

From Laurel's Desk – December 2018

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Another semester is winding up and with each passing day and week, I think about all of the items on my “to do” list. I am certain I am not alone in this regard. A successful day may be defined as one where more “items” are crossed off than added. It is very easy to fall into the trap of being consumed by all we have to do rather than taking the time to reflect on accomplishments and those who helped, supported, and challenged you along the way.

I remember how surprised I was when in my early years as a teacher, a student recounted about how I had “made a difference” in their life. I had no idea that something I could not even remember had such an impact. And then I wondered (and worried), if this small interaction had such a positive impact, what other small interactions might have made as large an impact, but in the negative sense?

Many years later, I received a card from a faculty member with a quote from Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” For the life of me, I could not recall the circumstances surrounding the card. So I asked her. Once again, I was surprised about the impact and once again, I became worried. How many times had something gone the “other way” without me realizing?

As I reflect on my own experience and what I hear from students about faculty, staff, and administrators, it seems empathy is the “secret sauce” that establishes the conditions for these moments to occur. It involves taking the time to be “in the moment,” to listen, and to meaningfully connect with another person. This is not easy, particularly with the pressures we are under that have been increased in a “hyper” world – hyper-connected, hyper-productive, and hyper-sensitive.

With this in mind, I want to share another quote from Maya Angelou: “I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it.”



As we all work toward supporting our students in this, the final weeks of the semester, let's try as much as possible to create the conditions, in all of our relationships, for empathy and the courage to show it.

Laurel

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