

Reflections from WT Podcast Transcript

Men of Honor

- Randy Ray: Welcome to episode number seven, Reflections from WT the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. My name is Randy Ray and I am the director, broadcast engineering here on the campus West Texas A&M, and once again I'm honored to be joined by the 11th President of West Texas A&M Dr. Walter Wendler.
- Dr. Wendler: Randy, it's good to be here. Always good to visit.
- Randy Ray: Always good to chit chat.
- Dr. Wendler: Yes sir.
- Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, maybe I notice this more than other people but it seems like WT has been in the news a lot lately.
- Dr. Wendler: There are a lot of things going on. We've had a number of things of events and announcements. I think since the last time we talked, we had the gala, celebrating the completion of WT125 from the Panhandle to the world, which is our long range strategic plan. And we filled up the biggest the ballroom they had at Embassy Suites downtown in Amarillo, there were 500 people in attendance. We had a number of very fine speakers, Kel Seliger was there, Four Price was there, of course Chancellor Sharp was there and chairman of the board, Charles Schwartz was there. So we had a very nice event. And then many, many local dignitaries and leaders, to celebrate the conclusion of this long range plan for West Texas A&M University. And I think it's, I've done a number of plans, I think this is the best one that I've ever, in a sense, engaged in. It was, the participation levels were very good, people took it seriously. And I think we have a document that casts a vision for West Texas A&M University that will live for the roughly 15 years between now and 2035 when we reach our 125th anniversary.
- Randy Ray: Yeah, and I think we're already off to a great start with that. Some things that I've noticed in the news along with that is how great our basketball program's being doing lately.
- Dr. Wendler: Yeah.
- Randy Ray: I mean we've won a lot of stuff.
- Dr. Wendler: We have.
- Randy Ray: We've continued to win.
- Dr. Wendler: We have both men's and women's, of course the women lost recently, the men are still going and we'll see what happens. But we're excited about it.

Randy Ray: Yeah, and also the Amarillo Center. That's a fantastic facility.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, the Amarillo Center and Harrington Hall down there opened up and we had the ribbon cutting for that, and again, Mayor Nelson from Amarillo was there and she's so supportive of what we're trying to do here at WT and I think they are genuinely pleased that we are downtown. You know we have over 300 students now, nearly 400 but I'd rather estimate conservatively rather than in a sense of expand or brag or something. But there's almost 400 students there and our intention is to move our nursing program down there, which is one of the best in the state of Texas. We have a 97% pass rate on the NCLEX, which is the nursing and licensing examination. And there's only two other schools in the state that are higher than that and we're in the top ten percent nationally. You can't much get much higher than 97%. You and I, when we went to high school, we got 100%, for example.

Randy Ray: I'd be very happy with a 97%.

Dr. Wendler: I would too.

Randy Ray: And I don't see a whole lot of those.

Dr. Wendler: So we move the nursing program downtown, we'll have roughly 600 students, maybe almost 700 and a lot of faculty and staff will be down there every day. The Dean's office will move downtown. That will be his permanent home, downtown. So we're excited about all that.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: It's going to be a real presence.

Randy Ray: I have had some folks stop me and say, "Can we come visit?" And I say, "Yeah, the campus, the one in Canyon, the one in Amarillo, is always open to visitors." Don't you agree with that?

Dr. Wendler: I absolutely agree with it. And people can come visit anytime. And I will tell you this, if someone comes to visit and are not warmly welcomed, they should call me and that won't happen again. I think it's very important that we open our doors to the public. We're trying to serve the people of the top 26 counties of Texas, and beyond. But our first goal is here. And the likelihood of someone just dropping in is higher with people that are local than people that are far away.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Normally if you're coming from a long distance, you make appointments.

Randy Ray: And I think it, I want to encourage people, not if you have a child that's getting ready to go to college, even if you're just interested in what we're doing,

because like you say, we are the heart and soul of Texas Panhandle, so I would invite everyone, any and everyone to come visit us.

Dr. Wendler: I agree with you. We have ... Here's an example, and it grieved me to hear this. We have 40 students from a local high school, a big high school and it was not in Canyon, but it was a good sized high school here in the Panhandle, come to campus, there were 40 of them and I was talking to them, kind of sharing with them about WT and so on, and I asked how many of those 40 students had been to the campus before. And quite frankly, I expected half or more to raise their hand. Four students raised their hand. And the other 36, and it may not have been 40, it might have been 30, it might have been 45 but it was around 40 because the tables were in groups of ten and they were nearly full and there were five or six. So it was close to 40. Four had been to the campus. And I told them, I said, "Look, I don't want to embarrass you or diminish you in any way but I'm going to tell you that you should have come to this campus before just to see what a university looks like."

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: This is a nice university. And I've been in a lot of them. And it's a nice campus. Just to get a feel for what it's like.

Randy Ray: Absolutely. Like you say, we have a beautiful campus and I believe this too, when you are looking for a school to go to, it doesn't take long to figure out if that's the place that you should be or not. I have found that ten minutes, you're going to know if that's your school or not. And I think that if you come to WT you're going to find that this is your school.

Dr. Wendler: I had a family one time that came from Tampa, Florida. I met them at a new student orientation. No! It was a new student visitation time on the campus. This was two summers ago. And it was a family of three people and their plan was, they flew to Amarillo from Tampa Bay, and they had a plan to visit eight schools. This was the first on the list. I don't know where else they were going to go. And the father told me his son was on the campus for a half hour and he said, "Dad, we might as well change our trip. I'm not going anywhere but here."

Randy Ray: This is it. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: And I'm not making that up. That is a true story. And that's one. Not everybody feels that way. But you're right. A youngster and their family, a young student, I shouldn't call them a youngster but to me that's a lot of people. The student, potential student, future student and their family will make a decision based on the people they meet, the attention they receive and the sense of purpose of the place. And at WT, that comes out good almost every time.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I think we have a very welcoming campus and we have a welcoming faculty. And I just think students here are outgoing and friendly too.

Dr. Wendler: I agree with you.

Randy Ray: So, lot of things going on in the news. One of the things that I wanted to talk about is a picture I saw of you just a few days ago, with the Presidents from all the area community colleges.

Dr. Wendler: Oh, this is, I think you're talking about the Destination WT-

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: -Program. And we're very proud of it. As everyone knows that's read anything that I've written or heard me speak, I am a strong proponent of community colleges to help reduce the cost of a college education. We can't cut our budgets much more than we already do. We are very efficient. We're the third most efficient university in the state of Texas, for example, regarding the cost for instruction and administrative costs, also. Very low. And, after we've done those things, we have to have faculty, we have to have staff, we have to have facilities. We need those things and they need to be of high quality or we can't deliver a good, quality experience, both facilities and people. People first always. So what I say to people is, "Look, if you have to borrow in the first two years, go to a community college." And the ones that we focused on so far, and we're getting ready to start to expand this, but have been our three local community colleges. Amarillo College, where Russell Lowery-Hart is the president, Frank Phillips College, Jud Hicks is the president there, and Clarendon College in Clarendon is a fine school, Robert Riza is the president there.

Dr. Wendler: And our goal is to make sure that we are able to get students into WT, as transfer students, with the least wasted hours, hours over what's required for transfer and what will apply to their degree programs here. So basically, when a student declares their major in the community college, we are then granted access to their records, not everybody on campus but advisors and they can fill out ... When they put their courses in that they're taking at all of those colleges, we simultaneously start to create automatically a degree plan for them at WT based on their declared major. So they know exactly how everything's going to fit together. I wrote a piece a few weeks ago on how important advising is. And this will help us do the best job we can, advising. And it sounds simple enough, you know, "Why didn't you do this 20 years ago?" Well the fact of the matter is that it's hard to do because of the FERPA laws. We're not allowed access to those records.

Dr. Wendler: But we've become essentially partners with them, took us awhile to do it, but we have MOUs, memorandum of understanding, with each of those colleges that allows us to be partners. And I think the presidents, the three gentleman, Russell and Jud and Robert, all believe this is a really important step in making a seamless transition from the community college to West Texas A&M University.

Randy Ray: I love that. Alright, well we're going to take a break and when we come back we're going to talk to a very honorable person. We'll be back right after this.

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Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. For this segment I'm going to be talking to a young man from Houston, Texas. His name is Allan Baltazar and he is instrumental and a big part of starting a new organization on campus called Men of Honor. Allan, welcome, tell me a little bit about Men of Honor.

Allan Baltazar: So Men of Honor is a new organization that will be starting up. And it will be focusing on mentoring, influencing and encouraging it's members to be successful students here at WT. And we also are going to encourage them to be good men outside as well.

Randy Ray: Yeah. How often do you meet?

Allan Baltazar: It's a new organization. So it's barely starting so we currently haven't had any meetings. So that's like still getting processed.

Randy Ray: Yeah. So what do you encourage young men to do? I mean, when you say to be a Man of Honor, what do you mean by that?

Allan Baltazar: So, to me, an honorable man is just being respectful to others, just as you want them to be respectful to you as well. And just being a good person and doing good for everyone

Randy Ray: Yeah. So, Allan, tell me a little about your background. You're from Houston, Texas.

Allan Baltazar: Yes, sir.

Randy Ray: Are you the first in your family to go to college?

Allan Baltazar: I am. I am the first. Yeah.

Randy Ray: What made you want to come to WT?

Allan Baltazar: Well one of my first reasons was because it was, the price, it was compared to other colleges, it was the best choice I could make. And I wanted to try to and

have a college experience, as you could say, kind of away from home and see how well I could do.

Randy Ray: And you are a long way from home.

Allan Baltazar: Yes, sir.

Randy Ray: Yeah. What was your first impression when you came on campus? I'm interested to know that.

Allan Baltazar: I thought it was a really beautiful campus actually. I thought it was a really nice campus. It looked really nice and it was really welcoming, faculty and staff and all the other students here as well, they're really friendly and it's like a big family.

Randy Ray: Why did you pick criminal justice?

Allan Baltazar: Well I picked criminal justice because I've always felt like I belong there. When I was younger, I lived in not that good areas, as you could say. And it kind of influenced me to want to be that good person and make a change in my community, to help them as well.

Randy Ray: So what do you want to do when you graduate?

Allan Baltazar: When I graduate I plan on attending a police academy either in Dallas or in Houston. And I, as soon as I finish the academy and become a police officer. I want to work my way up to becoming a homicide detective.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Allan, we need more people like you. People that are willing to go to college, people that are willing to work hard and people that are willing to start organizations encouraging other people to have honor. I think that word 'honor' sometimes is hard to define, but it's really important. Dr. Wendler, what does being a Man of Honor mean to you?

Dr. Wendler: Well that is the \$64,000 question. Allan, I'm going to tell you, I visited a lot of high schools up here, as a matter of fact, all the high schools in the Texas Panhandle, and they're a long way from Houston. And I was at one of the high schools and a young man stood up, happened to be an African American, and he asked me, he said, "What will WT do to help make me a better man?" He didn't say man of honor, he just said better man. And he said, I want to be a good husband, I want to be a good father, I want to be a good citizen. And when I heard that, it almost made me cry. I thought, my goodness, if we had groups of students that felt that way, what a great university WT would be. You know, we can teach calculus all day long, I can teach people, not me but we can teach people how to diagram a sentence or how to differentiate an equation or do engineering problems or be a good nurse. But if they're not People of Honor, I'll just say People of Honor, we haven't done well by them.

Dr. Wendler: And, unfortunately, too many universities walk away from that. They're afraid to even address it. So I am so proud of you and these other students who are voicing the concern that we need to be Men of Honor, People of Honor. And I think it's especially important for men. We hear a lot about all kinds of things on college campuses going on, Title Nine issues, sexual assaults, all these kinds of things. And I just think when people begin to desire to respect each other in a very fundamental way, that is a, it's essential to, I think, to being an educated human being. I don't care how well somebody can write or calculate or how well they can understand what they read and so on. If they're not honorable people, we haven't done our job. So I really would encourage you, and I've heard a little bit about the organization, never talked like this about it. I really encourage you to be faithful to it and strong to it and really get the word out because we need more and more of that.

Dr. Wendler: I know, because we talked a little bit, you're the older brother in your family.

Allan Baltazar: Yes. Yes, sir.

Dr. Wendler: And I will tell you, that doesn't, you don't have an option, you have to be a Man of Honor to the rest of your siblings.

Allan Baltazar: Indeed.

Dr. Wendler: And that will create tremendous pride in your mother and your father and that's a wonderful thing. In the end, no matter how good a cop you are, you want your family to be proud of you and that's honor, I think. So I'm very excited for you. I think it's a great-

Randy Ray: Yeah, I am too. And I'm very proud of you. One of the things I love about teaching in college is I really believe that the years at university are really crossroads for any one person. I look back at myself and I, I did my undergraduate here at WT. I left here a different person. I left here a different person. And Allan, don't you- Are you a freshman?

Allan Baltazar: Yes, sir. Yes.

Randy Ray: Do you see already how this is a life-changing place?

Allan Baltazar: Yes, definitely. I definitely do.

Randy Ray: What's your favorite thing about WT?

Allan Baltazar: My favorite thing about WT is just how close it is. You know how everybody here is sort of like a family, as I stated before. I like how it's just a really friendly community. Everybody's involved.

Randy Ray: Yeah, well speaking as a faculty member on the campus, one that teaches, I would love to have more of you in my classroom. So I appreciate you being here, and I appreciate you being on campus, and I appreciate this organization. And I appreciate you being here today. We traditionally kind of wrap up all of our episodes with what I call 'curve ball'. You ready for your curve ball today?

Dr. Wendler: Who? Me or Allan?

Randy Ray: Yeah. I'm going to throw it to both of you.

Dr. Wendler: Okay.

Randy Ray: This one's not too tough. What's your favorite part of the day?

Allan Baltazar: My favorite part of the day is currently when I go back to my dorm and get ready for bed.

Randy Ray: Bed time. There you go.

Allan Baltazar: Bed time of course.

Dr. Wendler: Here's a stark contrast for you, my favorite part of the day is when my alarm goes off at 4:15 and I get up, I happen to read the bible in the morning and take quiet time. And that's what I like to do, but I also start to think and some days there's precious little of that. But I try to think and think about the day and what I'm going to do. And then I try to get to the office by six. And that time from about 4:15 until about 8 o'clock in the morning is a bright spot of my day.

Randy Ray: Wow. You know, I only recognize one 4:15 in the day, and that one is not it.

Allan Baltazar: Yeah.

Randy Ray: Well looks like we're out of time. Thank both of you for joining me today. And thank you for joining us for Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. If you would like more information about West Texas A&M University, go to our website www.wtamu.edu. We'll see you next time.