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## Listening to Leaders: Servant Leadership

Musician, poet, husband, father of four, community college president, Sanford C. "Sandy" Shugart cloaks every aspect of his life with the mantle of Servant Leadership.

With nearly 200 Leadership Orlando Alumni and participants, along with other business and community leaders in the largest *Listening to Leaders* audience ever, Dr. Shugart responded to questions about his professional career development, his personal life philosophy and how he strives to encourage others to reach their fullest potential.



When asked about his very first job, he shared that for an 18 year-old, selling women's shoes was probably the "worst job imaginable." On entering college, he said he never intended to get a 'real job.' What interested him most were poetry, music, and most importantly, how we know things. At the University of North Carolina, he studied the philosophy of science and completed his Ph.D. on how people learn.

It was natural, then, that his fascination with learning and teaching would lead him to a career in education. Holding key posts with the University of North Carolina, the North Carolina Board of Science and Technology, and the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges he was well prepared for his first college presidency at the young age of 35 in Houston. With most college presidencies lasting 3-4 years, Dr. Shugart spent eight successful years at North Harris College until he woke up one night and realized he was in the 'shallow end of the pool.' Always more challenged by being "in over his head," he decided to see what other opportunities were on the horizon.

In deciding to make a career change, he said that he only considered two locations – California and Orlando. Academically, Valencia Community College is one of the top five of 1,200 such institutions in the nation. He also realized that Valencia was on the cusp of changing the model of higher education and could be a vanguard of paradigm shift – and he wanted to be part of it.

Dr. Shugart believes that education is where America begins – the Ellis Island where individuals can build dreams on their own behalf, changing the course of generations for their families. Eighty percent of minorities in education are at the community college level. Many think that diversity is a problem to be solved; he looks at it as an opportunity to provide empowerment and engagement.

Still young at 48, his immersion in the writings of Robert Greenleaf on Servant Leadership are reinforced each day by a reproduction of Rembrandt's painting, *Return of the Prodigal Son*, which hangs in his office. The five characters in the painting – father, son, elder son, servant, and bystander – teach the nature of forgiveness and restoration. By putting yourself in each character, you begin to understand the dynamics of these qualities from several different perspectives.

In business, we tend not to be forgiving; the workplace often is not a safe place to make mistakes and learn from them. He says, "Experience is the name I give to my mistakes." As business leaders, we should strive to provide an environment, each and every day, where our co-workers and colleagues can gain the meaningful experience that will allow them to grow, learn and serve.

Sandy Shugart is no different at home than he is at work. He and his wife, Jane, believe that home is where hospitality for family comes first – a place where family members are encouraged to really be themselves. The absence of television sets and electronic games encourage family interaction. Computers in public areas for easy access to the wealth of educational information that the internet provides, musical instruments, places to write and draw, and lots of board games provide an environment that may seem foreign to many of us. But, it well serves the Shugart family and it could positively change the dynamics of our families if we were willing to give it a try.

Dr. Shugart ended his visit with the recitation of two original poems, followed by enthusiastic applause from our guests. We are happy to share one of them with you here.

### **Brick Work**

It wasn't a work I had chosen, but  
I was young and the job came to hand  
like each new, rasp-edged brick  
and I was taken with the  
challenge of the craft.  
Head-down to lay to a line  
straight and square, feeling the  
grain of baked earth and  
handling the sanded mud with  
quick, smart flicks and jabs,  
a precision boxer working a square ring,  
mastering tools and letting them  
master me: hammer, level and trowel.  
Focusing, focusing until every  
cell is in the rhythm, speed,  
economy of motion, each brick  
leading to the next, no hesitation,  
no space between the notes and  
all notes the same,  
brick to brick, course on course,  
year stacked on  
year until I take on the very  
texture of brick, the grit of mortar  
rigid joints and flat face of the wall  
no view but the brick,  
no plan but the brick,  
no dream but the brick

and then

the walls, at last,  
connect and there is  
nothing to do but to set the  
iron bars in the  
tiny, high window  
and wait for  
the end.