

Reflections from WT Podcast

Episode 2 Transcript

Speakers:

Randy Ray, Director of Broadcast Engineering and Associate Lecturer of Media Communication

Dr. Walter V. Wendler, President of West Texas A&M University

Chandler Huddleston, West Texas A&M University Student Body President

[Music playing]

Randy Ray: Well, welcome back everybody. Welcome to episode two of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. I'm excited to be back for another episode and I am joined today by the 11th president of West Texas A&M, Dr. Walter Wendler.

Dr. Wendler: Randy.

Randy Ray: Welcome back, sir.

Dr. Wendler: Randy, it's good to be here. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you. It's always fun.

Randy Ray: Always fun to talk to you, too. So a lot of energy on campus, as always. I was gonna mention to you and talk to you just a little bit. One of the things that I love about working on a college campus is the energy. Don't you agree?

Dr. Wendler: Oh, I do agree. The young people, and I know we're going to talk to Chandler here a few minutes, but the young people at West Texas A&M university to me embody the very best of American youth and the things that go on in their minds and what they're interested in and their commitment to progress. And I just can't say enough about the students at WT and maybe the word energy captures all that's important.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I just love walking across campus. We have a beautiful campus and just walking across it, talking to students, you can't help but feel good.

Dr. Wendler: We had recently a president's list reception and the president's list are students who make a 4.0 GPA and they're a very bright group of energetic students to talk with and they're committed to doing good things and they're a joy. They're a joy to be around. When I transferred to Texas A&M from a community college in New York, the second semester I was there, I was so proud of myself. I made the dean's list and I called my father in New York and said, "Dad, I made the dean's list." And his response was, "Which one?" But anyway, people take pride in achievement here. There they work hard and when they're rewarded or recognized for that, it's very satisfying. And I like it.

Randy Ray: I agree with you and I also, I was talking to one of my classes about this yesterday. I don't think that we give that generation enough credit. I think they

are hard workers and I think they are going to be an excellent group of leaders for our society.

Dr. Wendler: I agree with you. I think this current generation takes it on the chin and I don't think they should. The students that I come in contact with on a regular basis are hardworking. They're committed to purpose. They have a set of values that I think are generally admirable and when I make these general pronouncements, of course it doesn't always apply all the time to everyone. There's always somebody that's going to be the exception to the rule, but by and large, this group of students is hardworking and they're determined and they get down to business.

Randy Ray: I agree with you. And they are more focused than we say they are sometimes. Let's talk about some things going on campus. We have some exciting things coming up.

Dr. Wendler: We do. There's a lot going on in the coming month, in November. We have the veteran's memorial day dedication on November 9th that begins, I think, at about 10:30 in the morning. People should be looking for that.

I can't remember the full title, but the Army Band from Fort Sill, Oklahoma is going to be here for that. Yeah. Oh, it's going to be very cool. And the city of Canyon has a huge flag that they put on one of their fire trucks. They're going to bring that and we're buying thousands of flags. We're going to cook hot dogs and we're going to make a day and celebrate the opening of this veteran's memorial. We're very proud of it. Back to our students in this current generation. People say, well, they're not interested in these kinds of things, but when we did the groundbreaking on this, we had a good turnout of students and we're having free hotdogs at this one, so I expect the numbers to go up a little bit.

Randy Ray: Yeah, free food. You'll get them there.

Dr. Wendler: Free food. Like me, I go out when there's free food, you know, I'm always there ready to partake.

Randy Ray: One of the things I love about WT, I think WT has always embraced our veterans and I think we continue to do that.

Dr. Wendler: Oh, I think so too. Leo Reed has done a great job of that. We have hundreds of veterans from active military, and it's a great way to get an education. I would like to encourage more veterans while they're enlisted to enroll in one of the community colleges that is available to them and to articulate courses for study when they get out of the military. And I think most people on a four year enlistment could actually finish a community college degree. So, they would leave as a veteran with a community college degree. And if that was the case, WT would be there with open arms to welcome them here, because we want to welcome transfer students.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I don't know if you're aware of this, but one of my coworkers here in the communication department is actually deployed right now and serving in Africa. So we're shorthanded, but that's okay. We will fill in the gap until he gets back.

Dr. Wendler: Well, and see, that's one of the wonderful things about WT for me, there is a level of patriotism and appreciation for national service when people put themselves in harm's way and so on, that is fairly widespread across the campus. And I find that maybe because it lines up with my values, but I find that to be very ... it's rewarding to see that. It's not like that on every college campus.

Randy Ray: No, I think a lot of that's reflective of our culture here in the panhandle.

Dr. Wendler: I would agree with you and we need to, you know, we're in the process of putting the finishing touches on our long range strategic plan and over and over and over in that plan, we emphasize the importance of, I'll just call them panhandle values and the impact they have on this university. And they make our university distinctive. You don't get that at the University of Houston. It's a fine university. You don't bring panhandle values into the campus at the University of Houston or the University of Texas. It's different.

Randy Ray: Were you surprised that the culture at all when you moved here?

Dr. Wendler: Oh, yeah. I have to say just a little bit. I mean, I'd been here a number of times when Russell Long was the president because I worked in the system office. I was the vice chancellor for planning and I came up here and made a number of trips and so on. So, I had some sense of what it was like. And I know quite a few west Texans. Some from Pampa for example.

Randy Matson who was a gold star-

Randy Ray: Gold medal winner.

Dr. Wendler: He won the gold medal in the Olympics was the executive director for the Association of Former Students. That's what they call the alumni association, former students, at Texas A&M University for years. And he represented everything that I see in the Texas panhandle. This man was a three star varsity athlete in three sports at Texas A&M University. Football, basketball, and track. He could throw a shot put. Won a gold medal doing it in the Olympics.

But in front of everything he did was a level of humility where he put himself in the back seat. That was absolutely remarkable. And I'm thankful to say that there are a lot of Randy Matsons up here. They may not win that gold medal, but they are committed to doing a good job, working hard and not always seeking glory or recognition for what they've done. And I like that.

Randy Ray: I totally agree. I tell people the best thing about the Texas panhandle to people.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. I would agree with you.

Randy Ray: And I believe that. Do you know anything about the World War I centennial display at the library that's going on?

Dr. Wendler: No, but it's up and running. And I've glimpsed at it when I was over there for something else, but I haven't studied it, but I know it's an important display. I think it's especially important for our students now.

This generation that we were talking about, who I think are interested in history and kind of situating themselves in the bigger picture, but these world wars, that our fathers experienced, either directly or indirectly are falling out of the lexicon or the vocabulary of all of our students because they're so far past and we have the skirmishes now, these challenges in the Middle East and so on and so forth and in other parts of the world, but it's not like the world wars which captured everyone's attention. So I think in familiarizing current students with those global conflicts is a very important thing to do because we can degrade into that again.

Randy Ray: Yeah. And I love the fact that our library does things like that. It's just another great facility that we have on campus. And another great facility that I'm excited about is the Amarillo Center.

Dr. Wendler: Randy, I'm excited about that one too and as you know, the intention was to open that for the fall semester. We got a little behind with it. Now, we will open it in January for the spring semester and it should be completely finished.

It's going to be a first class facility and people may remember the Amarillo Center from the '50s or '60s, not in the building it's in, but we've had opportunities for people to study downtown, but this is different now because we are housing whole programs down there. Social work will be down there. Some of the graduate programs in education, speech and language clinic will be down there. And they will be, start to finish, those programs at the Amarillo Center. So those students will be downtown. That will be the faculty's home down there. And I think it's going to be an excellent opportunity for us to be in the center of the city of Amarillo.

Randy Ray: And we look for that to open in the spring.

Dr. Wendler: Spring. Yes, sir. In January, right after the first of the year, we should be ... We'll start moving in probably just before the holiday break and then we'll be in there in January.

Randy Ray: Exciting. Very exciting. We are going to take a break and we will be back in just about 60 seconds. And we're going to talk to a very special guest. We'll be back in just a minute.

KWTS Announcer: Are you looking to expose your business to a new audience? Become a KWTS underwriter. KWTS broadcasts over nine counties and on the worldwide web. As an underwriter, you get a radio spot telling listeners about your business. This spot plays 35 times every semester. If you sponsor a special show on the station, they'll talk about you on air too, and it's a tax write off for you.

By underwriting KWTS, you're partnering with a national award winning program and helping students become outstanding media professionals. Visit WTAMU.edu/KWTS for more information.

Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. I didn't introduce myself earlier, I don't think, but my name is Randy Ray. I am the director of broadcast engineering on campus and I am honored right now to talk to two different presidents here on the university campus. I've been talking to the university president Dr. Wendler and we're now joined by student body president, Chandler Huddleston. Chandler, welcome. Good to have you here, sir.

Chandler Huddleston: I'm glad to be here.

Randy Ray: Exciting times for you. A lot of things going on. You have a lot of things on your plate. Tell me about governor Greg Abbott. And he recently appointed you to something. Tell us about that.

Chandler Huddleston: Yes, sir. I was appointed to serve on the Texas Juvenile Justice Advisory Board. And so what that is, is it's a great way to serve the state of Texas and serve our up and coming generation of youth. So what I will be doing is I will be serving as an advisor to the actual justice board, to talk about policies, how can we better serve the students that are maybe at risk of going through the juvenile detention system?

Or if a student is in the juvenile detention system, how can we serve them and how can we make sure that this isn't a constant thing and this isn't, you know, a road that they're continually going down, but we can actually provide support and aid to kind of have a transformation and attitude and in just, you know, overall lifestyle.

Randy Ray: How was that connected with you being student body president? Is that how the governor came to know you?

Chandler Huddleston: The way that that happened is I had applied to be the student regent of the Texas A&M university system. And just through that process, I made it relatively far in the process and I networked with some people in the governor's appointment office and just kind of, you know, one thing led to another there and a couple conversations later I had applied for this board and here we are now and it's something that I'm really excited ... It's a role I'm excited to have and excited to serve in.

Randy Ray: Chandler, do you have aspirations to be a politician?

Chandler Huddleston: No.

Randy Ray: Really?

Chandler Huddleston: That's not right on ... Not on the current.

Randy Ray: What do you want to do? What do you want to do?

Chandler Huddleston: My end goal would be to be back in higher education. I have loved WT so much and the process of growth that WT has given me and I just see that and I see it in the lives of almost every student here and I want to be a part of that. I want to be able to give that back to students, you know, in front of me and that's the end goal is to be somewhere in higher education just because it's where I think I've flourished and it's just a place that I love so much.

Randy Ray: I tell you what, WT gets in your blood. My dad dropped me off at Jared Hall back in 1980 and he said back then, "I'm going to give you a semester," and it's what? 32 years later and I'm still here. So.

Chandler Huddleston: It's a special place for sure. Yeah.

Randy Ray: So what is it like? What does it mean to be student body president?

Chandler Huddleston: So I would say one of my main job descriptions is to be the voice of the student body and you don't get that without being an active listener. So, I think the most important job description that I have is to just interact with students. I mean, primary goal number one for me is to interact with students on a daily basis and just get ideas, get inputs, thoughts, concerns because that's how I can take those inputs and then essentially transformed those into ideas and go into meetings with a more informed stance so that I can act on behalf of the students here.

Randy Ray: I'm going to ask you both the same question. If you could tell me in one sentence what your job is, could you do that? Dr. Wendler, you go first. One sentence.

Dr. Wendler: I was hoping you'd ask Chandler to go first so I could kind of copy him. In one job ... In one sentence, rather it is to help lead WT to a brighter future and that requires many different tasks, period.

Randy Ray: There you go. Chandler, you're up.

Chandler Huddleston: I think I'm just going to go with a simple sentence here and that is just to represent and serve the student body of WT. When it's all broken down, that's the most important part I think of my job.

Randy Ray: All right. Here's another. I'm going to ask you both two questions. I want you both to tell me what the favorite part about your job is and what the least favorite part. The part you don't like too much. What is that? I'll let Chandler go first this time.

Dr. Wendler: There you go.

Chandler Huddleston: All right. So my favorite part of the job is I think I'm basically just going to go, you know, one side of the coin versus the other here. My favorite part of the job is interacting with students and getting changes that, you know, that I hear proposed and being able to see those put into action.

And then my least favorite part of the job is when somebody suggests something to me and I'm not able to make that happen and I'm not able maybe to deliver on exactly what was wanted there. And so the best part of the job is you know, being able to deliver and help students in every way that I can. And the least part is just if that, if that duty of care there is broken.

Randy Ray: Are you sure you don't want to be a politician because that's right up a politician's alley. Dr. Wendler.

Dr. Wendler: I want to ask Chandler one question, too. Point one, to your first response there that to engage good ideas that you think have value and then see them implemented. Can you give us an example of one that you've had that has in a sense your fingerprints on it, where you engaged it, worked with the students to develop it and then forwarded it up to the university? Just an example of that?

Chandler Huddleston: Yeah, so last year actually we took a look at our student government endowment and this is something that had already been in the works, but once we looked at it and it was a Senator Arne Van Mourik, and I, we looked at it and we said, you know, this isn't at its full potential here and if there's anything that is unanimous across the board that all students want, that's scholarships and money.

So we thought, okay, well, let's look at this and see what we can do to help students. And actually, we were able to pass a bill through student government and bring it up to Randy Rikel and it's going to slowly be implemented. It's going to generate over the course of 30 years, it's going to generate \$5 plus million dollars in scholarships and this is new scholarships that would not have otherwise have been there without just this little look back. And somebody saying, you know, how can we serve students and how can we best be good stewards of our positions?

Randy Ray: Yeah, Dr. Wendler, what is the best part of your day and what do you don't like doing too much?

Dr. Wendler: The best part of my day is listening to testimony like that about positive change at the university and how students can engage that. Our effort to help students

financially is near to my heart. Students graduate now, too many, with too much debt and what Chandler and student government have proposed that has been warmly received is one means with a long-term commitment over a period of decades to create more funds for student scholarships.

This is forward looking. It's visionary and it should dispel any myths about this current generation of students being lazy or lacking initiative or not looking ahead and valuing the future. So, that kind of thing is the best part of the job. You know, I really don't have any parts of the job that I really don't like.

Sometimes I get tough issues that I have to deal with and I'm the one that has to deal with them and those are challenging and sometimes I get a little frustrated with those, but the bottom line is they are all sharpening mechanisms. They teach me something.

I'm a learning leader. I'd like to think of myself as a learning leader and I learn stuff every day. I mean, one day I'll misspeak on something and I'll realize it and then I try to have to fix it, you know, I have to go back and say, "Well, this is what I really meant." Those are challenging times, challenging issues, but I learn from those. So even those are not, they're not all negative to me. So many times, if we look at what we do as a means to become better and the experience is valuable, then there's no downside to this job.

But serving the students. And I would also extend that to the people of West Texas. I have thoroughly enjoyed the part of the job of getting to know people out in the Texas panhandle and their passion for life and hard work and all that ... It's remarkable actually.

Randy Ray:

Yeah. Well, I agree with both of you. This is a wonderful place to be. This is a wonderful place to go to school and a wonderful place to work. This is my 15th year and I can't imagine working anywhere else.

Well, that about wraps up our time. I've enjoyed talking to both of you. Thank you so much, both of you, for being here. I am looking forward to our next chat. We're going to have a surprised faculty member. I say surprised and a surprise. They're going to be surprised if you ask them, probably.

We're going to bring in someone that will be fun to talk to and I want to talk to them a little bit about what it's like for them to work here on campus. So again, thank you all for joining us for Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. Be sure to join us next time. We'll talk to you then.