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'It Has to Be About Relationships'

09.18.2008 | Students, Service and Giving

In Jim Collins' popular 2004 management tome *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't*, a critical component of organizational success is "getting the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus."

Dayton City Manager and 1998 UD management graduate Rashad Young has made this concept a pillar of his administration since taking the helm of his hometown in December 2006 at the age of 30.

"In order for me to be successful, I have 2,000 people who work here, and I cannot be everywhere -- I want people who are smarter than me, who know more than I do and who are just as driven, passionate and committed to this community as I am," said Young, who earned an MBA from UD in 2004. "Those are the criteria I use in finding the right people with the same values in alignment, integrity, accountability, ethics and honesty."

He's got high expectations, and he strives for constant improvement.

"I am not overly exasperated about when people make mistakes," he said. "What I value is integrity. I cannot tolerate a lack of effort, a lack of caring, being disingenuous, or mistakes that are the result of a lack of adherence to the norms and values I expect from senior management. But if people are more upset about a mistake than I am and do not want to make it again, I have a good idea they are the right people."

Like the late Joe Belle, the longtime director of residential services at UD, Young places great value in community and consensus.

"As a city manager, I am to some extent a CEO," he said. "But my ability to influence, direct, make things happen in the community is dependent on my ability to build consensus between people. It has to be about relationships. Everyone has a voice. ... Sometimes these groups agree, but more often they do not. You have to sift through all the competing interests to bring people together through partnership and collaboration."

To do that, he balances his own wisdom with that of others.

"It's a combination of my personality, my experiences and learning by watching people who do it right and who do it wrong," he said. "If we handle something incorrectly, history has shown us that it can tear a community apart, causing sometimes deep divisions along racial or socioeconomic lines."

He turns often to his mentor, former Deputy City Manager William Gillispie, with whom he worked in his UD internships as a W.S. McIntosh Scholar.

"Community leadership and servant leadership I have learned by watching him and seeing his passion for this community," Young said. "The best advice I received from William Gillispie in my early career was that people will criticize and challenge the decisions you make. ... Ultimately, he said to do what you know is right. At the end of the day, that's how you sleep at night."

He's also committed to youth in the community and to UD students, particularly minorities. He speaks at leadership conferences at UD and has been a mentor to several UD students, including a current engineering student who graduated from Young's alma mater, Meadowdale High School. They're in touch at least several times a month.

"Service is about giving back to your community in the Marianist tradition," he said. "It's my responsibility as a community citizen. Here, I get to do that every day."

— Maureen Schlagen