

## **2021 Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture**

### **Prof. Renee Rigoni, Business Administration**

It seems like just yesterday it was September of 1988 and the first day of classes. I had been hired as an Alice Young intern to teach two sections of ACC 101, but a late August resignation in the department changed that to a full-time temporary appointment. I had never taught a class full of students in my entire life. To say I was extremely nervous is an understatement!

I was standing in the 4<sup>th</sup> floor hallway in Building 6, going over my prep notes, hoping I wouldn't crash and burn on my first day. It was a two-hour class, so I couldn't just say "Hi, read the syllabus and see you in a couple days". At three minutes to show time, I walked through the door ..... into an empty room. Where were they? Had they heard I didn't know what I was doing and decided not to show up? I took a deep breathe, looked at my class roster and realized I was supposed to be in the next room over. Whoa, disaster averted.

Things got better from there. I was careful to heed the notice in the Trib to check my room assignments before heading off to class. I learned to relax and just follow my instincts regarding the best ways to deliver instruction. And I listened to the wise advice of my colleagues regarding things that worked for them.

After all these years of being a teacher, what advice would I like to pass on to you? Most is in the form of homespun platitudes, but that's what helped me remember them. Hopefully, it will help you, too.

The first one came from Ernie Mellas, a retiree from the Biology Department. "A good lecture is like a good plane trip. There's a take-off, a flight and a landing". My version is more like this. "Tell them what you're gonna tell them. Then tell them. And at the end, tell them what you just told them." The key to a good learning experience is to tell students what they're going to learn so they can get their heads set in the right direction. Then explain it, making sure to link it to past knowledge so they know where to mentally file the information. When you're done, tell them what they've just learned. A take-off, flight and landing. Then stand back and watch them soar.

"It's only a game of catch if you throw the ball back." I was at a June professional development event many years ago where one of the presenters used this one. We've all been in situations with students (and perhaps some colleagues) where they try to engage us in a frustrating exchange and no matter how we reply, it isn't good enough for them. My best advice to you is to just stop. Stop talking, stop sending email responses. Just stop. You made your point. You don't have to always have the last word.

Another favorite comes from the movie "Dodgeball". "If you can dodge a wrench, you can dodge a ball". Or as a student once paraphrased for me, "We practice harder than we play". Yes. We do challenging work in class and as homework assignments so when we get to the test, it seems easy. A corollary to this is to set the bar where it needs to be set. Make no reductions in the high standards we set for our students. We're getting paid to make them think, not let them coast.

"Don't believe everything you think." I spend many hours alone working on the computer replying to emails, creating drafts for future committee discussions, reading various documents, and writing things to use in class. I've got this one prominently posted on my computer where I see it all the time. It's so easy to believe your point of view or opinion is the only correct one. Don't fall into that trap. Never

underestimate the ability of a diverse team to come up with ideas and solutions better than what you can come up with working alone.

The next one comes from Jim Petrosino, one of my former chairs, and speaks to the importance of consensus. “Know the result before you call the question.” When he wanted to pass a new initiative or make a change to department policy, he would spend time walking around talking to us individually to get our opinions and concerns regarding the item he was proposing. Through these conversations, he built consensus and buy in for what was always a stronger proposal than his original one. When it came time to vote, there were usually very few objections and implementation nearly always went smoothly. Please keep this approach in mind, especially when you’re working with small groups.

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.” Several years ago, we were in the middle of a difficult contract negotiation. An unknown colleague slid a longer quote from Calvin Coolidge under my door and it included, in part, these words. I’ve never known who gave this to me. Maybe they’re reading this today. But I’ve kept it posted in my office and am forever grateful for this encouragement. It seems like a small thing, but for me it was huge. Going forward, always remember to support and be kind to each other. And never give up.

“Student success is our highest priority.” This came from one of MCC’s previous mission statements. But it was always my favorite. I’ve had many conversations with colleagues where they express frustration and discontent with the institution. I know, it’s hard to believe. I listen to their complaints and then suggest they put all that aside and just focus on the students. Just worry about how you can contribute to their success.

Finally, I’d like you to indulge me while I reminisce about my friend, Carmen Powers. Our offices were down the hall from each other and together we would sit and solve the world’s problems. We used to joke about which of us had the biggest heads, but always knew she had me beat. I fondly remember our trip to Austin when we received the NISOD Award. We laughed, giggled, and spent time in the hot tub where she gave me advice on marital intimacy. She was the cool big sister I never had.

I was honored to be asked by her family to do a reading at her memorial service and I’m equally honored to be asked by you to share my thoughts as part of the Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series. She was one of a kind and I still miss her.

Before coming to MCC, Carmen worked in the advertising industry and valued short messages. I know she would agree with my parting comments. Our work matters. We change lives. Never forget this.

Renee Rigoni