Guest Column: Living and Communicating the UA's Public Good Mission

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Over my 20-year relationship with the University of Arizona, I have seen many important cultural shifts on campus, including the creation of resources like the THINK TANK and the launch of the 100% Engagement initiative.

Faculty are more readily experimenting with modes and technologies that disrupt the passive traditions of the classroom, and the UA has added buildings and spaces designed specifically to encourage interdisciplinary interactions and improve the quality of instruction.

As a three-time UA graduate who has spent the last decade working in the Office of University Communications, what I am most proud of are those efforts that directly align the work of students, faculty and staff with the University's land-grant and public good missions.

Perhaps more than ever, public higher education is being called to be responsive not only to community need, but also to community pain. This is evidenced by the newly emergent nature of campus activism and unrest, notably driven by instability in the global economy dating back to 2007.

At the same time, the rise of social media and digital technologies has enabled a more diverse population of people to shape public perceptions about issues within higher education and within our own campuses.

In communications, we hold a great and increasingly important responsibility to clearly convey to the public the value of public higher education. Some of the most important tenets of the public good mission are that we should produce applicable research to benefit people's lives and promote transformative teaching that drives student learning and encourages our graduates to pursue public service after they leave.

As I leave the UA to join my partner, who is pursuing a career opportunity outside Tucson, I share four main truths that I have come to believe. Many of these were shaped through my interactions with a number of individuals who are working to creative positive, transformational change at the UA and beyond.

Be a fierce ambassador not only for the institution, but also the public good mission of higher education.

Higher education scholars and practitioners Gary Rhoades, Matt Matera, Kendal Washington-White, Karen Francis-Begay and Kasey Urquidez - all champions of student learning and inclusion - persistently speak and act through the public good mission. In doing so, they do not merely evoke the UA's brand identity, but the tangible and intangible value of the public good. Just as it is important to live through the UA brand, so too is the importance
of remembering our collective call to action in preserving the public good.

Extend not only an ear, but a hand.

Most everyone is taxed for time and money, but some are able to make amazing things happen despite limitations. Magan Alfred of Student Affairs Marketing, Dale LaFleur of the Office of Global Initiatives, Mika Galilee-Belfer of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and UA alumnus and photographer John de Dios are adept at connecting individuals and resources. This is invaluable in communications, and especially notable given the continuing effects of the last significant recession. When we are able to link people and resources, we have a greater potential for engaging in the types of creative and meaningful ways that help to elevate the institution. Acts may be as simple or as complex as introducing individuals separated by academic boundaries, inviting a junior colleague or students into major initiatives, or mobilizing constituent support.

Never forget that you have made mistakes.

Remembering one’s own shortcomings and the ways others have served as mentors, allies and advocates can help encourage collegiality. This requires, at a minimum, a humble nature? and I thank Nura Dualeh of the Office of Student Engagement, CyVerse marketing and communications coordinator Shelley Littin, Student Affairs Marketing writer Amanda Reyes and UA Cooperative Extension information specialist Faith Schwartz for encouraging me to remain open, honest and humble.

Bring a level of compassion to your work.

Higher education scholar Jenny Lee, art professor Jackson Boelts, and College of Arts, Letters and Sciences program manager Sylvia Mioduski (who has known me since I arrived as a 16-year-old UA freshman) have taught me the importance of adopting a compassionate and mindful practice. When you are persistently dealing with issues related to trust, buy-in and both mission and message alignment, a compassionate practice can bring clarity and understanding to the human experience. It can also help improve intergroup dialogue and foster workplace commitment.

Together, these truths aid with self-preservation, help bring clarity and focus to mission and communications and, ultimately, help drive the overall health of the organization.

La Monica Everett-Haynes, assistant director of news editorial in University Communications, earned a B.A. in journalism from the UA in 2001 and worked in newsrooms in Arizona, Washington state and Texas. Returning to Arizona in 2005, she went on to earn a master’s and Ph.D. in higher education, in 2010 and 2016 respectively. She has spent the last 10 years serving as a communications professional with University Communications, where she has led and facilitated media relations, content production and strategic communications planning. Everett-Haynes ends her service to the UA on June 30.

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