

MC Forward Podcast
Season 3, Episode 1 – Part 2
Drs. Shinta Hernandez and Nancy Newton
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. This is the second part of a discussion with Dr. Shinta Hernandez, Dean of the Virtual Campus, and Dr. Nancy Newton, Grants Manager, on the differences between being a leader and being a manager. Nancy and Shinta, thanks for joining me again.

NANCY

Thank you for having me.

SHINTA

And thank you for having me.

MIKE

In last week's episode, Nancy touched on how leaders are identified. And Nancy, you made the comments that, is it the bossy person that is identified on the playground as a leader? And it leads me into this discussion about how the different genders are identified as leaders. And... and we know that females who are identified as leaders are characterized one way, males are characterized as another way. Shinta, you're the sociologist. What do you make of that?

SHINTA

Well, this speaks, uh, true to my heart because I, as you said I'm a sociologist, and I specifically specialize in racial and gender inequalities and so this is certainly something I could talk forever about. But I... there's a lot of research, years and years, decades of sociological research and social science research in general that just talks about the perceptions people have about female leaders, male leaders, and looking at the qualities that each group possesses. And so, when we look at the qualities, many at times, the qualities can be very similar, but the perception of these two groups are very vastly different, and therefore, we treat these two groups vastly different. One is treated more positively than the other, so when... when male leaders are seen as assertive, um, dominance, a go-getter, that is often seen very positively, but you see those same qualities in female leaders and there are a lot of names that are associated with, uh, that type of leadership.

NANCY

Right. And I would... I would add that females as seen as bossy. We're seen as, um, when... when males are seen as passionate, we're seen as emotional. And so, that

dichotomy is just crazy. And if you're seen as a... an assertive woman, an assertive female, then, oh, you've got cajones and you, you know, just be quiet for a little while. So, yeah, it's extremely frustrating. Sorry, I said cojones, that's okay. [Laughs]

MIKE

Yes, that was fine. Uh, prefer that than some of the other terminology that you may have been able to throw out. But as... as leaders, yourselves, how do you manage those expectations? How do you... how do you lead that? How do you work with young women, girls, um, other women in your workplace to say, it's okay to... to have those traits that are traditionally assigned to strong male leaders?

NANCY

I think one of the things that we, um, you said, how do we work with those young women to say it's okay? But I think we also have to re-educate. We almost have to re-educate the male population to say, why is it not okay in your eyes? Um, why can a woman not be seen as assertive? Why is she only seen as bossy? And so, I believe that the delivery of anything that we do and how we communicate and the relationship building is one of the most important things, whether you're a manager or whether you're, you know, a leader, and whether you're a leader who manages or manager who leads. So, that delivery, and it's... um, the... the relationship side of things is I think one of the most important things, um, in all of this management or leadership.

SHINTA

I wholeheartedly concur with you, Nancy. Um, the analogy that immediately pops to my mind when we're talking about having to re-educate society about this is medical schools. So, for hundreds of years, medical schools have been teaching their medical students the human anatomy and how to obviously navigate through that using the male bodies systems, right? It is only recently, and by recently, I mean like maybe the last 25, 50 years that the medical schools across the country are reimagining itself and re-educating and changing its curriculum so that they're inserting women's bodies, women's physiologies into them... into the curriculum. So, it's that re-educating the... the... the industry, that sector, on how to create more and more equality. And so, it goes along the line, same lines, as what you're saying Nancy. The other piece when talking with, um, those who have sought mentorship, uh, I say to them also, let your work speak for itself, because while, yes, it's important to be assertive and to continue those qualities that we often find are desirable in leaders, effective leaders, I also truly believe that if... if you do the work, do it well, that your work will allow others to see the great work that you can do.

NANCY

I also think that do the work and if you don't do it well, but you try and you try again, and then, you know, you take another path or you find another way that works for you and your team or the institution, that is... that admitting to mistakes and owning will also, um, stand you in very good stead with whoever it may be who is, um, watching.

MIKE

In any case, whether it's male or female, at some point, you have to advocate for yourself, right? As we shift gears a little bit to talk about how you two see yourselves as managers or leaders, let me ask you first, where do you see your... your leadership growth having taken place over the past couple of years?

SHINTA

I think that's allowing me the opportunity in the last couple of years to have space to create a vision has then allowed me to grow both personally and professionally, has allowed me to create, build, and strengthen a team that will help us achieve those goals that are in the vision. So, the other piece that I'd like to... to focus on is speaking to the heart that is something that I've always been exercising, at least trying to exercise, I did it in the classroom when... when teaching students. I taught with tough... tough empathy, tough empathy pedagogy. It's speaking to the heart, but at the same time getting those students to where they need to be. So, in my leadership position, the last couple of positions I've had, speaking to the heart, but also understanding that we have this vision that we have to reach. And so, trying to get all of us in that direction has been an area of professional growth for me.

MIKE

Nancy?

NANCY

Yeah, um, collaboration where people have felt empowered, empowers me as a leader. It allows me to almost see my influence in others, but to see them just completely show their skill set and their true, um, find their path and asked me for, um, help, but not ask me to take them... ask me to go with them, um, I... I love in the last couple of years, actually probably three or four years, I've been very lucky to have a, um, supervisor who let me go and go and go do, okay, I'm going. But to be able to go and empower people and motivate people and inspire others, it's just... it gives me the success version of me. Through them, with them, and, yes, work towards the vision, but that empowerment piece for me is really important.

MIKE

So, let me take us back a week where we talked about the list of leader... the leadership, and one of the characteristics was develops power, and there was some pushback from both of you on the use of the word power. What's the difference between developing power and empowering someone? Shinta?

SHINTA

From the way it is phrased, developing power sounds like it is just a one-person job and everybody just has to go with it. Empowerment is a collective concept where the entire team works together to move toward goal or goals.

NANCY

And I think empowerment begets empowerment begets empowerment. I think you can... it can have so many different facets to it, but the word power is so hard almost and has an almost finality to it. Um, but for me, empowerment is more of a... and I don't know what a linguistic would think is, but more of a flowing word, almost where you can, you know, it can have so many, um, you know, it can have so many knock-on effects that can then empower others and empower others. But power is very final to me.

MIKE

Nancy, you mentioned that maybe we should change titles of positions and yours from Grants Manager to Grants Leader. How would that make you feel as an individual?

NANCY

Well, as long as my pay didn't decrease, I would be fine with it. [Laughs]

MIKE

But does it... does it empower you more to have a title of Grants Leader compared to Grants Manager.

NANCY

It doesn't matter. I think in that particular position, I'm not sure if it would matter. But it would... because I... I like to think of myself as a leader in anything. Um, manager just happens to be my title. And so, if we made the change, I'm not sure it would particularly have a great effect on how I approach things. But I... interested it might make me feel, or maybe Nancy Newton, the Grants Manager who leads. There we go, that's my new title. [Laughs]

MIKE

Shinta, you... you exhibit a lot of leadership that you have over the past couple of years, when do you manage?

SHINTA

Good question. I think I manage on a regular basis, but, um what helps me to focus on the leadership component more regularly is that you have a strong team. So, as a leader, you go back to building and strengthening your team, honing in on each individual team member's strengths and whatever areas of opportunities for growth/ weakness they may have. You help them achieve, um, or overcome those weaknesses, if that is something that needs to be overcome. So, that overall your... your group is... is a strong one. Um, and so, that helps me to then just manage what needs to be managed, and then it helps me to lead and grow and bring the team forward to whatever that vision is. So, I do like to think I exhibit both qualities, but over the years, as you've said, I've provided... been provided with the opportunity to lead, but it's because of the collaboration with my team, um, or departments that allows me to lead more visibly.

MIKE

Question to both of you. Which is harder for you, being a manager or being a leader? Nancy, we'll start with you.

NANCY

I think being a manager is more cut and dry because the... it tends to follow the status quo and the position description. Um, and you know, you know what's required of you, almost. Being a leader requires that you are able to influence and inspire others to come with you. Um, I think of... I think it's possibly more difficult to be a leader, but to be an effective leader, I think, you know, anyone can call themselves a leader, but to be an effective leader, I think may be a little more difficult than being a manager. What do you think?

SHINTA

Well, I think, um, going off of Nancy's comments, I honestly think that it's probably almost equally difficult to be both. It's because it... it does depend on the skill set of the individual, that said leader, that said manager. Um, and if the person doesn't have the qualities that make them effective, so using that... that's a very big key word here is effective, if they don't possess the strong qualities of an effective leader, an effective manager, then that person can easily, um, fail the... the work, right? So, it can be easily, or equally rather, difficult to be both. And I think a lot of that has to be with the support system. What support system do you have to help you grow and become better effective managers and leaders?

NANCY

Let me ask you this, Shinta. Do you think it's easier to hide when you're a manager? When you... than when you're a leader... as in, you know, responsibilities?

SHINTA

That's a good question. I think it might be easier to hide be a manager simply because of the scope of their experiences and the responsibilities that they've been given by the organization or company, right? Whereas a leader, the reason why we name people leaders is because they're supposed to be out there. They're supposed to be visible outside, you know, maybe making speeches or doing presentations or talking to government officials and politicians. Those are generally the leaders that we have, um, going out there, so in that sense, yeah, it might be easier to hide if you're a manager.

NANCY

I would agree.

MIKE

Nancy, you mentioned something a few minutes ago about position descriptions, and it's my experience that managers will know their position description inside and out.

And we'll often say, I'm not doing x because it's not in my position description, where I have never heard a leader say I'm not doing x because it's not in my position description.

NANCY

Yeah. And it comes back again to the, you know, the de-- definition and the almost confinement that some may think within a manager's position, and then that ability to shirk responsibility and to possibly give it to... I don't like this word, but subordinates, or, um, and get away with not being a team player, which is not a good manager. [Laughs]

MIKE

Shinta, what are your thoughts?

SHINTA

I think, um, because a manager is, again, generally, somebody who is supposed to be task oriented, right? So, it's that task that's probably easier to lay out on a job ad or a job description than the... the things that leaders are supposed to be responsible for. So, a typical statement on a leader's job that might say, create a vision and provide direction for xyz, whatever that project is. Well, create a vision and provide leadership or direction, that's very vague in my opinion. So, it's harder to say, well, that's not in my job description if you're a leader because great vision that's very macro. Provide direction, that's also very macro.

MIKE

Is it safe to say that both of you would prefer to be identified as leaders who manage compared to managers who lead?

NANCY

I would say... I would say so, though I think some would argue that the word manager has some kind of cachet to it. Um, but yeah, I think I'm a leader first and a manager second.

SHINTA

And I'd say the same for me. Leader first, manager second.

NANCY

How about you, Mike?

MIKE

I think probably a leader who manages is the way I would characterize myself. Uh, I will also tell you that having the questions reversed is not a really good feeling. So, Nancy, thank you for putting me on the spot. [Laughs] I appreciate that.

NANCY

[Laughs] You are certainly welcomed.

MIKE

And that demonstrated wonderful leadership to take the reins of this podcast and just turn it on its head. [Laughs]

NANCY

I'm trying to empower you, Mike. I hope you felt empowered.

MIKE

I... I did, and I am empowered to wrap this up and say this has been a wonderful kickoff to Season 3. I'm really excited about the... the upcoming season. I can't thank the two of you enough for helping us get it started. So, uh, Shinta and Nancy, thank you so much.

NANCY

Thank you. Thank you for doing this again, Mike.

SHINTA

It's been a pleasure, and I'm honored. Thank you for asking me.

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.