Eric Barber
RECIPIENT OF THE EVERETT E. GOURLEY AWARD

Given each year to a leader and educator whose concern for students and colleagues is an inspiration to those who serve in admission.

Congratulations on being the Everett E. Gourley Award recipient this year! It’s clear that you have had a remarkable impact on students and colleagues throughout your career. What helped shape your approach to leadership?

EB: I’m lucky to have had many great mentors, so that’s been a gift. But one particular piece of advice that stands out is from my prior head of school Ronnie Codrington-Cazeau as I was moving up the ladder. She told me, ‘As you climb higher on the organizational chart, you lose control but you gain influence. If you try to manage what everyone is doing, you’ll burn yourself out. Instead, be the Chief Influencer. Help guide the ship—the actions people take and the choices they make—rather than control it.’ That stuck with me. When you engage with your team and ask for their input, you’re planting seeds of influence while empowering their decision making.

How do you guide your team so they can grow in their own careers?

EB: One thing I believe in is getting to know everyone’s story, and sharing my story in return. That’s how you really understand what makes people tick, which helps build trust and goodwill. Understanding their goals and fears helps me provide them opportunities for growth. Everyone on my team has done either ATI or ADI. My team spends a lot of time together. Our team culture is one of continuous improvement, so we focus a lot on professional development. We meet regularly, we do a few off-campus retreats each year, we celebrate birthdays together. It keeps morale up so that everyone feels seen and included. Work-life balance is important and my team knows family needs come first. We’re a very humane, relationship-based school, so elevating the human side of our roles is part of our philosophy.

How have students inspired you to grow in your career over the years?

EB: The most important thing I’ve learned from students is that we are dealing with their profession can be a lonely job, and it can be misunderstood. As you climb higher on the organizational chart, you lose control but you gain influence. If you try to manage what everyone is doing, you’ll burn yourself out. Instead, be the Chief Influencer. Help guide the ship—the actions people take and the choices they make—rather than control it.” That stuck with me. When you engage with your team and ask for their input, you’re planting seeds of influence while empowering their decision making.

When you accepted the award at AC21, you spoke about the importance of engagement and being seen in the enrollment profession. Can you elaborate on your message?

EB: I think it’s incredibly important for enrollment professionals to connect with and learn from each other, which is why I really appreciate EMA. I think Heather’s Hoerle’s leadership, and her focus on steering the culture toward a more member services-oriented operation, has helped both EMA and all of us. The EMA staff are so engaging, and I’ve always appreciated how responsive the team has been—little things like answering my calls or texts when I have an idea. I would encourage new and older members alike to continue to use EMA to expand your network and expand your toolkit.

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What advice would you give to other enrollment professionals during this busy time of the year?

EB: Continue practicing self-care. If you don’t have a self-care routine, you should develop one. At this time of year, you can let your own needs slip until you’re suddenly burnt out or unwel. I know that if I can’t take care of myself, it will be really hard to take care of my team, so I do small things like taking two walks a day at work—and I will ask someone on my team to join me if they can. Our profession can be a lonely job, and it can be misunderstood in our schools. It’s up to all of us to support each other, stay connected, and take care of one another. +