

Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series
May 2021
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Thank you so much for inviting me to be a part of the Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series. Carmen was a respected colleague who always had a joke to share at grading time when she knew the staff in our operation were feeling overwhelmed. I am honored to have been asked to participate.

I still find it hard to believe that I retired with four days' notice. How could a career end without any planning or transition? Let me be the first to tell you that it can. And it did. Everyone can be replaced and the world moves happily along.

No one goes to college thinking they want to be a Registrar when they grow up. I never took a typing class because I was a "people" person and would never have to type anything. I paid someone \$1.25 per page to type my master's thesis. I failed computers in college. No, I did not do poorly in the computer class – I earned a big fat F on my academic transcript. Clearly, I had no future working with computers. Like many "people" people, I found very quickly that the idea of working and talking to people all day, every day, is much less enjoyable than the reality.

What does a "people" person do for work when they realize they don't want to spend the whole day with people? She becomes a Registrar. The perfect balance of independent work and an occasional meeting with other human beings. I won the lottery when I became the Registrar at MCC. I had worked at a couple other local colleges and enjoyed my work. But I fell in love with MCC. The people, the teamwork, the innovative spirit, the love for our students and the culture. We honestly felt that anything was possible.

Tony Felicetti hired me. The best thing he did for me as a young manager was to give me the freedom to run my operation the way I wanted. He had faith in my skills and allowed me to build the team my way. Of course there were standards. But he knew that if he supported my "style" that I would be successful and my team would be successful. The freedom was intoxicating. Our motto was to exceed expectations at every level. It was an exciting way to operate. The words registration and excitement are not commonly used in the same sentence. But that was our life. I always said that if I explained to Tony why printing transcripts on pink polka-dot paper would be a good idea, he would give me six months to try it out. If it turned out to be a bad idea, we would revert back to plain white paper. Honestly, his faith in me allowed me to think creatively and take chances that I might never have taken under a more restrictive manager. And if I made an error, he would call me out. But by the time the conversation was over, I would leave his office wanting to go back and do an even better job. That is a gift that most managers do not possess. The world was our oyster. We could do anything.

As a new staff member, I was sitting at a meeting with Chris Abbott, Chair of the Math Department. I didn't really know her well. She looked at me and asked a question about how to deal with a staff member. I physically leaned back in my chair wondering if she was talking to the person on the other side of me. Uh, no. I actually asked her if she was talking to me. Her response was, "Yes, I would like your advice because you have managed staff longer than I have." I was in shock. A teaching faculty member was asking my advice. Like I was a real person with real ideas of value. I shared my thoughts on her staff situation. That interaction woke me up and changed the way I interacted with colleagues at MCC. Our organizational chart, hierarchy or pay grade meant nothing. We were truly a team with a

common goal. That single question completely changed my perspective of MCC and I knew that I never wanted to leave. I tried to pass that feeling on to everyone I interacted with. We were the MCC team and anything was possible.

Then we implemented Banner. Thank God we had our MCC family by our side through that process. The Computing team allowed the system users to lead the project. I can only imagine the conversations they had behind closed doors when they heard our questions or watched us struggle. Never an unkind word or behavior was ever expressed. Never did they criticize us or make us feel that we were stupid. They held our hands, picked us up off the floor and directed us with wisdom, respect and kindness. We built lifelong friendships through that implementation. The first day we went live was for the summer registration 2006. Linda Curran, a longtime R&R staff member, got up from her chair to open the service window at 8am and I could see her hands were shaking. Nothing scared Linda so seeing her hands shake really frightened me. We just kept reminding one another that we were one chapter ahead of any of the other users. And if we screwed up, we would fix it and people would understand. Life would go on. And it did.

The Computing team was there the morning our 'drop for non-payment' process started dropping all student in alphabetical order. Every student who had a last name with the letters A-L were wiped from the registration files. They held our hands as we deleted the historic transcript files from the old SIS system. They worked tirelessly to help us automate the repeat course process, which seemed easy, but was so mathematically challenging that even Chris Abbott would find it stressful! They were the rock of every operational office on campus and I was blessed to have been able to work with them.

One afternoon, I heard a person yelling and sobbing in the hall. I walked out to see what was happening because he was out of control and frightening other students in line. He came in my office and was puffing himself up to start arguing with me. He was a transgender student who had a feminine first name and was begging us to change it. This was the first time something like this ever came to my attention. (Yes, I am embarrassed to admit this! I am responsible for student names! How could I have never thought of this?) I didn't have a solution. Every registration/record keeping bone in my body tells me that name and social security number MUST match. No exceptions. Ever. Except there was this very vulnerable man sitting in front of me begging for our help. His pain was raw and his need was real. I reminded him that we were family and he need NEVER cry in a cold hallway at MCC. Ask to come to an office, tell someone you are struggling and there will be a line of people waiting to help. You don't need to suffer alone at MCC.

I have a couple of super-powers in life. One is the fact that I can literally sleep anywhere. If you give me three minutes of quiet, I could go to sleep. Another super-power is that I may not know how to solve every problem that comes before me --- but I probably know someone who does. And that is exactly how we began to solve the issue with alternate names. One call to computing and we came up with the first phase of the current alternate name process. At first, we only added the alternate name in parenthesis after the official name on paper class rosters. In hindsight, that seems archaic. But it was cutting edge in the day. Now, a student wanting a different name can request it and the change happens immediately without touching the SSN/Official name processes. This student who sobbed in my office never experienced the full alternate name "miracle" but he certainly started the movement. Oh, and my third super-power is the fact that I never get hangovers. Probably TMI.

Faculty are my favorite people at MCC. Every type of human is represented in the faculty ranks. We had a beautiful relationship because I wasn't their boss and they weren't mine. But a key role in my work

was to help them get their job done. I tried to take this very seriously and do my best. Peter Collinge, Math Chair, used to call me regularly. My phone would ring and I would see his name and just KNOW that I had screwed something up. That man could find every needle in absolutely every haystack ever built. He was never unkind to me. He was on top of his game every single day and wanted me to know when there were problems. I never argued with him because, frankly, he was never wrong. I WISH he had been wrong once in a while but he never was. People would occasionally ask me if Peter was being overly critical. Uh, no. We screwed up. I trusted him to tell me. I learned so much from him. My daughter enrolled in one of his classes and I asked her what she thought of him. She said she thought he was a very gentle man. Gentle is not the first word I would have used to describe Peter but I think she was right.

My favorite grading story is well-known by the R&R team. We used to work during the holiday break week to process grades. We wore little fingerless gloves like in a Charles Dickens novel because we didn't always have heat that week. I was chasing an instructor down for grades. Emails, telephone calls, etc. No response. Finally the professor emailed me his grades asking me to input them because he was just too tired to walk over to the business office in his Caribbean resort. Yup, too tired. Clearly, honesty is NOT the best policy. This is a perfect example of when lying is appropriate. Such as, "Would you enter my grades because a great white shark bit me?" Or, "I am in the hospital with 3rd degree burns from the sun and can't move." I entered the 80+ grades. Took about 20 minutes, at most. But that story has been told and retold for 20+ years. So far, no one has been able to beat it.

I took a bus trip once to NYC with a large group of MCC staff. So much fun. We were introducing ourselves to one another and I said my name. A woman in front of me introduced herself and announced that she had never been on any of my missing attendance lists in her career at MCC. A bunch of other people joined the chorus saying they had never been on my "hit list" either. I assured everyone that I was all bark and no bite.

For a "people" person who doesn't want to work with people --- I sure have a lot of stories to tell. I hope I made a difference at MCC. I hope I changed the way the college worked with a Registrar. I like to think I transitioned the college from a traditional registrar/faculty relationship where the registrar enforced the law and the faculty didn't ask questions. When I met with the registration team at my first interview, a staff member said that they were just looking for someone who could tell people, "no." I told them that if that was what they were looking for that I was not the person for the job. I can say no. But I don't want to. I find the word YES to be a much better way of life. I am very proud of my history and ability to say YES to my family at MCC.

English professors with PhDs proofed my kid's papers, facility workers gave me advice on equipment or painting, baristas at Java's filled my cup when they saw that it had been a bad day, Kim Collins, Deb Benjamin, Melissa Jarkowski and Christine Accorso helped raise my children by giving me advice and keeping me grounded, Donna Burke held my hand as I learned to understand my child's learning style, Dina Giovanelli listened to my father's many stories about the 1960 riots, Taine Vinci remembered every college policy ever written so I never needed to memorize them and the women at Dunkin would deliver frozen coffee to my office if I skipped a day because they were worried about me. They didn't even know my name but asked people who the tall woman with the short hair was and found me. Left it on my desk with the sweetest note saying, "Enjoy this from the girls at Dunkin." That note is still in my wallet. Could anyone have been as lucky as me? I don't think so.

Let me also thank my MCC family for educating my children. Both of my kids graduated from MCC. They grew up in our halls. They spent sick days laying on blankets in my office watching TV on a big cart rolled into the room. They roller skated down the ramp in front of the building. They picked tulips from college gardens and brought them to my office. (Only once, I made them stop) They used the office shredder to make HUGE paper crowns from the recycling bins for every staff member in my office and the team actually wore them while they worked! They both went on to other colleges and said they would have stayed at MCC for four years if that was possible. They wouldn't be the people they are today without you. I appreciate that more than you know.

Thanks for letting me participate in this lecture series. And thanks for giving me a great career and work life. My annual faculty activity report always ended by saying we should never confuse registration with brain surgery. And it is a good day if no one dies. No one died on my watch.

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