



Arizona Department of Education

Office of *Career and Technical Education*

Welcome to the 50th Annual ACTEAZ/ ADE AZ CTE Summer Conference!

This year's theme is EMPOWERING LIVES and Strengthening Arizona's Workforce, a beautiful sentiment for the summer conference's golden anniversary.

In thinking about my greeting to you, I remembered that I was asked a few months ago to reflect on my "Why;" the driving force that propels me toward the work I do, and I thought it appropriate with this year's theme.

Each morning as I approach 100 West 15th Avenue, the building where I work, my path takes me past a bus stop for which two, three, or even four homeless people have sheltered for the night. Traveling closer to the reflective glass-covered building that houses the Career and Technical Education unit at the Arizona Department of Education, I sometimes wait for another homeless person to cross the street, towing their entire possessions in a wagon or shopping cart. Occasionally, I will see another who is the beneficiary of someone's good grace, as the homeless soul's clothing is relatively clean and new, thinking to myself how it must feel to have shed what most likely had been worn for months or even years.

I imagine what their destiny may have been if they had been EMPOWERED to gain experience, learn a skill, or cultivate a talent. What might their world be like if they had been EMPOWERED to enrich their capacity to build or create? How EMPOWERED they may be if they had had the opportunity to be involved in career and technical education?

In all honesty, they may have had a CTE experience. Furthermore, I am not naïve enough to know that CTE can eliminate all the challenges of mental health maladies and poverty in our communities. But I am confident that if they had been EMPOWERED through CTE, how much different their reality could have been.

My heart aches for the underprivileged. Watching those less fortunate around me tugs at my "why." How can I help others to reach their potential? What can I do to increase their station in life. Why do I champion CTE?

The fact is, whether student or teacher, CTE brings purpose, self-worth, a reason, and hope. CTE finds a way into the souls of those involved to bring value and relevancy, not only in a particular vocation but to the point where it EMPOWERS all of us to serve, move forward, and contribute to the greater good around us.

Recently, I read an article in Big Think, an online periodical in which Barry Conchie and Sarah Dalton wrote "What JFK learned about leadership from a NASA janitor" - August 27, 2024.

They wrote:

Tom Horne, Superintendent of Public Instruction

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"When President Kennedy visited NASA at Cape Canaveral in 1962, he noticed a worker clearing leaves with a broom. Never one to miss an opportunity, he went to the employee and introduced himself with a question: "Hey, I'm Jack Kennedy. What are you doing?" Anyone who works in aviation will tell you that the presence of debris in the vicinity of accelerating aircraft can be destructive. The backdraft from engine thrust can suck the debris into the engines and cause catastrophic failure. This was the most obvious and logical answer to the president's question, but the employee looked back at Kennedy and said, "I'm part of the team that's going to put a man on the moon."

"Research into employee engagement by Gallup captured what came easily to JFK: "Does the mission and purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?" In asking the question, Gallup realized that it wasn't knowledge of the organization's mission and purpose that is important (although that's a good starting point), it's that employees can express this knowledge through the value they create in their own job. Sure, the employee at NASA is sweeping up leaves, but his value is much greater. He sees his job as critical to the mission of NASA, and he just happens to contribute by sweeping up leaves.

Now, sure, the authors of "What JFK learned about leadership from a NASA janitor" articulate the importance of how important it is that each of us create value in the job we do. But, I think there is another point to be made. The "why" we do what we do, small or big, started when we felt EMPOWERED with the belief that we are making a difference. With CTE we are EMPOWERED. Confident and in control of our lives. Giving all of us the skills, the authority, or the freedom to do something. Giving us meaning.

Seeing the morning routine of those on the street each morning makes me realize why my job has meaning and value. It's my "Why." Sure, the "what," the "how," and the "when" I do my job have value. They comfort me in the belief that this makes me productive. But when it comes to "why" am I here rather than somewhere else?" It is because I believe the work I do can EMPOWER others.

I don't know if you are part of a team that is going to put a person on Mars, but I do know you are part of a team EMPOWERING students to learn a skill, develop a craft, and discover a passion. EMPOWERING them with opportunities other than simply waiting for a set of new clothes or looking for a warm, safe place to sleep for the night. EMPOWERING them to think forward. EMPOWERING them to solve complex problems. EMPOWERING them to find value in their lives. You are their launch pad, bringing value through CTE. You are an important part of EMPOWERING LIVES.

"Thank you" for all you do.



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