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Leading Voices: José Hernández '84, former astronaut, tells stories of perseverance in first "Leading Voices" event

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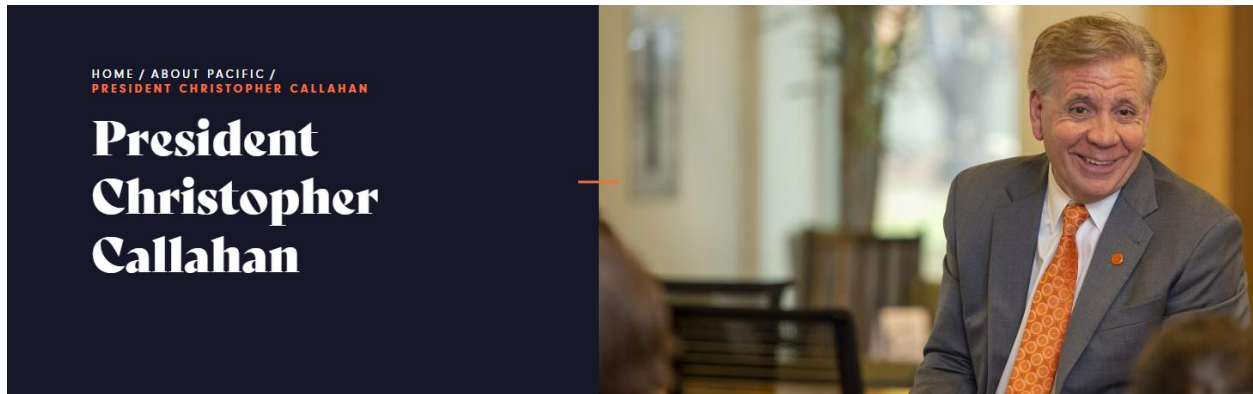
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José Hernández '84 tells stories of perseverance in first “Leading Voices” event

AUG 31, 2020



José Hernandez '84

The number 11 has significance this year for University of the Pacific alumnus and former NASA astronaut Jose Hernández '84.

It was 11 years ago this week, on Aug. 28, 2009, when Hernández and his crewmates on Space Shuttle Mission STS-128 blazed into space and fulfilled his dream of being a NASA astronaut.

His flight for a two-week mission came after he was rejected 11 times by NASA.

His 12th time was a hard-earned charm.

“You just heard Jose’s inspirational story,” Pacific President Christopher Callahan said to a virtual gathering of about 100 after a video played on Hernández’s life. “I get goosebumps every time I hear it. I was struck by your steadfast perseverance.”

Hernández and Callahan shared the dialogue Wednesday during the kickoff of the Pacific Alumni Association’s “Leading Voices” series, which will run through mid-November. The series seeks to explore compelling stories from the Pacific family and focuses on key moments in the lives and professions of the speakers.

Callahan asked whether Hernández’s training background in NASA—including periods of isolation—can be compared to feelings that many have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic

“Being an astronaut, it kind of trains you to handle these situations of isolation,” Hernández said. “... When all of this started, I thought to myself, ‘how can I summarize this? I came up with six simple objectives to help people get through it.’”

- “First, have a positive attitude. Be a glass-half-full kind of person. This pandemic has forced us to be together with our loved ones. I mean, what a gift. You are creating memories that you otherwise wouldn’t have had.”
- “A page out of NASA, be good at communication ... At home, it helps to be able to repeat instructions and have good engagement. You de-escalate potential confrontations.”

- “Create a schedule every day. At the end of the day, you look at the list and you get that great satisfaction of checking things off. You feel productive.”
- “Bond with the family. Make sure you do something special with each family member. My daughter is a gym rat, and we didn’t have weights, and you could not buy them at stores. So guess what I did? I ordered seven sacks of cement and we made our own weights and now we have a functional gym in the garage. My other daughter is a TikTok fanatic and she ropes me into doing some silly things.”
- “Set goals. Everyone has goals and if you are like me, you only address the top half, not the bottom half. Well now is the time to visit the bottom half.”
- “The most important is self-care, self-management. You want to take care of yourself. Eat healthy, exercise, take your multivitamins, practice good hygiene.”

Callahan said these six objectives will be distributed to others in the Pacific community.

“Those are fantastic ... This was spot-on, not just for life in general but for this particular time with COVID,” Callahan said. “Particularly, your focus on a schedule for young people, especially for our freshmen ... And I couldn’t agree more about the self-care for our students. I hope they will take that unbelievably good advice to heart.”

Hernández answered questions from students, faculty, staff and other virtual attendees.

- **On motivation:** “What motivated me is we were dirt poor. We didn’t have anything. I knew I didn’t want to be a farmworker the rest of my life. I knew how much I’d earn as a farmworker and that was not going to cut it. We could do better.”
- **On motivating his children:** “I take a page out of my mom’s playbook. What I do is I put the expectation on my kids that college is not an option, it’s a requirement.”

- **On his parents:** “If they had gone to college, they would have been world-renowned psychologists. My mom did not say if, she said when.”
- **On how students must face multiple stressors:** “I call it a safety time out. I say, ‘hey, I am not in a situation right now to deal with this.’ Sort of breathe, relax, and get my bearings again. And then maybe treat myself to something I like to do. Then look at the situation from a different perspective.”
- **On the college-to-career path:** “What happens as a freshman is you walk in with a toolbox and it is empty. And what Pacific and other institutions do is they start giving you tools. They start teaching you how to use these tools. And then you walk away with a complete toolbox.”

Callahan expressed his gratitude for the message, which he noted is especially applicable during a time of difficulty and uncertainty for the Pacific community and so many others.

“It has been an absolute pleasure,” he said. “Your words will help sustain.”

Leading Voices series continues

The following virtual speakers are confirmed for the Pacific Alumni Association’s “Leading Voices” series:

Sept. 2, noon

Michael Tubbs: Tubbs, 30, has served as mayor of Stockton since 2017. He was elected at age 26 as the first Black mayor in the city’s history. Previously, he was elected to a Stockton City Council seat, where he served from 2013–17. Tubbs, a Stockton native, is a graduate of Stanford University.

Sept. 23, noon

John Chambers: Chambers is the former executive chairman and CEO of Cisco Systems. The John T. Chambers Technology Center opened on July 1, 2001, on the Stockton Campus. Chambers will

share his predictions on the future of the workforce. His son John J. Chambers '03 is a Pacific alumnus.

Sept. 29, 6:30 p.m.

Pete Carroll: Head coach of the Seattle Seahawks, Carroll '73, '78 has won a Super Bowl (2013) as Seattle coach and two national champions with the University of Southern California (2003, 2004). He was a standout during his playing career at University of the Pacific. He also was an assistant coach for the Tigers and has received the Pacific Distinguished Alumni Award.

Oct. 14, noon

Connie (Xanttopulos) Rishwain: The '79 COP alumna is past president of both UGG footwear and Vionic Group. She is a past recipient of the Pacific Distinguished Alumni Award and serves as a Pacific regent.

Oct. 28, noon

Steve Goulart: Goulart '80 BUS is executive vice president and CIO of MetLife, Inc. He received the Pacific Alumni Association's Distinguished Professional Service Award in 2019.