**Your Roadmap to Educational & Personal Greatness**

**with Dr. Mica Stewart**

**Episode 128**

Dr. Mica Stewart:

The goal to me to recognize the ways in which I need to improve in my teaching and commit to that work of improvement. One of the key enemies of growth is perfectionism. Perfectionism paralyzes us, and then we won't even try. Okay. And that one of the things, we have wonderful students and they are so gracious and they just want to know that we try, because what we're saying is that I see you, you matter, you are part of this class and I'm going to do something to reach you.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bing to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 4:

... and I know I'm going to achieve my goals and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 5:

She is a sociology major, and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona.

Speaker 5:

... psychology major, English major...

Sun Ezzell:

From transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 6:

I really liked the time that we spend in Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 7:

... to think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, learning assistance faculty and professional learning academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

What does it mean to achieve greatness? Our featured speaker today is Dr. Mica Stewart taken from Fall Flex Day 2021, who shares with us what the pillars of acquiring greatness as educators really means in order to create successful experiences for our students. We hope you enjoy this abridged version of Dr. Mica's great presentation about how anyone is capable of achieving greatness.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Hello, all of you beautiful people. I am Dr. Mica, and I am so excited to be here with you all today. It is an enormous privilege to stand before you, my colleagues, and talk about being great. And I thank you for the trust that has been placed in me to carry out this task. I hope that I have something to share with you that will be beneficial and that will help you to do your jobs better as faculty, because we have a huge responsibility, but it's one that I believe we can handle and we can handle well. All right.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So, this word great, it's something that we hear a lot in the news. Maybe we turn on our TVs and there may be some commercials advertising different things about greatness, right? So for example, when I was young, many of you may have experienced this too, but there was this pretty sophisticated feline who liked to get on and talk about how great frosted flakes were, right? So you know who I'm talking about? Tommy the Tiger. So he wouldn't just say, "They're great," right? No, no, no. It was, "They're great!" As a kid, it was fun to mock his voice and to say, "Hey, yeah, they're great," to whatever else you might want to.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

There's also been a lot of talk over the few years that have passed, it's particularly 2016 to 2020, in politics about greatness. We have had leaders who have talked about greatness and some of their followers who have also mentioned greatness. I used to think that the past president was the one who came up with that slogan. But interestingly, he's not, that this was just building on the slogan that was put forth by Reagan in '80. I didn't know that. So I don't know if any of you others knew that, but I just thought that was interesting. The more things go around, the more they come around.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

And then the other use are great that is very common is great use in athletics. So we've got here Muhammad Ali, who labeled himself and many of us agree as the greatest. So interestingly, it was Ali's wife, Lonnie Ali, who was the one who coined the term GOAT, right? She was the first to use it, talking about Ali because he, living in a culture that devalued African-Americans, decided that he was going to say, "You know what, I'm not going to listen to that narrative. I'm going to come up with my own narrative." And so, he used the word great to describe himself. He said that he called himself the greatest, even before he knew that he actually was the greatest. So sometimes we have to speak things into existence, especially in terms of how we feel about ourselves.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, that said, we also have the term GOAT, greatest of all times. We like to sit around and talk about who's the greatest. And in terms of gymnastics, is it Simone Biles? She's like, "I'll accept that title. No problem. You can call me the greatest." And she even have it engraved in some of her uniforms. And then, also, we've had people talk about Michael Jordan in sports and he is the greatest, even though he's resisted that title. When you see how he's been portrayed, it's really kind of understandable. The other thing about all of this notion about great and GOAT is that it really generates a lot of debate, right? So you have people arguing and ranking and making these lists about who all time GOATs are or having debates about it in football. "Oh, this person is the GOAT." "No, I'm the GOAT." Okay.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So, I just want to say to you that the concept of great that I'm going to propose to you today is not based in any of this. It's not based in advertisements that are designed to get you to spend your money on something that may be labeled as great, but not good for you. And it's not based in partial truths that are historical and that are really based on a whole host of denials about the sufferings and the cost of that greatness to many other people in our country. So you might be like, "Okay. So you're telling us what you're not going to talk about. What are you going to talk about? What do you mean by great, Dr. Mica?" All right. So let me share with you my thoughts.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

To be great is not something that's limited to just a few. It's something that each and every one of us can do. It's something that each and every one of us can be. Why? Because to be great is to prioritize growth, restoration, empathy, accountability, and truth-telling. Today, I'm going to walk through each one of these and talk a little bit about how they all work together in the creation of greatness in our lives and how they can help us to be great as educators. And that this greatness is not just limited to how we do our jobs, but to every aspect of our lives and that's why it's so powerful.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, having said that, let me caution you. Each one of these concepts is something that we could do a whole series on, like just on growth, right? There are so many books written just about growth or just about restoration. So really, what I'm going to be giving you is an appetizer. Okay. So if you walk away saying, "Hmm, I'm still hungry," that's okay because all you got is a little teaser, and I'm hoping that this will inspire you to want to learn more.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So to be great is to prioritize growth. To be great is to prioritize growth. So, what I'd like for you to do, because we're going to define growth, I'd like for you to take a few minutes and to think, well, not a few minutes because I don't have a few minutes, but just a little bit of time to think what comes to mind when the word growth is used. What comes to you? What comes to mind, grow or growth? Cellular division, embracing change, learning something new, oh, doing better next time, yes, learning new things, change, to stretch, okay, to improve, ah, vulnerability, yes, soil, okay, to improve, continuous learning, opening our minds, to learn about things, to expand my awareness. So it sounds like we're all on the same page. Oh, empowering, this is good. This is good. Okay.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So let me tell you how I'm using growth, because I think that it's always important to be on the same page, and based on what you are putting forth, we are. Defining growth, the way I'm defining growth is to increase in something intangible, to grow in character or knowledge or ability. Let's talk a little bit about that. So characteristics of growth, you might think, looking at the list that you all gave, aside from the cellular division, most of the things that were listed were on the positive side, but technically growth is a neutral word. Okay. We also perceive it as good, even though growth and growing can be associated with something positive or negative.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So for example, if you notice something in your skin and you go to the doctor, and the doctor says, "There is a growth on your back." And then they have to determine, is this a malignant growth or is it a benign growth? And then when we find out that we have a growth, that something is growing on us, that those cells are dividing, that's about all I can say, because I am not a biologist, but it elicits fear in us, right? A fear response because there are some things we don't want to grow. Now, another thing that is associated with the word growth that's not necessarily positive or isn't positive at all really is debt. So, we grow in debt. In fact, many of us may have grown in debt over the pandemic. We were fortunate as faculty to still have our jobs, but many people were not. Many people lost their jobs. And so, they grew in debt.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Many of us though, to get all these degrees that we had, we increased in debt in terms of our school debt. I have just accepted the fact that I will be paying off my loans from before, I won't say the rest of my life, but at least the next 20 something years. It's just is. Now, because growth can be something positive or negative, I want us to use John Lewis's word, Senator Lewis's word, where he talks about good trouble. So, we're going to look at growth from the perspective of good growth, right? We're not talking about any kind of malignant growth. We want to shut that down, loop that out, operate on that and get rid of it. Okay. We want good growth. Let's talk a little bit more about that.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

What is our goal? When we're talking about good growth, our goal is not to be the GOATs. Okay. We don't want to be the GOAT. We don't want to go head stuck on us. There's just nothing about GOATs that we need to be. Okay. Because the problem with this GOAT notion is that the comparison is with other people. When we're talking about growth, we're not comparing ourselves to other people. This is a challenge that I'm having with myself, right? It's not about you. It's about me being the best that I can be. And so, that's the goal, to strive towards being the best that you can be at this time in your life within this set of circumstances. I emphasize those other points because we can compare ourselves to ourselves, as in 20 years ago, I used to be so much stronger or so much whatever, because I don't know if any of you know this, but the first time I came to Mt. SAC was when I was in college and I came out here for the Mt. SAC relays, right?

Dr. Mica Stewart:

And so, I could get out on the track and I could say, "Oh, I can't do what I used to be able to do," and feel bad, but that's not the kind of growth I'm talking about. So even comparing to ourselves, we have to look out for where are we now? Okay. And what are the circumstances? Because we just came through something really challenging. We just had to teach through some difficult situations, right? So it's kind of like, "All right. Maybe this class did not go the way that I wanted it to go, but within this set of circumstances, what's the best that I can do?" Okay. We apply that to ourselves. The more we can focus on our own growth and having some grace for ourselves, the more that we can share that with others, like our students, who are also going through these kinds of circumstances.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Again, the goal of growth is not again to get teacher of the year. Now, you might think, "But Mica, isn't that a good thing? Because then everybody's recognizing that I'm growing, that I'm doing a great job." Teacher of the year, if you get that, I would encourage you to let that be a byproduct, something that just falls out of what you're already doing, but that you're not doing it for that, because when we're doing it so accolades or for rewards, then that becomes the goal and then we don't even feel satisfied with the growth that we have made, the steps that we have taken, the journey that we have covered. And then we get jealous. Even today, when they were going, when a Chisa was announcing, Chisa and Kelly were announcing the different award, "Well, how come that person got faculty of the year? How come back person got the honorable for classified? Why didn't I?" And so, it's like if we go for those things, it's always going to lead to some kind of jealousy or some kind of insecurity. So, that's not our measure.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Again, our measure is something that's not dependent on anybody else. It's just dependent on us. So the goal to me to recognize the ways in which I need to improve in my teaching and commit to that work of improvement. And if you want to give me a faculty of the year next year, then that's fine, but again, it's a byproduct. It's not the goal. All right. Now, one of the things I encourage you to do on your journey of growth is to recognize your enemies. They always say, "You got to know who your enemies are." One of the key enemies of growth is perfectionism. When I have worked with faculty on DEISA, doing DEISA work, understanding diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and anti-racism, some faculty say, "Hmm, I'm really hesitant to include some of these things in my class or to do some of these things because this isn't my area. This isn't what I do, and I'm afraid of offending."

Dr. Mica Stewart:

The nature behind that or the sentiment behind that is a goal of not to already wound somebody who's already been wounded, right? Marginalized groups have already been wounded. We don't want to add to that. But the flip side is that perfectionism paralyzes us, and then we won't even try. Okay. And that one of the things, we have wonderful students and they are so gracious and they just want to know that we try, because what we're saying is that I see you, you matter, you are part of this class and I'm going to do something to reach you. When we're trying to grow, we got to reach out to our resources. Maybe you don't know everything, but we are on a college campus. Hello? We're all experts in something.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So we reach out to the one who does know and we say, "Show me," because what? We can all learn. We can all learn. Okay. We also have to know our other enemy, which is pessimism. "Oh, it has to be perfect," or "Oh, there's no point in even trying, because it's going to fail." And another enemy is pride. Again, it's fed by comparisons, which I've already discussed and it encourages us to hide mistakes. We can't grow unless we are willing to make mistakes, but if we don't allow ourselves to be vulnerable and to reveal our mistakes, then we can't advance. We can't grow. We're stagnant and that's no good for us and it's no good for our students.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, some friends of growth are practicality. This whole idea of growth, there's a lot of literature on it, especially in terms of growth mindset. It's like, "You know, you just have to keep making an effort and just keep trying and trying, and then you can do it." And there's been some criticisms about that, because the bottom line is no matter how much I practice, I will never be able to sing like the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, and I will never be able to sing like the person who's going to play the Queen of Soul, Jennifer Hudson. That's just not happening. I can take all the voice lessons I want. So I need to be practical. So I'm not spending my time trying to develop somebody else's talent instead of my own. I need to practice. Whatever it is, I need to practice. It doesn't make perfect, but it does make better.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

I need to be patient with myself and with others because we are all growing, at least, hopefully. And I need to pace. We have to pace ourselves because we can't just go out full fledged and think we're going to keep going. We have to go at a pace that we can keep, we can maintain, right? Otherwise, we might burn out. So, what are some growth resources? Here are a few. When I say a few, I really do mean just a few because I don't want you to feel inundated. So one of them that I have just come across that Dr. Lisa Rodriguez has shared with me is the Learning Institute. This Learning Institute, it is so awesome. I mean, there are so many presenters and they're all talking about equity and they're all doing the work. It is wonderful. And then we also have a faculty toolkit that was designed by our very own Dr. Lisa Rodriguez, Matt Bidart and Emily Versace. So if you can take a look at those, you will find so many resources.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, those are some resources. Now, growth opportunities, we have many of those. So, we have many things that Title V is doing. So Lisa Amos is our financial manager or financial management Title V coordinator. Lisa is just messy. I can't compare, because she's doing 20 workshops a week and I'm just like, "Oh, man." So I can't compare because that will make me insecure. I can just cheer her on and say, "Go, go, Lisa." Another opportunity is for something that data coaches, faculty coordinator, Tiffany Kuo and I are doing together. So I am the faculty coordinator for DEISA and equity, well, actually, equity and professional development in which I really emphasize DEISA.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

And so, what Tiffany and I are going to do, Dr. Kuo and I, we're combining our resources and we are wanting to come in and meet with the department and help you all to look at your data and see where you are, because here's the thing, we want to grow. We want to get to a new destination, but we can't get there if we don't know where we're starting, right? So that's what Tiffany's data and the work that she's doing with the data coach. It can show you what's the drop rate in your class? Where are students dropping? What's happening? How many are passing? And then we can know what to do. And that's part of what you'll learn with me, or actually what we'll learn together.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

And then the final growth opportunity that I'm really excited to tell you about is the one book, one campus opportunity. So, Octavia Butler's Kindred is the book that we are going to be reading as a campus. And so, what we're going to have, and we're going to have these reading groups. They are great reading groups with the DEISA focus. So I'll be facilitating these groups. All of these concepts that we're talking about, we're going to apply them. So what's the ways that we can grow and that we can be accountable and that we can be restored relationships? And then how do we do that, especially using a DEISA lens? So if you are interested in something like that, please sign up.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

All right. So to be great is to prioritize restoration. To be great is to prioritize restoration. So restoration, a bringing back to the former position or condition or restoring to an unimpaired or improved condition or restitution. But then it's like, what is restitution? So the returning of something to its rightful owner or giving an equivalent for something that was lost. So when we're thinking about what needs to be restored, we see or we learn that damage can occur within the person. Damage can occur. So it can be that I have hurt myself, and that that is me harming me. Damage can also occur between me and others. Maybe I harm you or you harm me, or I harm you all or y'all. Okay. I'm from Texas. Or y'all harm me or we harm y'all or y'all harm us. We're looking at intergroup type of damage. Or maybe it's the organization that harms us, or the institution that hurts us, or our whole society. So all of these are the kinds of damages that can occur and all of these need some type of restoration.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, they haven't, especially on the institutional and societal level. There are many restitutions and restorations that we are still looking for, all right, waiting for reparations or whatnot. We might be waiting a long time, so I guess that pacing comes in handy. Also, damage can occur between you and you. So maybe it's not me, but I'm still harmed when I have to see the two of you, because maybe I care about you. Think about children watching parents fight or between you and them, or between them and you. But again, it's not me. It's just what I'm observing, but I get damaged by carrying this. So what I want you to take a second to do is I want us to reflect. It's not going to be a long reflection, but just to think about what is something that has been depleted in you, taken from you or damaged between you and another that needs to be restored? I want you to just take a minute to think about that. And then what builds up within you the longer it takes for the restoration to occur?

Dr. Mica Stewart:

How many of us are involved in at least one relationship at Mt. SAC that is in need of restoration? Okay. So here are just a few key takeaways in terms of restoration, that unrestored relationships interfere with our ability to be great. They just do, for all the reasons that you all listed. They're draining. They're exhausting. They take our energy from one thing that we have to put it on another. It's hard to move forward when the past has not been addressed, right? Some people are like, "Okay. Let's just move forward. Let's just move forward." It's like, "Well, yeah, but if we don't deal with it, it's just going to keep coming up." Many of us want to restore relationships, but we just don't know how. Sometimes it's not about restoring something to what it used to be, but it's about creating something entirely new, right? We just need to start fresh.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

When we hurt one another, the practice of restorative justice can facilitate healing. And I do want to make one more point, and that is that to restore anything, the parties that are engaged, they have to want to restore and it has to be something that can be reached because if somebody has just been, they're just like, "You know what, I'm just going to keep being the way that I am. I'm just going to keep harming," then there to be no restoration, right? But to the extent that people genuinely want that, then it can happen. To be great is to prioritize empathy. What is empathy? Empathy is the ability to see as, to feel with, to respond to the needs of another human being, right? To see as, so you take the perspective of the other person. To feel with, their pain is your pain. When they experienced something, it might make you say ouch, right? And then the needs of another are something that you respond to. You don't just look at it and say, "Oh yeah, that's pretty bad." If it's within your power, then you do something.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, if you do research on empathy, these names will come up, Paul Ekman and Daniel Goleman, and they have done some great work. Ekman does a lot about how to read empathy and body language. Goleman does a lot about emotional intelligence, which is the ability to understand our own emotions and the emotions of others. In pod, Yolanda Herro and Leanne Greenley do a wonderful workshop on emotional intelligence. So, they're great. I won't take anything away from them, but they're not the first ones to talk about this, right? So if we want to understand empathy, I mean, this is just something that if we look at indigenous perspectives, indigenous people have long understood, centuries before Goleman or Eckerd came forward and talked about empathy, but there's interconnectedness that my wellbeing is tied up in your wellbeing, and that all of us need to be concerned about each other because that's how survival happens.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Okay. So what is empathy? Again, it's been around. African proverbs, it's in there. I am because you are, and because you are, therefore I am. So when I hurt you, I hurt me, right? When we cut off from that, which is what has happened in so much of our country's history, there are some great things about our history, but there are also some really cool things, where we have cut offs from the pain of others, recognizing what we're doing to others. And so, then that has been attempts to take away their humanity and it's taken away the humanity of those who are present. So it's a mutual thing. And so, because it's empathy that makes us human, right?

Dr. Mica Stewart:

I am not a robot. You are not a robot. Let's walk in our humanity so that we can really serve our students. Empathy is so key because if we want to close achievement gaps... But really, that's not even a high enough standard. Closing the achievement gap, yeah, we want to do more than that. If we want students to reach their full potential, then we have to show them that we care and it doesn't take a whole lot. If you really care, you can show it. You can learn how to say hello. You can do certain things that aren't going to take so much from you, but will give so much to our students.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

All right. To be great is to prioritize accountability. Accountability means that we are liable to another. So whether and how we carry out our responsibility, the one to who we are accountable has the ability and afford to sanction us. And they don't just have it, but they actually use it. They actually use that ability and authority. Now, I do want to make one comment. Sanction, a lot of times, again, we think of as negative, but sanction is not inherently negative. It just means a reaction to the way that norms are followed or not followed. So that sanctions can be positive. So it's like, "Wow, we see what you're doing in your classroom. Man, we're going to give you extra money in your paycheck in July." Hello? Right? "We see all that you had to go through. We have empathy for the struggles that you've had. We, as your leaders, are going to be accountable and we're going to make sure that you're taken care of. So we're going to give you an extra thousands of dollars. So thank you to our college and thank you to our negotiation team." Whoo, I am grateful.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

Now, our responsibility is a task or a job we assume or are assigned. Maybe I take it on or maybe on a scientist. But if we come to this college and we say, "I want to be a faculty member at Mt. San Antonio College," then it's our responsibility to make sure that we do it well. I really do feel like growth is truly, truly valued. So what is our responsibility as educators? That as educators, it's our responsibility to teach the students that we have and not the students that we wished that we had. So we can't label the students that we have and put the dunce hat on them and say, "It's your fault that my job is harder than it needs to be." We're here and our students are awesome and wonderful. We just have to take the time to figure out how to meet them.

Dr. Mica Stewart:

One of the things that, again, with restoring relationship and maintaining relationship is that we want to stay away from the blame game, right? Yes, our students do come with a lot of real issues. Instead of playing the blame game, we play the strength game. "Okay. Here's what you're doing right. How can we do more of that?" It's a totally different question, totally different question. So as a leader, then it's our responsibility to take care of. As the college, as a leader, it's their responsibility to take care of us, right? And that's why I'm so glad that we've gotten this option about coming back to campus because a lot of us were not feeling the love, right? We weren't feeling the love. And just as we weren't, our students don't. So, what can we do to be accountable to the wellbeing of our students?

Dr. Mica Stewart:

So the last one is truth-telling. To be great, we must tell the truth to those we lead. We don't want like being lied to, so we want to make sure we don't lie to others. We want to tell the truth to those in power, and most importantly, we want to tell the truth to ourselves.

Christina Barsi:

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