

»Embrace lifelong learning«

Guest Professor Waheeda Lillevik encourages students to never stop learning



Waheeda Lillevik, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Management at the School of Business of The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), USA. In November and December 2018, she visited Pforzheim Business School as a guest professor and lectured about Leadership. In the interview with student reporter Lia Sophie Wilmes, she reveals what is needed to be a good leader and why leadership is such a sought-after topic.

BY LIA SOPHIE WILMES

Mrs. Lillevik, you are teaching “Leadership” here – a topic that is very important in today’s working environment.

Yes, I think leadership is one of the most important and most sought-after topics. Even if you’re not going to be a leader in the traditional sense of a CEO, you will probably still lead people, unless you are a one-person operation. So it is important to know the behaviours and concepts of leadership as any employee working anywhere. This includes understanding what needs to be done to get people to help you, work for you, and be efficient and loyal.

What do you think are the three most important competencies a good leader should have?

One of the many important competencies is empathy. Being able to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes is crucial. Before being a leader, you probably were a follower, and in getting to that stage, sometimes we forget what had inspired us to follow a particular person or what mistakes we made along the way. Another competency is being adaptable and flexible. The world we live in is constantly changing and only very little is predictable. There is a lot of disruption, numerous new technologies, innovations and changes. Leaders need to be able to adapt to all this. The third competency is being knowledgeable in more than just your business. Leaders need to understand everything: politics, laws, different cultures ... This goes back to the ever-changing world. It’s not sufficient anymore to just read the newest business book; it is necessary to read the newspaper every day and to think about the perspectives of other disciplines such as sociology, history or anthropology. Business does not occur in a vacuum.

You’ve worked at The College of New Jersey, a university based in New Jersey’s capital Trenton, for 11 years now. What is special about it?

TCNJ is located on a beautiful Georgian style campus, so it’s very pretty. But what’s more important is that we are a great community. At its core TCNJ is a liberal arts college with a focus on interdisciplinary studies. Every student chooses a major and must attend at least one course in another area, for example science or arts. This approach also contributes to the leadership concept of knowing more than just your narrow area. Our students are well-rounded. I think it is a very good concept. In terms of the size we are similar to Pforzheim. You know the students and they know you.

With TCNJ and your experience from Pforzheim Business School in mind, how do US students differ from German students?

First of all I want to thank my German students for always applauding me after my lectures - that is a very nice gesture! US students don’t do that, so when I go back home I’m sure I will miss that. Actually I don’t think there are many other differences between US and German students. As university education is very expensive in the US I think that the students are really motivated to attend classes, but my German students are also very engaged. US students also love the flipped classroom model and other sorts of experiential classes, they don’t want lectures alone.

Is there an advice you would give students in today’s fast-changing world?

You’re always learning. It doesn’t have to be formal learning in a university, but I think people should constantly pay attention and look at everything occurring around them. The corollary of the fact that you are always learning is that you have to get used to being uncomfortable. Even though it is hard, you have to dive in, because while there might be pain, the learnings are fantastic in the end. Either way you will learn until you die, so embrace it rather than be afraid of it.

The **College of New Jersey (TCNJ)** is a liberal arts college located in the suburbs of New Jersey’s capital Trenton. TCNJ was rated the number one public institution in New Jersey several times and is recognized as one of the best public universities in the Northern US. TCNJ’s School of Business received its initial AACSB accreditation in 1997 and was fully re-accredited in 2017. On TCNJ’s campus students have the chance to see shows at two theatres or hear a performance at the music hall. Students can also get involved with over 150 student organizations at TCNJ.

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