Learning to Lead
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What does it take to be a leader? One may think that she needs to be perfect, have a particular title or a high intelligence quotient. Reflecting on my time spent with our President, Dr. Howard I realized none of this is true. Instead, the three traits he exemplified were respect, being approachable, and transparency. Throughout, the day I had a chance to witness these qualities, but there are a few moments that encapsulate them perfectly.

1. “Work is never more important than the people.” –Dr. Lonnie Howard

At 7:30 a.m. we met with Dr. Joyce Loveday and Faculty who served on the Department Chair Taskforce. Dr. Howard wanted to personally thank these instructors for their assistance with the design phase of this project. He gave each of them a hand-written thank you card along with a box of See’s Candy lollipops. Each instructor acknowledged that this change is still a work in progress, but each instructor expressed enthusiasm for its launch. They all shared gratitude for being selected to provide input into the Department Chair model. This was not on the agenda, but it was important to Dr. Howard that they shared a moment. The exchange of respect between all in the room showed me the importance of supporting everyone in the workplace.

At 8:00 a.m. we were joined by Dr. Joyce Loveday, Mabel Edmonds, John Moyer, Michelle Hillesland and Bill Coyner to congratulate Don Souza for being a 2015 recipient of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) award. Dr. Loveday also presented donuts for him and the students to celebrate his contributions. She informed us that CPTC has six other NISOD recipients. I wondered who they could be. She began calling names: Kelly Hollowell, John Moyer, Tula Mollas, Maureen Sparks, Wayne Bridges and Dr. Howard. I had no idea. We always hear about how great our instructors are, but this was proof that there is excellence in our classrooms. Here, titles or seniority didn’t matter. What mattered was an appreciation and respect for each other’s work.
We were all selected to fulfill a duty here on campus. However, when working together we usually communicate via e-mail or phone. Most of the time if we meet in person it is due to a formal meeting. Outside of work I can’t say that I know many of my colleagues. Another characteristic of a leader is being approachable. Generating a rapport with those around you can create a synergy that’s transferred into the workplace.

2. “Lunch with Lonnie.”
During my time with Dr. Howard he would check-in with me to see if I had any questions and ask me how I was feeling. This also meant that he would check-in to see if I needed anything to eat. I probably denied the option to eat three times. However, around 11:15 a.m. he asked if I was hungry again. Before I could turn him down he mentioned that he has a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I typically won’t eat this type of sandwich because I don’t like jelly. But, Dr. Howard assured me that it’s not jelly, but strawberry rhubarb jam from Pikes Place Market. I began speaking of different jams I’ve also discovered since moving from Texas (strawberry being my favorite). It was settled. Dr. Howard shared his peanut butter and jam sandwich with me. Our commonalities allowed me to feel a little more comfortable to speak up and ask questions.

Organizations are known to have a top-down model for communication and decision-making processes. Currently, we are redefining what shared governance procedures look like at CPTC to increase campus awareness and involvement. Learning to be open to ideas and feedback is a reflection of a leader’s commitment to growth.

3. “Operating under a veil of secrecy leads to chaos.” –Dr. Howard
A few minutes before 1:30 p.m. Dr. Howard shared that he doesn’t know the exact details of our next meeting. He made speculations but, his honest statement shattered my notion of having to know it all as a leader. When the meeting began, he engaged in discussion with questions and firm statements. By the end of the meeting he told me that he would need to revisit this subject by reengaging with the organization. With his honesty it deepened my level in trust
in him. At that moment his title didn’t precede him. Instead, he was a humble man who cared about what he does for the college.

I can honestly say that I didn’t know what to expect from my shadow. I didn’t know if I would be smart enough to understand higher level operations within the college, if I would be taken seriously and if all the meetings would be monotonous. But, I realized that those thoughts didn’t cross my mind because of Dr. Howard’s humanistic approach.

I learned to be a leader you need to care about the people by developing a good working relationship with them. You work better when you feel better and Dr. Howard’s leadership style is one that I admire. A great leader values respect, being approachable and transparency. I am thankful for his extended invitation because of what I learned. As he said, “there’s a leader in all of us.”