

Leader of The Year

Dr. Chad Audi

Serving Humanity With Clarity,
Sincerity, And Humility

Dr. Chad Audi

President and Chief
Executive Officer
Detroit Rescue Mission

“

You don't solve a problem by kicking the can down the road; you solve a problem by understanding and confronting it the right way.

”



Clarity in vision, sincerity towards the goals, and humility in behaviour are the essential traits to acquire to become a transformational leader. **Dr. Chad Audi** is one kind of leader whose leadership style and work are an epitome to achieve for emerging leaders. He is the **President and Chief Executive Officer** of the 1909-founded **Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries (DRMM)**, a faith-based, non-profit organization recognized by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and reputed for devoting a wealth of resources to meet the basic needs of humanity while motivating individuals to rebuild their lives, one life at a time.

A Phenomenal Journey

Dr. Chad Audi's journey started with curiosity, determination and learning. By age 27, and with the guidance of his exemplary father who was Chief Financial Officer of an international business, he had equipped himself with graduate and terminal degrees in business administration and finance. He had also garnered some leadership experience working in the private sector, with many people as direct reports.

Dr. Chad worked in very dynamic and challenging business environments and had the benefit of watching some remarkable business leaders up-close as they grappled with very tough issues and decisions. So, when he came to non-profit Detroit Rescue Mission in 1997, and started as a volunteer in the finance department, he already had a good foundation. Still, he believed he needed more insight and mentoring. The then president and CEO, Don DeVos, saw the good work Dr. Chad was doing and took him under his wings, helping him gain a fine understanding of the nonprofit world, and particularly faith-based human services.

Instructively, the more he proved himself with percipience and problem-solving, the higher the responsibility he got. Thus, in a few years, Dr. Chad became the Chief Operating Officer, and in 2004, the Board appointed him the President and CEO. Since then, the organization has grown in all ramifications – annual budget, staff strength, number of program beneficiaries, locations, donor base, partners, volunteers, just name it. Under the able leadership of Dr. Chad, the organization has accumulated a greater capacity to respond more effectively to the changing needs of disadvantaged and distressed individuals and families in the Detroit area. He says, *“Looking back now, I see and appreciate the role great mentors have played in my leadership journey. But I also see the irreplaceable place of*

insightfulness, creativity, people skills, constant self-evaluation, decisiveness and grit.”

Immeasurable Support for the Impoverished

Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries is primarily drawn to individuals and families in disadvantage and distress. They could be in homelessness, hunger, domestic violence, abandonment, substance use disorder, joblessness or recidivism. *“We are their go-to nonprofit organization,”* says Dr. Chad. He further adds, DRMM's programs are designed and implemented to help people in such situations turn their lives around. In recent years, it has expanded beyond Detroit and Highland Park to bring its services nearer to people who need them in cities like Roseville in Macomb County where it has a thriving food bank, and Port Huron in St. Claire County with a life-changing shelter for women and children. The organization's well-equipped and fully accredited 240-acre camp in Howell serves the camping and leadership development needs of young people from the Detroit area. And, its food box and toy delivery program has been taking the organization to cities like Inkster, Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Wayne, Westland, Livonia and, of course, Detroit and Highland Park neighbourhoods, targeting seniors and children who need a little help. Thankfully, the community outreach also enjoyed great support from volunteers and donors who strongly identify with DRMM's 112-year-old mission of giving hope and help to the “least of these” in the community.

Increasing the Circle

DRMM is opening a new location in Livonia for senior respite care, free walk-in healthcare, opioid treatment and counselling. It is also revitalizing its withdrawal management and substance use disorder treatment facilities in Detroit to better serve substance use disorder patients and their families. Because of the economic challenges that persist as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will scale up its food box and toy deliveries to reach more families in need. *“We are also designing shelters of the future that will provide greater opportunities to men and women in need,”* says Dr. Chad.

Traits of an Ideal Leader

According to Dr. Chad, every leader should have a very good understanding of the problem that needs to be solved, a clear vision of what needs to be achieved and how to achieve it. A leader should also possess an ability to attract



and retain the right people to help in achieving the vision, a flair for thorough self-evaluation, openness to new and disruptive ideas, and an insatiable appetite for continuous improvement.

Embrace, Help and Grow

“A positive work culture is essential both for the guests we serve and our staff members”, says Dr. Chad. The team at DRMM treats each other as a family member. Here, everyone believes that it is one big family of brothers and sisters. So, staff members are encouraged not to see their colleagues as competitors but as team members working toward the same goal of helping the homeless, hungry and hurting turn their lives around. They don’t just work together in serving guests and community; they also help each other in different ways. Through celebrating each other’s birthdays and praying for each other, the team shows compassion and love for each other.

Dr. Chad asserts, *“If you are facing a challenge, colleagues come to your aid. Our work culture places premium on treating everyone – guest or colleague - with dignity and respect. That’s actually our policy, which I reiterate in my interactions with staff.”*

Challenges Make You Strong

Community service is about serving the community, not self. *“If you commit yourself to serving people in the community, you must brace yourself for the challenges that come with it,”* says Dr. Chad. He further adds, *“I can tell you here and now that it is never a smooth ride. There are bumps, twists and turns along the way. But you must never give up. You must see each challenge as a passport to greater heights. Each challenge is a teachable moment. So, serve with clarity, sincerity and humility.”* 

