President’s *Our Common Ground* Award 2014
Leslye Kornegay  
May 5, 2014

Dr. Leslye Kornegay arrived on the UVM campus in 2007 to lead the newly created Custodial Services Department. Through her visionary leadership, and commitment to excellence, diversity and the principles enshrined in Our Common Ground, Dr. Kornegay has succeeded in establishing a model organization that is an example for the entire university and similar institutions internationally. The values of Respect, Integrity, Innovation, Openness, Justice and Responsibility can be found in all aspects of her work. She is a tireless advocate for her team – indeed all employees – across the university community. Leslye develops people to be their best at whatever they aspire to be. She has truly created an organization where synergy is at its best.

By seeing every problem as an opportunity, and engaging an appreciative and organic leadership style in her approach, Dr. Kornegay, by example, challenges others to meet the highest standards of performance. The leadership scholar John Maxwell has written that, “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.” Indeed, Dr. Kornegay exemplifies the values of Our Common Ground as she knows the way, goes the way and shows the way for all of us here at the University of Vermont.

Dr. Kornegay has served, and continues to serve as a role model for her employees by providing the positive example of the power of educational advancement and professional development. A deep commitment to education is at the center of Dr. Kornegay’s approach to leadership. As a working professional, Dr. Kornegay has pursued and attained her advanced education, earning a masters degree at Central Michigan University and her doctorate here at UVM. As a reflection of this value, she has built opportunities for her employees to pursue their own educational goals. Regardless of level of education, employees are encouraged and supported to improve their language skills through ELL, pursue high school equivalency, attain a college degree, and earn an advanced degree. Meeting people “where they’re at,” and building those opportunities is a hallmark of her approach. Hand in hand with educational advancement is the value of
professional development that Dr. Kornegay weaves into her practice. She looks for every opportunity for her employees to participate in UVM committees and external professional organizations. Her team is active with national organizations of International Executive Housekeepers Association, Society for Human Resources Management, and APPA (Educating Facilities Professionals). This “pay it forward” approach to “uplifting” and developing the next generation of leaders not only benefits UVM today but also builds stronger organizations for the future. She looks for every opportunity to show the I CARE spirit with her employee recognition initiatives and customer service philosophy.

“Nothing happens in a vacuum,” is a phrase you will often hear Dr. Kornegay say. It reflects her understanding that teamwork is the key to organizational success. Teams working together – not individuals working alone – create change that is sustained and transformational. Her goal is always to build the best team, a team with a diversity of perspectives, creative approaches to problem solving, and a willingness to question the status quo. This, as you can imagine, is no easy feat. Embedded in this team approach are the I CARE core values of Integrity, Commitment, Accountability, Respect and Excellence, and a constant commitment to customer service. Through Dr. Kornegay’s vision, leadership, and preactive stance – one that anticipates change and opportunity - all of these accomplishments have been possible, and benefited countless employees.

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