

Leadership Profile of Dr. Amy Gadsden

Sam Kessler 23 January 2018

As Dr. Amy Gadsden spoke, the candy tray creeping into my peripheral vision served as a reminder that visitors were welcome in her office. Indeed, when Amy's not rushing around to meetings, I've noticed that her room serves as a popular destination for Penn employees seeking out a brief chat or to grab sweets. Amy has a pleasant demeanor, answering questions in a thoughtful manner. During our conversation, several quick, successive bangs served as a loud reminder that there's always something -- sometimes unexpectedly -- on her agenda. Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel, the Vice Provost for Global Affairs and Professor of Medical Ethics and Health Policy, barged in apologizing for the interruption and informing Amy that he had ten minutes to prepare for his conversation with the Provost.

Since June 2014, Dr. Amy Gadsden has served as the Executive Director of Penn Global. The office sits within the University of Pennsylvania's complicated structure, falling under the authority of the Provost's Office. Penn Global serves as the University's primary hub for strategic direction for its global endeavors. As Penn Global's Director, Amy oversees three reporting offices: the International Student and Scholar Services, Penn Abroad,

and Global Support Services. At the heart of her role, she works to catalyze effective partnerships between Penn's schools and centers as a means of increasing global engagement both on campus and overseas. One of the tools at Amy's disposal is the Global Engagement Fund, an annual award which grants successful applicants up to \$40,000. Amy also works diligently to increase the amount of international resources that Penn's schools provide to their students, while also ensuring that her offices effectively provide crucial services for study abroad programs and international students. Last year, Dr. Gadsden was also named the Executive Director of Penn China Initiatives. One of her new responsibilities is to determine the distribution of the Penn China Research and Engagement Fund (CREF) -- a \$10 million research engagement initiative meant to be disbursed over five years. Amy's assigned responsibilities are nearly as exhaustive as her resume.

After receiving her B.A. from Yale and a PhD in Chinese legal history from the University of Pennsylvania, she spent more than ten years in the foreign policy field. In addition to serving as the Resident Country Director at the International Republican Institute and a Special Advisor at the U.S. Department of State, Amy held several impressive consultant roles, including with Pew Charitable Trusts and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Prior to joining the Provost's Office, she spent five years as Associate Dean

for International Strategic Initiatives at Penn Law.

Amy has proven highly successful in her leadership roles. Since 2016, Penn Global has hosted more than 20 Penn Global Seminars. It has also distributed 25 CREF awards since 2015, involving more than 50 faculty from all 12 schools and 71 international partners. Amy also increased the number of international post-graduate internships and expanded the number of international curriculum offerings for students hoping to advance their academic and professional careers. One of the most significant achievements (laid out as a goal in the Penn Global's Strategic Framework [2012-2017]), was the creation of the Perry World House (PWH). The new state-of-the art building nestled in the center of Penn's campus serves as a forum for top intellectuals from Penn's 12 Schools and the global community to convene and wrestle with key global challenges. The Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, based in D.C., opening its doors is another exciting development.

Despite the crucial role Amy has played in Penn Global's recent achievements, she's quick to deflect credit onto others. Like the Level 5 Leaders presented in Jim Collin's, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* Amy exhibits a mix of personal humility and intense professional will. She credits her former boss with providing her with important leadership mentorship. "It's not about you," her former boss told her. "It's about the position you're in. You're a steward of that role." Ego

was meant to be taken out of the equation. In many senses, Amy sees her biggest role as setting the "tone" and "serving as the biggest cheerleader on campus for any global activity." This type of attitude also fosters an environment conducive to teamwork, collective learning, and open and honest dialogue. One of Amy's favorite quotes, attributable to Collin Powell, is that "perpetual optimism is a force multiplier." Being thoughtful and analytical was important, but it was just as essential to believe in the things you do, recognizing and celebrating milestones. Amy took pride in carrying the "global flag." "I believe in it all," she stressed.

A good organizational culture is also often partially dependent on effective hiring practices. Leaders working with self-motivated employees don't need to micromanage and can typically articulate a vision, or general framework, while permitting their employees a degree of personal latitude to accomplish the organization's goals. Having the "right people on the bus" is a precondition for trust. This trust is crucial, considering Amy often has too much on her plate to avoid delegating some work to others. Amy is completely comfortable with this. She views much of her work as relationship-based and frequently commented on the need to nurture and sustain networks. Forward-thinking leaders like her also recognize the need to cultivate talent internally, viewing educational and professional development as closely linked with the success of the organization. Amy has

permitted employees to go to class during working hours with this understanding. Recently, her former Global Initiatives Fellow returned to the Office and was promoted to Penn Global's Associate Director in the Office of Global Initiatives after receiving her M.S.Ed. At my request nearly a year ago, Amy was also kind enough to sit down with me and discuss potential options as I contemplated which Penn graduate school program I wanted to enter. It made little difference to her whether I was in her organization. Her willingness to meet with me was not meant as a strategic action; it was simply a kind gesture. Yet these types of measures exude a positive image of the organizational culture which may increase the likelihood of future returns. In a similar vein, content employees often serve as walking advertisements for organizations.

While Amy takes a people-based approach, she does understand that conflicts inevitably occasionally arise as organizations with different goals and visions operate in an environment without infinite resources. So long as her intentions are good, Amy is willing to upset people. If the frequent bursts of laughter I hear when people are leaving her office are any indication, I doubt this is very often.

Works Cited

Collins, James C. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't. New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2001. Print.

Author Bio

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Sam Kessler is the Staff Assistant to the Vice Provost for Research at the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania's School of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. He is a graduate of Ursinus College where he majored in History and Political Science. Prior to working and taking graduate courses at Penn, he worked for the Committee of Seventy, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health.