

## A Conversation with Dr. Sophia Maggelakis, Dean of RIT's College of Science

Facilitated by Luke Auburn

**Luke Auburn:** You're listening to the RIT Professional Development Podcast Series. I'm your host Luke Auburn. Today, I'll speak with Dr. Sophia Maggelakis, dean of RIT's College of Science since May of 2010. In her 20 year tenure at RIT, Dr. Maggelakis contributed significantly to the mission of the College of Science and the institute. She founded the School of Mathematical Sciences and RIT's Women and Science program. In addition, she is a recipient of the Eisenhart Award for Outstanding Teacher and Who's Who Among America's Teachers. We'll talk about her views on professional development and advice she has for faculty and staff. Thank you very much for having us.

**Dr. Maggelakis:** Thank you.

**Luke Auburn:** So, as a former faculty member who has advanced her career, what advice do we have for faculty who are interested in higher education administrative positions?

**Dr. Maggelakis:** They have to like to work with people. So, you can't be in an administrative or leadership position if you don't realize that that position is to actually serve your people or serve your colleagues in this case because we're in a higher education. So, sometimes there is a misunderstanding thinking that if you're in administrative position or leadership position, people work for you but actually you work for your people. The earlier you realize that the better--you really need to be genuine and be yourself and love what you're doing. And be your passion, not to be in an administrative position because of the prestige, or the title, or the power because that doesn't work very well. You might get in the position but you might not last long. In the academia, we're really colleagues. And those of us who are in a leadership role, we're here to advocate for our faculty and for our programs and for our students and to promote the best environment, education environment for our faculty, staff, and students. So,

that's advice I would give, to do your best, seek excellence and don't listen to those who might say that you need to be what they think you should be. You should be yourself.

**Luke Auburn:** That's great advice. What has been your own experience with professional development? What do you find works for you?

**Dr. Maggelakis:** What works for me is again, working with people and learn firsthand through experience. So, I like to learn from every experience. And every day, there are different experiences, so I analyze every experience I have on a daily basis and ask myself, "How could I do this better? What did I learn from this?" And also discuss it with some colleagues to get advice or share these practices. I know that there are many workshops out there and many books one can read, but the real everyday practice is completely different than what you read in the books. And so, yes, they are useful and they give you some guidance. But to me, the best development is the everyday experience I have with our faculty staff and students and learn from the experience, and seek advice on an as needed basis.

**Luke Auburn:** How do you find people who you're comfortable with approaching? How do you seek out those types of mentors?

**Dr. Maggelakis:** It's difficult to find mentors to be honest, especially, as you move up in a higher position because you deal with cases that are extremely confidential and you can discuss every case with just anyone. So, I seek advice for my supervisors and some colleagues outside the RIT to get their opinion and make sure that I'm looking at the situation the right way. But yeah, it's difficult to get mentors especially in a leadership position.

**Luke Auburn:** I'm sure. How do you approach professional development with your own staff? Do you have formal processes in place or do you take more of an organic approach?

**Dr. Maggelakis:** I take more of an organic approach. We have--I'm very blessed to have a very good leadership team and we meet every week. We discuss challenges and what we have to work with, our projects. And we also meet once a month over some refreshments. And we choose to read various articles that are related to leadership and professional development, and we discuss them and try to connect what we've learned with our everyday experiences and see how this, what we read, can help us with the various cases that we're dealing with. And also, it creates a relaxant environment where those who have difficulties like we just said earlier, well, how do you find mentors? I see that group as my mentoring group and they see it as their mentoring group. So, we are mentors for each other. So, they share best practices on how they dealt with a particular case and others learn from it. So, that's how we go about it discussing and in reading these articles and trying to learn from each other.

**Luke Auburn:** That sounds like a great group.

**Dr. Maggelakis:** Yeah.

**Luke Auburn:** So as we look out to the future, what professional development trends do you see becoming important for faculty and staff in higher education?

**Dr. Maggelakis:** I believe what should be out there is maybe an assigned coach or mentor to someone who is in a leadership position especially us in up higher. For the reasons that I explained earlier, I think if I have a coach, let's say, or I don't know if that's the right word, but that's what is used out there. There are also many workshops that you can attend, but like I said still very useful but I don't--what I'm doing with everyday cases, I don't see how I can use what I learn from some workshops and because it requires patience and it requires sometimes courage to deal with certain issues. And sometimes, you don't learn that in the workshops, we either have patience or you don't. I mean, they can tell you to be patient, but if you're not patient or if you're not dedicated to have people, you're not going to do it all though you might read it in a book and you might be--if you're not genuine in other words, your colleagues see it.

And to me, it's extremely important to follow your passion and be genuine about what you do every day and to care about the people you lead and try to bring out the best in them, and that's to me what works best. If you try to pretend or practice what you can learn in a particular workshop and it's not you, then it comes out, and so, that doesn't work very well.

**Luke Auburn:** That sounds like great advice regardless of what your position is.

**Dr. Maggelakis:** Yeah, so that's--yeah that's true. And you need to be willing to take risks in this kind of position and put integrity and respect as number one, and understand that you're not going to please everyone because you have to do what's right for our students and for faculty, for our programs and sometimes that might not please everyone. You need to bring change to contribute to the mission of our college and RIT and sometimes that upsets people. But if you explain to them and you're transparent about it and they understand why you're bringing the change, then, they're not so upset. So, you know--

**Luke Auburn:** OK.

**Dr. Maggelakis:** --this is my philosophy in general on that. I have attended one or two workshops, but for the most part, I've learned through--

**Luke Auburn:** Learn by doing.

**Dr. Maggelakis:** --Yeah, learning by doing. That has been my training pretty much.

**Luke Auburn:** That makes a lot of sense. Well, thank you Dr. Maggelakis for your time.

**Dr. Maggelakis:** Well, thank you. Thank you.

**Luke Auburn:** That concludes another edition of the RIT Professional Development Podcast Series. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit [rit.edu/cpd](http://rit.edu/cpd).