listen to find out. That's a root cause analysis, that root of actually what's holding them back, and it's never going to happen in the first conversation or even in the first, you know, time period right? It's probably going to be after… uh… the two individuals have bumped heads and gone through some kind of conflict, whether minor or a major, but gone through those, you know, forming–storming–norming–performing stages and gotten through the other side, built that trust and say hey it's not about dividing this out but growing it so we all get a bigger piece. I think that, you know, what to inspire people to accomplish that, to get out of, you know, asking them directly. I think it's really important to, when you build that in a relationship, when you're asking the direction, like I want to personally challenge you to look at this in a different direction, in

a different way leaving…that, with open-ended questions, really provides that sense of dignity and gratitude that everyone deserves, you know. And especially people that you're leading. They really, I think frequently…it's so important to breathe that breath of self-confidence and assurance into people, so that they can be independent problem solvers and so that they already know what's expected of them. But do we give them that permission to do it inherently instead of is that okay? You know, like instead of always checking along the way which once again using the forming–storming–norming–performing like that you know you know you can only really grow that over time and with sincere, with sincere communication, and sincere relationship building between the leader and the and the team.

Mike
So, two things jumped out as I was listening to that that response: listening and trust. They're important for leaders to be successful.

Scot
Yes.

Mike
That doesn't always happen however, right? We don't always engage in active listening, and as we are well aware, listening is not the same as hearing.

Scot
Yeah. Um yeah, you know I think that that when it comes down to the leadership role I find it a moral obligation, you know, like to hear someone out. You know, we've all been on the other side of the desk, where we're trying to explain something, when something…let's use an example… by you're being held accountable for something, right? And it's you know some tension in the room. I feel like I really I owe it to this person as a human being, first and foremost, and then as an employee and a director and boss relationship to hear him out completely, and like, to sincerely try to understand from their perspective. And I say that in conjunction with… because I think that's the kind of behavior if you can integrate it on a very regular basis that does build trust. You know it does build trust. I always try to, you know, there's the standard practices of building trust of trying to involve people in the decision making, trying to involve them in the changes that impact their work. But we well know that all organizations, or many organizations I should say, your decisions are made. Things change and you don't always involve all the people involved. Um because sometimes it's just completely not be you know physically possible to get everyone involved. To get all the voices in the room or you know sometimes it's just like straight up, hey this legally happened and we got to do it. [laughs] You know, so there is that balance because the other side of that is down in the front line employees they just see things moving around, then they see priorities whipping and changing, and being like, hey what's going on? You can look at the…how fluid situations were during the early days of the covid pandemic. You couldn't involve everyone in the decision making. People needed to lead. We had to make some

decisions and move forward. Um but making sure… but I still think… so it's like linking that to hearing people out. You can still hear people out even if they can't be totally involved in decision making. Involving them as much as possible I think is really important and also just being honest with them, and being like, you know, this one we can't have everyone's voice in there…leveling straight with them. I've been in situations where, like, well… hey you know my employees they would like to be involved in decision making but they don't want to be if it's just lip service. They don't want to be if it's really just for show and we're just gonna make a decision anyways regardless of what they say. So, I think that level of sincerity is very important because people frequently I mean they can read it right? They're detectors, they're BS detectors, they're like yeah, yeah you asked us, but you didn't ever … we didn't really ever have a have a go at changing what you were gonna say, you just were trying to get our buy-in…

Mike
…well I think oftentimes too individuals want to have a voice and they should be heard out, but they only want to voice if it's going to benefit them. In some cases you know are they willing to make those hard decisions after hearing all the options? And in many cases the answer is no and then like you said there are times when people just have to lead and make a decision. If you incorporate opportunities for everyone to have a voice then… gosh … I can't imagine what would have happened to organizations at the height of the pandemic. If they had done that they'd still be waiting for decisions to be made. I think back to the whole issue that the airlines have experienced and I'm not sure anyone is leading in those cases, but you have a lot of voices in the room and it just doesn't seem to be moving things forward, so I like your analysis. I like the focus on - at some point someone has to lead.

Scot
Exactly. It's like, how do you make that discernment right? Like at some point, you do need to get everyone's different opinions and make sure everyone feels validated and that that their voice, you know, that their ideas are shared, but there is that sense of discernment of okay, hey, we gotta weigh our priorities and make the decision and pull the trigger. Where I think leadership can fall down is that, as we well know, it's way easier to just make the decision and feel like you could live with the consequences even though that usually burns us, later right? So we can come through a difficult situation where we had to make some quick judgment calls and everyone's sort of okay with that but then we can rely on… oh wow it's so much easier to do that than to go through the whole vetting process of something right? And I think that's a trap. I think that's a trap because that's where we have to stop ourselves and say, no we're gonna go back and we're gonna share this with everyone and we're going to have a staff meeting about it and talk about it and we're gonna have, you know, give everyone whatever the different methods is, you know, verbal non-verbal written, uh all the different ways of collecting people's feedback and input. It's a sacrifice. It takes time and that's where I was talking about that discernment. What is really the best way sometimes things are critical and you have to just go for it and other times you might want to just go for it because you

think it'll just be easier in the short term. But then it's not. And it's really worth getting everyone's uh input, whether it's just their buy-in, whether they have… you know whether people just want to be heard… and then the other side is… and this is where I've… I frequently… I found myself… that they have phenomenal, better ideas… like way better solutions than I would have come up with. And that's why I love a diverse working environment. Where you have people coming from so many different starting points and currencies in life, where you know, they're starting from different places of the globe and different first languages and different religions and different academic backgrounds and the breadth of solutions, is so much greater that it would be foolish not to take advantage of it, right? It's you know that's the value of diversity… is that is… that wonderful problem solving, but the tricky part of the leadership is the sermon of how much time can I spend doing that compared to just making a decision and living with the consequences.

Mike
I love the saying if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room

Scot
[laughs] yeah good point.

Mike
Right? And I agree with you. I want to be in a room of people not like me… who have different ideas… different perspectives. You know, I love these various tests that you know, leadership skills tests, that that we offer and I'd love to be able to at some point develop a process where we give people these tests before we hire them so that we know exactly who's coming on our team, because I don't want a team full of me. I want a team that is diverse. Brings different perspectives. Has different passions and compassions for projects. And yet leaders often look for people like them…

Scot
…oh yeah, right.

Mike
…and I think that's our downfall in many cases.

Scot
Well yeah it's a bias right… it's an unconscious or conscious bias depending on the individual and also I think it is an evolutionary trait where we have, you know, are tuned or yeah, tuned to connecting with similarities, but you know, nowadays that.. you're right it doesn't serve us well. It really doesn't. It can really be a hindrance. We are in the modern workplace and so that that's one thing I've definitely valued, building that trust relationship gives you the… um it's almost like a currency or… uh in and of itself if I have that trust I can make mistakes, if I have that trust I can be like hey you know what this one we just had to go for and we just gotta you know I can ask for a discretionary effort

um if I have that trust, I don't have to worry about them getting something done because I know they will. Um but building it and um I you know I've always been old school in regards to …yeah…well I guess I don't know if you've really called old school but, but that philosophy of servant leadership, of like I really need to be here at my core, to be an advocate for this individual's future, whether it's hey I'm where I'm at, I want to just crank it out and someday I'm going to retire, fantastic. Or it's I'm new in my career and I gotta like… how do I get somewhere I like… this kind of thing. Can I do more of that, you know, meet, growing those individuals… I mean growing those individuals… helping them identify their passions and then plugging them into the resources to grow those passions… that really builds trust too. I mean that that really feels like hey that person's really on my side. That person really wants what's best for me, because as we know as leaders there's going to be days when we have conversations where it's going to be a difficult conversation, but if we've done the work ahead of time, sincerity you know sincerely or with sincerity I should say um it provides a strength in their relationship and hence the leadership style to deal with the ups and downs

Mike
As we begin to wrap up and you take a look back at your leadership journey what leadership skills is Scot Brown continuing to work on?

Scot
Um… I'm continuing to work on [laughs] I like this one… um making sure I let others completely finish before I jump in. [laughs] Being the youngest of six… uh conversations at the dinner table were usually competitive…[laughs] so I have a tendency to jump in which really comes down to listening skills right? And also, I am I'm definitely working on how to deliver difficult information. You know, how to hold people accountable when it's difficult and uncomfortable and doing that from a place of sincerity and strength.

Mike
Well Scot I appreciate your insights. This has been a wonderful conversation. Thanks.

Scot
You're welcome. Thanks for the invite.

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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