

Dr. Shouan Pan, Sonia Filan, and Dr. Pan's wife, Queenie Chen, after receiving his Paul A. Elsner Excellence in Leadership Award.



“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.” – Jack Welch



Each year the Chair Academy recognizes inspirational leaders throughout its three-day conference. We recognize a number of exemplary leaders, teams of leaders, institutions that foster and teach leaders, and those who are passionate about developing their leadership skills and putting them into practice in their personal and professional lives and in partnership with the community. We also choose just two among this talented and diverse group whose leadership encompasses all of these areas to honor with the Paul A. Elsner International Excellence in Leadership Award. One of the individuals we honor this year is Dr. Shouan Pan, President of Mesa Community College (MCC) in Mesa, Arizona.

In his role as President of MCC, Dr. Pan leads teams that foster prosperity, successfully ushers his institution through an ever changing landscape of post secondary education, and engages friends, family, coworkers, and the community in strategies to triumph over obstacles ranging from budget crises to increasing student success rates to achieving personal goals. He has established himself as a master collaborator, a champion of student success, and a strong partner throughout the community. He is known for his passion for educational excellence, his ability to build and sustain a vision for a large and extremely diverse team, and his capacity for taking on the most difficult challenges and inspiring fellow administrators and faculty to achieve

exceptional results. All of these qualities distinguish him as an individual who invites loyalty, commitment, compassion, and the creative energy needed to make post secondary education the very best it can be on behalf of the students working to achieve their dreams.

History

Although we continue to discover that there is no such thing as a conventional leadership journey, there are aspects of Dr. Pan's path that are unique. Shouan was born in 1957 in the Anhui Province of China, a comparatively poor, agricultural province in China's eastern region that spans the basins of the Yangtze and Huai Rivers. He writes that, "Growing up during the Cultural Revolution in China, a period marked by unprecedented oppression and political upheavals, I was on the receiving end of suppression, disdain, and humiliation because I was a descendant whose father was classified as an anti-communist. As a teenager, I became very insecure and had little self-confidence. I never dreamt of becoming a leader, least of all serving the office of a college president for one of the largest comprehensive community colleges in the United States."

While reflecting on his childhood he notes that, "unlike the States, at least in those days, you [were] not free to dream." But that did not keep him from forming goals and working diligently to achieve them. In 1981 he earned

Dr. Bill Lamb presenting Dr. Marilyn Rhinehart her Paul A. Elsner Excellence in Leadership Award.

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his Bachelor of Arts in English at Hefei Polytechnic University, a major university in China, and remained there to teach as the Assistant Professor/Assistant Director of International Education until 1986. In 1985, while in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for a year-long exchange program, he discovered an opportunity to further his education in Colorado and by 1988 he had earned his Master of Education in College Student Personnel Administration at Colorado State University. By the time he earned his Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Administration at Iowa State University in 1993, he had achieved what may have been unimaginable when he was a boy. Perhaps it is his journey, one that spans many years and surmounts many obstacles, that inspires his commitment to student success. He writes, “I am constantly touched and inspired when I talk with students who are serious, hardworking, and dedicated to their own success, against untold life challenges.”

Inspiration

Dr. Pan is also inspired by his colleagues who are dedicated to developing the leaders around them. One important influence on his lifetime leadership development is Dr. Sandy Shugart, President of Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida. He refers to Dr. Shugart’s comparison of the leadership journey to a crucible, noting that “the successes, failures, the seduction of power, and elevated ego inherent in senior-level responsibilities work like heat to shape a leader’s character and integrity.” He goes on to say that through that learning process, it is possible to rise above our imagined or perceived limitations and become an influential leader, no matter where we work or where our journey began.

Philosophy

After more than 20 years serving in multiple leadership roles at several different institutions, Shouan recognizes that “striving for excellence in leadership is lifetime work.” As he has worked to hone his craft and develop the leaders around him, he has gained knowledge, skills, and experience that continue to shape his leadership journey. He notes a feeling of obligation to pass on his insights to young leaders aspiring to senior leadership work because his own journey “would not have been possible without the love, support, and nurturing leadership examples from my parents, teachers, and countless mentors.” When asked about insights he might like to share, he responded with three key philosophies:

First, leaders are not pre-destined. Anyone, regardless of her or his circumstances, personality, or background, can serve and lead. As long as one approaches the leadership work for the right reasons, as long as one is willing to undergo the “crucible of leadership”, she or he can be useful to others, and others will follow her or his lead. Through leadership work, we can transcend our perceived limitations and, in turn, help others to do the same.

Second, there is not a universal path to leadership. One can develop leadership capacities in any job, from any profession. The key is to be purposeful and intentional in attending to one’s learning and growth.

Finally, leadership starts from within... An aspiring leader is best to examine beliefs, characters, habits, motivations, and deficiencies first. Dr. Shugart describes this, as ‘doing much needed interior work. It is here, in the leader’s character, and spirit, that the effects of the crucible, for good or ill, are first experienced and ultimately transmitted through leadership responsibilities to the lives of others’ (Shugart, 2013).

Legacy

When we asked Dr. Pan what it meant to him to be the 2013 recipient of the Paul A. Elsner International Excellence in Leadership Award, he told us that it “has special significance to my leadership work and relevance for emerging leaders who aspire to lead in the post secondary education setting... Looking back, I know that I endeavored not just to serve the office for which I was entrusted the responsibility, but also to serve a greater purpose – to make a meaningful difference.” And there is no doubt about the positive difference he has made. Since becoming the president of MCC in 2008, Pan has steered one of the largest community colleges in the nation to reach new heights in academic excellence and achievement. He has done so in a way that inspires fellow administrators and faculty to bring their better selves to work each and every day in order to guide the many thousands of other students who, like himself, may have had little of concrete value to hold onto or hope for based on the humble origins or difficult circumstances in their own lives.

References

Shugart, S. (2013). *Leadership in the Crucible of Work: Discovering the Interior Life of an Authentic Leader* (pg 14-15). Florida Hospital Publishing, Maitland, FL.



“A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader; a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.”– Eleanor Roosevelt