

MC Forward Podcast
Season 3, Episode 5
Shade Akinrimisi
Transcript

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 Shade Akinrimisi, Instructional Assistant in the Assessment and Testing Center. Shade, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule as you prepare for students to join me.

Shade

Thank you, Dr. Mills. I'm glad to be here. Happy you invited me to join in.

Mike

So, talking about leadership, um, what kind of leadership do you... what kind of leader do you look for? What kind of leadership do you look for?

Shade

Okay, so, with me, I would say I look for a leader like a Scrum Master. So, I happen to be... to have done some classes with regards to project management. And one thing that I realized, you know, being a leader, you have to be a servant, it has to be a seven leader role. So, you're a servant leader in that you are a protector, a supporter, a coach, and you're also a facilitator. So, and you can also be an enabler, but in a good way. So, when I say an enabler in a good way is you could have this person do stuff. Not that you're enabling the person to do things... do nothing wrongly, but you're enabling them to be better at what they do. So, that's what I see, and that's what I see a leader... a leader as or the kind of leader that I... I am is a scrum master. A servant leader role. That's what I see a leader as.

Mike

Of those characteristics that you mentioned: protector, supporter, coach, facilitator, and enabler. Which one is the hardest to be?

Shade

The hardest could be a protector.

Mike

Why?

Shade

The reason why I say that is if you have someone that you're protecting... Okay, like you have a... like a co-worker and you, you know, you support the co-worker, you encourage the co-worker, you coach the co-worker, you help the co-worker, you enable the co-worker. But if the co-worker doesn't do what they're supposed to do, or maybe does things in the wrong way and expects you as the protector to continue to protect them, even though you've been protecting them all this while and you've been helping them, you've been coaching them, you've been encouraging them, you've been saying, oh, this is what I want you to do, this is how I want you to proceed and stuff like that, you've even had conversations with this person, and the person is still doing the thing the other way, the wrong way, you... there's a... there's a... there's a limit to your protection. So, that's why I think that protection is kind of the hardest thing as a leader.

Mike

I agree with you. I... I think there are a lot of times where most of the leaders I know really do a good job of supporting, coaching, facilitating, and enabling. And they... they protect to a point, but they're not going to fall on that sword for an individual if that individual continually does the wrong thing.

Shade

Exactly. Yeah. That's what I see. That's why... that's why it's totally that that would be the hardest thing to do and to continue doing if... if you've spoken to this person. You, you know, you've helped the person the way you can. You've encouraged this person as much as you can. And this person keeps going back to doing the wrong thing, then there's... there's that much you could do. You can't keep protecting the person forever, you know. So, that's why I think that's one of the hardest things to do as a leader.

Mike

In your leadership journey, how difficult has it been for you to get to this point of being a servant leader? Or is that something that you've always aspired to and that it just came pretty naturally for you?

Shade

Uh, I would say it's pretty... came... I mean it came natural to me because as you know I'm an African. I came from an African country. And it's been, you know, like my dad, when... when I was younger, he's like... he's an accountant. And so, he had already embedded that in me that, you know, this is how you should be and this is how you should not be. So, I already had that, you know, that in me, that, you know, to be a... I... I love encouraging people. I love coaching people. I love helping people. And I... I want to see the best in everybody. So, when I served as a leader before I moved here to the United States, when I served in, um, a company where I was the manager there. I had people from, you know, like different cultures, and, you know, people from different cultures had different ways of doing things. So, because I had that coaching and facilitator as, uh, or someone that would love to encourage people and would love to help people to help them succeed, so I had that in me already. So, it was kind of easier

for me to work with people and to help people to do what they're supposed to do with regards to, you know, their job, with regard to... Even as a student, you know, like I work in the Assessment Center right now. When students come in and, you know, they're asking about taking the placement test because, you know, we do the placements here. We do a lot of testing in the assessment center. And they come and they ask about, okay, I'm like okay... so, what... what are you... what are your plans? What do you want to do? What... what are you... what are you... what are you majoring in? So, I go further to ask them questions about what they're trying to do, and I, you know, I kind of like encourage them. I go into my mentoring mode and kind of encourage them and say, okay, so you want to go into this. Why do you want to go into this field? What do you think you gained from this field? And some of them will, you know, they'll open up. Some of them, you know, will hold back. And some of them will be like, oh, yeah, yeah. What do you think about this field? And you know, my... my... my... I have that motherly intuition to always ask that question, that, okay, you know, how can I... how can I support you? How can I help you? And I recently, um, worked with the Office of Equity and Inclusion. I...I was... I... I participated as a Talent Share. So, I had... I had to mentor a student that done the Social Justice Institute, um, program that they have there. So, one of the things I did with that student was while I was mentoring the student, I was in a class, you know, doing a project management class. So, every little skill that I get from there, I, you know, let the student know about it. And I... I, you know, tell the student, you know, like, okay, so, what... what do you... what are your plans? You know. You want to... you want to... you want to put your milestones, you want to put your goals, you want to do this. And, you know, I try to encourage that person that, you know, this is what you need to do to get to where you want to get to and stuff like that. So, that's the kind of person I am.

Mike

Your passion for working with students is quite evident. It's refreshing to see.

Shade

Yeah, yeah. I mean I try, you know. I... I... I was a student before, and I see what it takes to get to where you want it... where you want to succeed. So, I have that passion to always assist the best that I can, to encourage the best that I can, and to help the best that I can.

Mike

You mentioned earlier that you came to the United States and you... you have this international perspective. Are there leadership differences between other countries than the United States?

Shade

Uh, I wouldn't say differently. I would say maybe the cultural difference. That's what I would just look at. The cultural difference. Because when I came here and, you know, there was this culture shock when I got here, you know. That's the aspect of, you know... do you know, you know, diversity? Do you know about inclusion? Are you including

everybody and stuff like that? So, those... those kind of talks, we didn't have that back home. Because there wasn't anything about, you know, race, or, you know, diversity, or, you know... are you including everybody? There wasn't anything like that. So, it was like a culture shock when I first got here. It was like, oh, so we have to really be conscious of what we do, the people we talk to, the way we talk to people, the way we accept people and stuff like that. So, those are the things that, you know, was kind of a differ--... was kind of different from the leaders back home compared to the leaders here.

Mike

And when you say back home, where was home Nigeria?

Shade

Nigeria

Mike

Nigeria. Okay. So, as you... as you move through your... your leadership journey, what are the aspects that you're still working on?

Shade

Uh, the aspect that I think I'm still working on is, uh, how would I say this? You know, like I mentioned all the different stuff as a leader and all that. I think one aspect that I'm still working on is that, you know, like I mentioned, the part of being inclusive, you know. I'm still working on that, you know, to... to at least, I guess, get to that area where I see that, you know, I don't... I don't think, you know, that people don't see color, you know. When with regards to, you know, your being... leading, you know, you don't see color, you don't see that this person is different from you, you don't see that this person talks differently, or that this person... or speaks different or even mannerism of that person, you don't see the difference. So... so, those are things that I'm still working at, you know, to improve on, I guess, you know. I mean I wouldn't say improve on but I would say just to work at it.

Mike

Have you experienced that on the other side? You come to this country from Nigeria. Have you experienced leaders looking at you differently?

Shade

Not... not here I say, but I would say maybe not on purpose, you know. It could be that, you know, the person is just not knowledgeable about this, so that's what I would say because even I remember attending, um, I think it was a book review or film that they had at OEI, and then the facilitator was asking that, what do you think, you know, as, you know, what's going on in this movie? Was about, you know, was about race. I was about talking about race and all that, and what do you think about it? So, I was like, well, I'm secure in my race, so I'm securing in my color, I'm securing the color of my skin. So, I'm... and that's I don't see, I mean, there's so many things going around us and that you

see and, you know, you watch movie, I mean you watch the TV and stuff like that, but I was like I don't see that and I don't... I don't expect any other person to see that. So, that's... that's where my perspective is. I just say, okay, I don't see it. So, I don't expect any other person to say, but if I see that someone sees it in a different way then it's... that the person is not knowledgeable about it.

Mike

If we can go back to... to students for a second. What do you see the biggest need for students in developing their leadership skills?

Shade

I think the biggest thing, I mean things that I've noticed with students is they want the quickest way, you know, to doing things like, okay with regards when I'm saying the quickest way. So, we have, you know, we have a website. The College has a website and, uh,, you know there are some places that they need to go to like, okay, if a student comes in for the first time and wants to do a placement test ASAP and we, you know, tell them, okay, this is how you go, this is what you need to do, and all that. But students don't want to read. That's one of the things, and they don't want to, um, they don't... they don't want things hard. They want the easiest way to get to what the way they want to. So, as a leader, you know, things would not... won't be easy all the time. There are times where things might be a little bit difficult that you might have to change, you know, like when we went... like when covid started and nobody knew, you know, that we're going to be, you know, sitting at home working from home for over two years and all that. And we had to make... we had to make changes and all that. You had to learn how to work online, and so, that's one of the things that I always tell student that you, first of all, you got to learn to read. It's important to read. You got to learn to read because as a leader, if you don't know how to read, if you don't know how to be patient, then it's going to be hard for you. So, as a student, you want to learn how to read. Don't just want you... don't want to go to the... you want to say, okay, I want the easiest way out. Read, and then if you don't understand what you're reading, then ask questions.

Mike

That adaptability that you mentioned, I think, is so crucial for leaders. And... and it doesn't matter where you are in an organization, you can... you can be in any position, but that need to be adaptable I think is... is just critical to not only the success of an individual but as a result the success of an organization.

Shade

Exactly. You have to be able to adapt to changes no matter what the changes. That's what I see. I mean like when we went into... like the Assessment... even though the Assessment Center had online, um, proctoring services, but we... we didn't go full force as in working online and stuff like that. So, you had to learn how to adapt to that change, you know. Okay, so there's a... there's a saying that you can teach the person how to, you know, drink water but you can't actually take that person to drink the water. The person

has to move themselves, you know, able to change, able to adapt to change, you know. Okay, what's going on? How do I... how do I adapt to this... to this change? There are different ways of... there are different ways of adapting. The different ways where you think that might be better for you to adapt to stuff, so it's... I think it's always important to see that change is not supposed to make it difficult. Change is supposed to make it better.

Mike

I get the sense, Shade, that you are pretty adaptable.

Shade

Yes, I am. [Laughs]

Mike

Have you always been that way?

Shade

Yeah, I would say I've always been dealt with because I'm a person that loves challenges and I... I pick up things really fast. So, if you throw something at me, you know, I might, you know, I wouldn't say, oh no, no, I wouldn't like go against it. I'll just look at it and look at a way where I can work with it. So, that's what I do. And, um, I'm a pretty fast... fast learner, so I love to learn new things. So, I guess maybe because I love to learn... to learn new things, maybe that's what makes it easy for me to adapt to stuff. I think that's why.

Mike

So, you see change as an opportunity, not as a problem?

Shade

I see it as an opportunity. Yeah, because if you see it as a problem then you wouldn't want to do it. You have to have that... you have to change your... your mentality with regards to change. Don't see change as a problem, see it as an opportunity to improve.

Mike

And if leaders look at these changes as opportunities, it makes it easier for the people they work with.

Shade

Exactly. That makes it easier for the people they work with it. Makes it easier for everybody around them.

Mike

And yet we still often look at change as... as negative, not as an opportunity.

Shade

Yeah, I mean like... like you said, you know, a lot of people want to... they're thinking about, okay, why... why... what if it's not broken? Why do you want to change it? So, that's what a lot of people fight against change because they're like, okay, since this is not broken, why do we have to change it? Let's continue doing what we're doing, but the... the... but the thing about change is that you want to improve on what you've already been doing, you know. You want to make... make it better. You want to improve on it, you know. You don't want to keep staying and being stagnant and stay at that particular place and not change. So, there's always going to be time that you need to change.

Mike

Well, I think... people often say, you know, if it's not broken, why are we changing? Why are we... why are we moving in a different direction? It's because it's... it's easy to stay where we are, right? It's hard to make those adaptations and move in a different direction or... or alter the course a little bit.

Shade

Yeah, I mean it is. It's... I mean like I said, it has to come from that person, you know, that person has to be able to, you know, adapt, you know, you can't just say, okay, because this thing is like you... like you said, if it's not broken, why do you want to change it? You... there are times that you need to make a change. There are times that you need to manage. There's a reason why this change is coming into place. Why... okay, look at it as, okay, why is this... what's the reason why this change is coming? Don't look at it as, you know, that's, oh, it's difficult or it's going to be problematic trying to change something. You want to say, okay, why are we changing? This is it, to improve what we already have in place or to go in a better way or to give other options, you know. Like... we have... I breathe options. Now, you know, like students... students can do either online or in person, but they will, you know, even though we had the online, distant learning classes and all that before, but being able to do it in other ways like, you know, you have Zoom, you have, um, Blackboard Collaborate and stuff. Other ways where you can actually help a student to succeed. So, you don't have to be just one way street. There should be different ways where students can learn and succeed. Okay, we're all... we're all here to help students succeed. So, there's a... there should be different ways to help the students to succeed, so that's what I see with regards to change.

Mike

Shade, this was fun this. It was a good conversation. I appreciate your... your candidness and, uh, your insight. Thank you.

Shade

Thank you, I'm glad that, you know, that you, you know... At first, I was like, I don't know what it's going to be, but since there wasn't some questions already set aside, so... but I'm glad I came and I'm... I'm glad to be able to have this conversation with 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.