

Reflections from WT- Pillars of Leadership with Missy Macon

Randy Ray: Welcome to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. I'm Randy Ray and I'm joined today by Dr. Walter Wendler, the President of West Texas A&M. And you're joining us on a very special episode. This is episode number 13, which celebrates our one year anniversary.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah.

Randy Ray: Yeah, one year we've been doing this.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, and it's been a good year. I hear comments from people, mostly positive, matter of fact I've never heard a negative comment about the podcast. People appreciate the communication. It's available, it's on the website. People get notified, they can check it out and listen. And a lot of these programs are interesting to people in our campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I appreciate you asking me to do it. I really enjoyed it. I was talking to a young man the other day and he was talking about the podcast, kind of a young kid, I'm surprised he listens to podcast, but he was asking me about the Principal at WT. And I said, "Well, he's really the President," but in some ways you kind of are the Principal here, I guess.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah.

Randy Ray: So how are you like a principal and how are you not?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I'm like a principal, in my mind anyway, at least I would say a good principal, in that my first concern is always about students. I want to see students get a chance to meet their aspirations, to succeed, and to have a chance to engage themselves positively. If you followed me around on a day to day basis, you might say, "Gosh, how does this work relate to the students?" But for me, personally, I have to be able to connect the dots back to student development and student engagement and the quality of the educational experience.

We just recently finished Buff Branding as we start the school year. And the fact of the matter is that's all about students and it's fun. The students had a good time, you can tell. Missy of course is joined into that as its leader and does a great job and I know she'll probably say a word about that later, but the point is, I like it because it shows students a fundamental precept about life that you can join something that's larger than you are. You don't always have to be about self. You can join something that's larger than you are and engage that and get a benefit from it. And they were having fun and that's a good benefit.

I especially liked the fact that people were there and they were sober and all that sort of thing. I mean, when I mean sober, I mean literally they hadn't been

drinking and all that carrying on because if you just walked into the place, you might think they had been drinking. They get all revved up and it's a lot of fun. But I think that's engaging for students. Not everybody, some people may say, "That's a little bit too much. I'd rather go read Shakespeare in the library." Okay, that's fine. "Or I'd rather go play baseball or whatever." But it's a way for people to become part of a community. And in that sense I think the Principal's role and the President's role is very similar as kind of a leadership role to try and keep that before people.

Randy Ray: Yeah. So you deal with students, but your job is also kind of like a CFO or a CEO I guess of a big company. People probably don't realize what a big business running the university is.

Dr. Wendler: It is a huge business. Our budget, it's a shy of \$150 million, but it's a lot of money. Our payroll is just shy of \$70 million. But for comparison, as an example, CISD has a payroll, which is the Canyon Independent School District and it's a big district, has a payroll of about \$50 million. Ours is \$70 million. I'm only giving that as a way for people to calibrate the size of the organizations because there's schools all over and teachers and everything. I mean there's a lot of investment in that.

We have just finished and soon we'll be publishing an economic impact study and it's safe for me to say that this study done by a very reputable firm, a national firm that does university studies and economic impact, \$745 million per year is the estimated impact of WT. That's a huge impact on the community. And it's not just Canyon, it's the whole panhandle. Canyon and Amarillo, first Randall and Potter counties and then beyond. So it's a business, but it's a business that is focused on students first. And I am absolutely convinced, if we don't put students first, that economic impact of 700 and almost 50 million dollars will go down rather than up. I think if we put students first, our economic impact will increase and it's just that simple.

Randy Ray: I agree with you. And speaking of students, it's nice to have them back.

Dr. Wendler: It is, Randy. I like it because it puts a cadence in the week. Monday you start class, I just was talking to a freshman on the second floor of Old Main and she had been here for two years. She's from Paradise, Texas and of course yesterday was the first day of classes and she was taking a class this morning at eight o'clock and you see how anxious she was over there, about 7:25 ready to go to class. And then another fellow showed up, but she was from Paradise, which is about five and a half hours South down by Fort Worth. But when you see that, you recognize and you can see it in their eyes, their eyes are sparkling, even at 7:30 in the morning, at least most of them. And they're excited. They are excited about the program and what they're getting to do here. So we're very thankful for that rhythm of the students being here.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree. I love the fall for a lot of different reasons, but one of the reasons I love fall is football and we have a big reason to celebrate football in the fall. We have brand new stadium.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah.

Randy Ray: And we've talked a lot about that, but it's just so exciting and I love the fact that we're bringing football back to the campus and just the vibe that is going to create on game day. You were talking about that atmosphere at Buff Branding earlier. I think it's going to be that atmosphere on game day.

Dr. Wendler: I do too.

Randy Ray: And is going to be across the campus. It's not going to be just students. It's going to be people that live in Amarillo and the Panhandle. I think it's going to be a day that really sets the entire Panhandle on fire.

Dr. Wendler: I agree with you, Randy. I don't know what the ticket sales are doing. I know we're going along pretty well and I expect a big crowd and I'm an architect so I go over there and look at the stadium, I'm not surprised. I mean, I had some sense of what it was going to look like, but when I get there, yesterday I went over, I took ... I can't remember who went over now. Oh, John Smithee, he's Chief of Staff, came to visit the campus, representative Smithee and we went over and visited the stadium and they had put the artificial turf on the slopes in the end zones and it's this beautiful green, Emerald green thing, which of course in Amarillo, in this part of the world, any kind of dense green like that, it's pretty rare, but it is dense. It reminds me of Yankee stadium when I went there with my dad and sit up on the third deck, the seats were steep.

They're steep here and you'd look down onto that Emerald green. That turf there was natural grass back then. But you'd look down onto that stuff and you'd think, "Oh my Gosh, this is a ... talk about Paradise, Texas. It's not five hours from here by Fort Worth. It's right here." And that stadium, on the sixth we have the ribbon cutting, on the seventh the first game against Azusa Pacific 6:00 PM. I would encourage people that support WT and the Texas Panhandle to be out for this because it is going to be a big deal on campus. First time, 60 years, 60 years since we took a snap or had a kick off on the campus.

Randy Ray: And we'll be having events all day long.

Dr. Wendler: All day long and starting on Friday.

Randy Ray: Yeah. When are we unveiling the White Buffalo?

Dr. Wendler: That's going to be-

Randy Ray: Is that on sixth?

Dr. Wendler: Yes. That's going to be on the sixth.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I'm excited about that. And we've talked about this too, but that White Buffalo is just special to me.

Dr. Wendler: Well it is. It's neat and they scraped a hundred pounds of paint off of that. That's a lot of paint. But it's all been, somebody said we gave it a manicure. We did. I mean it's all cleaned up. I guess a Buffalo would get a pedicure. I don't know. I'm not sure on all that, but whatever it is, it is going to be pristine. As a matter of fact, it's covered. It's got a cover on it because it ... They have spotlights on it and the lights were all on this morning when I drove by. I come to work about six, a little before and the lights were all on and I thought, "Man, this is magnificent." And I look in there and see that grass, that turf and it's magnificent.

Randy Ray: It's a big deal.

Dr. Wendler: It's a big deal.

Randy Ray: It's a big deal. We are going to take a break and when we come back we're going to talk to Missy Macon and we're going to talk to her about some of the Pillars of Leadership here on campus. We'll be back in about 60 seconds.

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Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. This is our 13th episode and we have a very special guest. Today, we are talking to Missy Macon. Missy, it's good to have you.

Missy Macon: Good morning. It's good to be here. Thanks for having me.

Randy Ray: So you and I go back aways.

Missy Macon: We do.

Randy Ray: You were a communication student and you graduated in 2003 with your undergrad, right?

Missy Macon: Yes, sir. I did.

Randy Ray: Over in the Old Fine Arts building.

Missy Macon: That's right.

Randy Ray: Did you ever have a class with me?

Missy Macon: No, I did not actually.

Randy Ray: You got lucky. You got lucky. Yeah. So you were an advertising PR major, right?

Missy Macon: Right.

Randy Ray: So how does that apply to what you're doing today?

Missy Macon: It's kind of a funny transition from that to what I'm doing today because you wouldn't kind of see the connection at all. I mean, I did a couple of things. So as soon as I left WT, I did some on-air fundraising for KCV TV which is a whole different ballgame. But it was a lot of fun, learned a lot of things, eventually kind of found myself in a federal grant, actually called Gear Up and I worked for them for five, six years, I think. And through that realized that I really liked working with students and we did some leadership development stuff there. And long story short, I found my way back through a friend who worked here and she just said, "They'd posted this job, I think you'd be interested in it." And I looked at it and thought, "Yes, I would absolutely love that." And I have loved every day since.

Randy Ray: Yeah. And so you are, I don't know, the leader of, what is it? Pillars of Leadership. Tell us about that.

Missy Macon: I would love to. So I'm actually the Leadership Coordinator in the Office of Student Engagement and Leadership. And so I work with a variety of leadership programs on campus and as we're kind of talking about everything that's going on on-campus and all the different programs, we wanted to see if we could find a way to connect those dots for students. So we worked on a framework in just our office with the programs that we worked with and of course like connected them to CAS Standards and to student leadership competencies. And then back to, we started with the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership and we mapped kind of all of the programs that we do in our office to those things. And through that notice that we have some very common things that kept popping out at us and similarities in programs, but nothing connected because you didn't realize that with the language.

And so we decided that we needed to find something that would connect the dots for students and make sure that they understood that they were gaining these leadership skills in multiple different programs. My supervisor, Kimberly Cornelsen and I went to a conference in last December and Tulane University does something kind of similar to this and so we thought, "You know what? That

would be a great idea for our students to actually recognize the skills that they're gaining." And so by doing the framework, we identified common themes and then tied them back to leadership principles and pillars that we hope will one day soon become like a common leadership language on campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well I'm going to talk about those pillars a little bit and Dr. Wendler, I'd like to just chime in too. I'm going to talk about these, what are there? Eight-

Missy Macon: Eight.

Randy Ray: ... Different pillars. I want to talk about these pillars and I would like to each one of you to just kind of reflect a sentence or two about what you think about that particular pillar. The first one is Exemplary Character. How do you feel? Should a leader have good character?

Missy Macon: Absolutely. I think they should and I think it starts from the very beginning. They recognize their belief systems and the things that they're going to stand for and staying true to those things.

Dr. Wendler: Yup. Yeah, and I think WT is an especially important place to do this because the character of the people of the Texas Panhandle is so genuine and so sincere and it's geared towards hard work and personal responsibility and I just think that is so important and Missy in those leadership programs reinforces it. I see it in those students.

Randy Ray: Absolutely. What about a sense of responsibility? Missy?

Missy Macon: Dr. Wendler just mentioned that and we really are trying to help them take ownership of those things. Good, bad and just make sure that then if it is a ... Maybe they made a poor choice or something that they take responsibility for that, recover from it and move on and do better from that. But really owning those things.

Dr. Wendler: I couldn't agree more. And I think that's why it's so good to be transparent with students and with the people that we work with. And when you make a mistake, you own it. You own the mistake. If you speak inappropriately or if you do something that's nonsensical, whatever it might be own it, own it, own it and people like it.

Missy Macon: Absolutely.

Dr. Wendler: And it's a way to draw people closer to you by being human and recognizing errors and also being willing and humble to accept praise when it's due. But I think this idea of owning is very important.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree. I also think that a good leader knows how to pull together a good team and a good leader knows how to be collaborative and have good relationships within that team. So you all speak ... Talk about teamwork.

Missy Macon: We do teamwork in every aspect. All day long at work you are working with teams in groups and so if we aren't instilling those good ideas and thoughts in students right now about how do you be a good team member and how do you work effectively with a team to move the goal forward and things like that, then we aren't doing a very good job, I don't think, of educating them. And so helping them realize the good things that they can do by working with a team and that they'll go so much further with the team than they will by themselves I think is important place to start here at WT.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. I agree. Yesterday we had a meeting with the planning group, which is a pretty good sized group. There's about 40 people in it that are getting ready for the first home football game in 60 years. And right now there's a lot of a anticipation and so on about this first game and a lot of ... there's nerves. People are worried, how's the traffic and the flow, how are we going to make sure that people get where they need to go? How is the food service going to work? And one thing after the other, and there was a time when there was some tension in the air, but everybody soon remembered that we're working on this as a team. We have a common goal, which is to have a great game day experience for West Texas A&M University. And then they submitted themselves to the team, which I think is very important.

Randy Ray: What about professional competence? Tell us what that means.

Missy Macon: Well, we really want them to know like you're gaining these skills and what's appropriate behavior both in the classroom, outside of the classroom, in the workplace and what that looks like and how it can help understanding the skills that you're gaining and that will help you be more marketable. But then also following the proper chain of command that you maybe just don't go straight to Dr. Wendler when you have a problem. Right? Like there's people that you can talk to in the middle of it that can solve your problem or kind of help you through whatever situation that you're facing and help them do that in a responsible way and things like that.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, when you hire someone, you've got to think about professional competence.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, as matter of fact, I would say that's all we think about, but it's not all we think about. We also want to think about relational skills and being able to be member of a team and so on and so forth. But being able to do the job that you're asked to do is exceedingly important. I have seen in my long tenure since 1975 of being at universities, the biggest mistakes that are made are putting people that don't yet have the competence to be in the job that they're in. And it's not their fault. I mean they just haven't had the experience or the training.

And that's the leadership's responsibility to make sure that the person's abilities and what's expected of them fit together. Because if you don't, it's a challenge.

Missy Macon: And I think too, with that, students helping them understand that there's a process to gaining that competence too and you have to gain those skills by experience. And so when they leave us, they may not be the one at the top of the food chain immediately, but they have to work to that and helping them understand that that's a good thing. So that then they don't get themselves in a situation that they aren't comfortable with.

Randy Ray: What's that thing when people rise to the level of their competency?

Dr. Wendler: Peter Principle?

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. The Peter Principle says that they get to a level where they keep rising until they get to a place where they're incompetent. That's not a very kind of upbeat thing to talk about, but it happens.

Randy Ray: There is some truth to it.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, there is some truth to it.

Randy Ray: Alright. Strengths and Action is another pillar. And this one really struck to me because it talks about knowing one's own strength and I've had to learn my own strengths and my own weaknesses too. And tell me what your strength is and talk about that a little bit.

Missy Macon: So funny thing that I have my strengths shirt on today and as a a strengths-based campus, we help students identify and recognize the strengths, the things that they're most good at, those talents that they naturally have and develop into skills. And so positivity is my number one strength. And I think I use that a lot every day. Just encouraging students, seeing the good side and seeing, okay, it's not the end of the road, how can we get past this and really maintaining a positive attitude.

And I think that as we help students identify those and they understand more about them and they become more comfortable with them, then they understand how they can be a better teammate, how they can be a better roommate, how they can be a better coworker when they understand themselves, and then also understand others and their strengths and say, how can I compliment you? Or what's the strength that you bring to the table that I don't have? And recognizing that that's not necessarily a bad thing, but make sure that your team is well rounded and that you can lean on somebody else in a time that you don't have that strength necessarily.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I think that those are all good points. My strength I think is ideas, ideation or something, that's kind of an odd word, but I generate ideas, it seems to me, easily. I sit in my rocking chair and I think about things and ideas come to me. I wish every once in a while I could stop it. I mean it's almost like a disease because you don't get one thing finished and you're thinking about something else.

But I actually think that helps a team because there's a fresh flow of things to think about, and at times it can be overpowering, but one I think of the greatest strengths is to learn while you work. And I think that's very important. That's what's important I think about transparency and admitting mistakes and everything. Randy, you said you've had to learn your strengths and I know you, you're continuing to learn your strengths. You're not finished. You're not a finished work yet. You're being, in my language, you're being perfected. I mean, it takes time and there's a process there. And someone may look at me and say, "He's an old man. He's got it all everything figured out." I've got very little figured out. But when you recognize that and keep working to make progress towards a high aspiration, I think that's a great thing. And that can be a powerful strength I think to learn.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Two things about what you said. One is, you talked about people's different strengths, and I think that diversity, all kinds of diversity makes us a stronger unit, stronger team. So I believe in diversity and Dr. Wendler, you talked about that idea thing. When I teach my management class, we look at all these different characteristics of a leader, and one thing always sticks out more than anything else and that's vision. And I think you have vision and you have a vision for WT, and that's what WT125 is all about. So I think that's a big, strong thing that we need to look for in leaders and we need to develop in our leaders.

Missy Macon: Absolutely.

Randy Ray: Another pillar is cultural humility.

Missy Macon: I think this one really speaks to the fact that our campus is becoming more diverse and the workplace and anywhere even in the Texas Panhandle, everything is becoming more diverse and really understanding, valuing others' identities and perspectives and opinions and be able to have some civil discourse with them and understand where they're coming from. Not necessarily that you have to agree with them or disagree with them. But understanding, being willing to listen and being open minded about some things and being able to have a conversation can get you a long way.

Dr. Wendler: I would agree. And sometimes that's difficult for me. I have my ideas and I feel strongly about them and so on and so forth. But in the end, having an open mind and an open heart I think is the most important thing. And I think sometimes people will confuse a strongly held belief with a predisposition or some other kind of something and I don't think that's the case. As long as your

heart is open to listen to people and hear where they are, it doesn't mean you have to give up or sacrifice the things that you think are important.

So it is important and I think Missy is spot on. The fact of the matter is our culture is changing. Our university is 25% Hispanic, which reflects the population of the Texas Panhandle. It's 5% African American. These are student populations. Our staff, faculty and staff populations are not as diverse as our student populations. But in terms of Hispanics and African Americans, we represent the population of the Panhandle. And that's one very obvious kind of distinguishing characteristics, but personal beliefs and religious beliefs and other things that we identify with are also constantly changing and developing. And we need both open minds and open hearts, I think.

Randy Ray: You're talking about hearts, another pillar's a Heart for Service.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah.

Missy Macon: Well, earlier you were mentioning how the people of Panhandle are genuine and hardworking and I think I see in the Panhandle people that are just willing to help with whatever, drop whatever they're doing. I was actually visiting with a lady from Dalhart yesterday and her business had somehow caught on fire and the whole thing was gone and she said everybody in that community just really pitched in.

One of the banks said, "Hey, come use some of our office space, whatever you need." And everybody's just willing to give what they have to help them. And I think WT is like that also. And when we instill that principle and that mindset in students early on, they realize how good it feels to give back and what a difference it can.

So at Buff Branding like we were talking about earlier, we did a huge service project with over 500 people and then we packed 50,000 meals for the High Plains Food Bank. And watching the students really enjoy that moment is probably one of my favorite parts of Buff Branding because they get to see the physical impact in how much food we packed in, I mean, an hour and a half I think, and loaded onto the truck and then see the impact that it can have in our community. And instilling that early I think is important. And I think that university does a good job of that as well.

Dr. Wendler: Well I do too. And the only reason we can do a good job is, as you just pointed out, Missy, it comes from the community. It comes from the culture up here. I think it's trying to battle these high plains, the Texas Panhandle trying to battle the weather. People have tried to scratch out a living out of the ground up here. It's tough. Or trying to get oil out of the ground or water out of the ground or go get cotton to grow or feed cattle or cows up here. Now dairy is growing up. All these things, everything is a challenge. Nothing is easy and almost everything

we do it would be easier somewhere else. And it creates in people I think a sense of purpose and shared responsibility and service.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree. Last one, transformational growth.

Missy Macon: This is probably my favorite one and I think because I get to see students from the beginning of their journey just because of where I am to the end and watching them really recognize those skills in themselves and see the potential that they had that that came to fruition and they did the hard things in all areas is so important for me. And it really kind of gives me that fire inside to keep going and moving. Because I feel like with this one you see the difference and when they can recognize that difference in themselves is so exciting to see. It's just like they have a light in their eyes and they're like, "Oh my Gosh, I did all of these things." And so developer is also one of my strengths. To see this in students is one of my favorite things.

Randy Ray: Yeah. You talk about the ability to embrace challenges, take risk and perseverance. I think that makes a big leader. Well, we always end our podcast, Missy with what I call throwing you guys a curve ball.

Missy Macon: Okay.

Randy Ray: You ready?

Missy Macon: Sure.

Randy Ray: This one's kind of weird.

Dr. Wendler: They're all kind of weird.

Randy Ray: I would like you two to tell me what's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten. Silence. Do you need to think about it for a minute? While you guys think about it, when I thought about this question, the first thing that came to my mind was I grew up in a Baptist church and we'd had a lot of socials and those after church socials. I've eaten some weird stuff there. I still don't know what they are.

Missy Macon: You don't know what it is.

Randy Ray: That might explain a lot of things, right?

Dr. Wendler: I'll tell you the weirdest thing I've ever eaten. It's not that weird, but it was weird to me because I'd never had it before was chicken livers. I'd never eaten those before and I've eaten them one time. The first time I had them and the last time I had them, but I tend to like, I call it, kid food. I like hamburgers, hotdogs, pizza. I can eat that stuff. French fries, I could eat this stuff every day, every day. If it's on a bun, I want it.

Randy Ray: Well, Dr. Wendler, I know you believe in studying abroad and when you've been in other countries, I'm sure you've had some good stuff.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. I was in Blue Moon Tempura House in Tokyo and it was, it's a famous Tempura House and they bring in these fresh critters and they have these big vats of boiling oil and they hold the critters up so you can see they're still alive to attest to their freshness. And then they throw them in this vat and they get cooked to death. But it's just as fresh as you can get.

I've eaten some weird stuff in Vietnam, in Taiwan, in China, in Japan. But most of it has to do with critters. As a matter of fact, I went to the doctor one time, I know we're running out of time, but I'm going to tell this story. I went to the doctor one time. I had a sinus infection and I was getting ready to go to Hanoi and I said, "Man," I said, "I'm worried about being sick, Brian." He said, "Well, I'm going to give you this Z pack. You can take this medicine that'll take care of that part of it." I said, "You got any other advice?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "Don't eat anything that looks like fishing bait."

Randy Ray: Don't eat the bait. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Anyway.

Missy Macon: I did have some students one time bring me some, speaking of critters being cooked in oil, grasshoppers and from-

Randy Ray: Deep fried grasshoppers. How were they? Crunchy?

Missy Macon: I mean, I couldn't even ... Like they brought them to me and really, really wanted me to eat them and I just couldn't do it. They were kind of disappointed in me, but I'm not quite that tough, I don't think.

Randy Ray: Well, we are a little bit over, but that's okay. We've had a good conversation today. Thank you for joining us for Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. Be sure and join us again next time for episode number 14. We'll see you then.