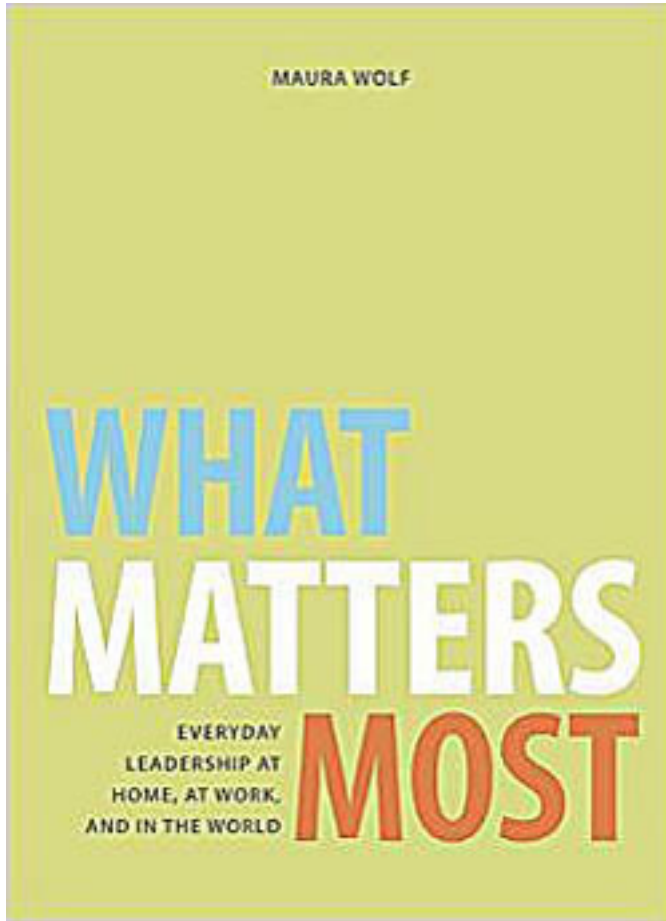


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'What Matters Most'By *Sophie Braccini*

Since her teen years, Saint Mary's College Master of Leadership lecturer Maura Wolf has been asking big questions, wondering who she was, what her task and place was in this life.

An activist and a scholar, she embraced motherhood with the same passion, but like many others she was caught juggling roles and commitments, while trying to keep her compass set on what matters most. For nine years, the questions she asked and the answers she found in herself and in the community, have been taking shape in the form of short vignettes; her book, "What Matters Most: Everyday Leadership, at Home, at Work, and in the World," features 42 of them, each ending in questions for readers to reflect upon and make journeys of their own.

Wolf moved to Moraga 12 years ago and is raising her young family here with her husband Noel Cook. At her Oct. 23 book launch at SMC, Wolf spoke about her motivations for the book, and the challenges of meshing her creative life with other commitments. "As many of you experience, it is easy to come up with these competing commitments, and to get lost in the pace of technology and the demands we have financially, with our families, our work," she said. On many days, she explained, it was difficult to figure out what did matter most.

"I was the mother of a 1-year-old child, married to a man that owned a home in Moraga, which was foreign to me, and was deeply attempting a life that was full of harmony and love," she said. Wolf was also a youth worker and activist from Boston, the daughter of an aging father, and was not giving up on having an influence in the world. Holding all these different roles created quite a bit of stress, and over nine years she started writing little vignettes on scratch paper when she was at the park, or running errands.

Wolf believes that everyone needs a regular reflective practice to widen the space between their actions and their reactions. For some it can be meditation, yoga, or having a glass of wine with friends at the end of the week to talk about what really matters. She says her book can be a conduit for that practice. "It's a tool that can bring you to the heart of the most meaningful stuff in life," she said. "You have to read it week by week; you sit with it, not knowing the answers [to the questions]."

During the book launch, her friend Amiel Handelsman talked about his experience with Wolf's book. "When you read the book you realize that for Maura and for all of us, there are many things that matter most, and many of the chapters grapple with what happens when they conflict with each other," he said. The chapter called Right Size Your Purpose, for example, talks about shrinking big ideas down to something that feels more doable. Handelsman wanted to hike the Appalachian Trail and wondered how he could reduce it to something doable, yet still meaningful. He ended up taking a three-day backpacking trip locally. "It takes a book like 'What Matters Most' to have compassion for ourselves when we make those choices and take the time to carve the path

forward," he said.

In addition to personal goals, Wolf believes communities are very important, especially small groups of committed people supporting each other to shift and expand, and increase their capacity as people, like the community of women that she formed with a few friends to discuss parenting concerns, called Mindful Moms. She said she owes a lot of her book to her friends. With her book, Wolf hopes that other reflective groups will form.

"They are the spaces where we experience belonging, they are the places that witness our evolving, and they are the places that create the space for a group of people to collectively expand their potential," she said.

The Leadership Center will be offering a session on "How to Create a Reflective Practice Group" using the book "What Matters Most" as a guide on Thursday, Dec. 4 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. at the Fireside Room at the Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga. The book can be purchased online at Amazon.com.

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