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## Training leaders for a challenging world

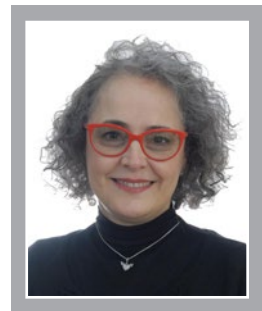
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“When people learn, so do our institutions. When people grow, institutions grow. Establishing a culture of continuous learning will give us the opportunity to learn and grow together”

(Marist Voices, chap. 21 - Br. Chano Gutiérrez)

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I've been an educator for 35 years. Even though I have held simultaneously other jobs, I am convinced that education is my vocation.

Today, I am making my gifts available at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, the first Marist University belonging to the Marist Province of Brasil Sul Amazônia. At the University, I teach in the Business School at different levels (undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate). I am also the coordinator of the Postgraduate Program in Administration. In 2022, I coordinated the Marist Leaders training course, in which we welcomed 60 leaders from 19 countries to our university for 15 days. All these have enabled me to develop and learn from others as well. This brought out the best in all of us. I think this is the way to bring to fruition Champagnat's dream.

In May of 2023, I received the invitation to write this brief reflection on my experiences as a Marist after having read chapter 21 of Brother Chano Guzmán Moriana's book, Marist Voices. So many exciting adventures came to mind! However, to direct my writing, I chose to reflect on how I, as a Marist servant leader, can contribute to the formation of young people who are prepared for a non-linear, often incomprehensible world in which people feel fragile and anxious. The information available doesn't give us answers; we need to think differently and develop skills, giving new meaning to what we already know. And the question remains: what kind of leader does this world need? In this context, we need to learn and grow together, based on a culture of continuous and collaborative learning. That's why I have chosen, from among the many possible quotes in the chapter, the passage that begins my testimony.



In my experience, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, I realize that we need to train leaders who are attentive and inspire their team, and act with humility. Much is lost when a leader thinks only technically; as well as knowing their job, they need to be aligned with its purpose and establish a relationship of trust with their team members. It is by example that a leader engages his or her team members. Or disengages them... Speech must be consistent with practice! The people they lead need to trust their leader in the same way that the leader trusts his team.

Another question that concerns me is: do only technical competences fulfil our purpose? When thinking about the people who make up our team, we usually list technical needs--hard skills, and place less emphasis on behavioral skills--soft skills. However, in order to face the challenges, we cannot discard any of these skills! As leaders, we need to think about skills and talents--how they can impact the team, the organization and society.

From this, we can appreciate that a leader can be a person who is technically qualified, focused on results and whose team exceeds the desired results. However, it is essential that they pay attention to people. They need to be able to capitalize on the talents of those they lead. This is not such a simple task!

I would emphasize that talent attracts talent. The more we develop our talents and value the talents of our leaders, the more likely it is that our team will develop sharing knowledge collectively. And for that to happen, it is important to be humble enough to learn from everyone! Even the leader...

When I made a career change, leaving my background in biology and entering the world of administration, the director who hired me for an executive advisory position said to me after three interviews: “I have always hired for academic knowledge, and it often did not work out. I want to explore... I am going to hire for behavior. Let’s see if it works out!” I stayed with the company for three years and asked to leave because I needed to look after my newly born child. In the executive advisory position, I had the opportunity to develop many skills based on the challenges I faced. And because of the framework, I had to take a comprehensive course that could give me the technical skills to carry out the different activities I was taking on. That’s developing talent!

I went straight to work! I felt like the company was mine too. I believed in myself! I had the psychological security to experiment, make mistakes, create, learn, and start over again. Today, after studying the principles and characteristics of servant leadership, I realize that this is the feeling of anyone who can be led by a leader who acts in this way.

This is my challenge every day at PUCRS... to allow people to believe in their potential. Realizing that everyone works at his own pace, it is up to me, as a servant leader, to present challenges that are compatible with individual possibilities and to help them seek out new possibilities based on the knowledge I’ve built up collectively. To enable them to identify the contributions they can make considering the Marist charism and have them understand how much I believe in the mission long before words.

The pandemic has made us work in isolation. This closer look was jeopardized. Our students entered the videoconference rooms and remained there, with the camera and microphone closed. It was a very challenging period that required a great deal of effort to make us feel close. At the time, having separate groups in the videoconference allowed for a certain closeness and, because of an open camera, a more personalized conversation.

In these spaces, I realized the individualities and challenges faced by those students and was able to make myself available to listen and support. Similarly, meetings with teachers were fo-



cused on urgent matters that needed to be resolved. Coffee and chatting in the corner of the room did not happen, not least because the agenda was taken up by sequential meetings. We were focused on delivering a quality lesson and on the targets, leaving aside the “corridor” chat and collective learning. We delivered a lot, but the price was high if we consider the team’s development.

For all these reasons, I would like to end this reflection with a challenge I have been facing. I believe that collective learning is the basis for developing leaders and that the university is an effervescent environment for this growth. Although the pandemic has introduced us to the convenience of screens and working from home, face-to-face interaction can facilitate learning.



So my question is: how can we return to our face-to-face way of working, based on everything we have learned from the pandemic, so that teachers and students can share more effectively? Through this interaction, we develop community spirit and encourage dialogue for more effective and complementary training. This way, we can turn out more servant leaders!

Learning only happens with an attentive eye and with love. So, in the same way, the leader who learns in this way develops their followers with love... a responsible love!



The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Marist Institute.

If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to [fms.cimm@fms.it](mailto:fms.cimm@fms.it)