

CHAMBER of COMMERCE: New Educators Breakfast

Tuesday, August 12, 2008

It truly is an honor to be here this morning among all of you. When I was asked earlier this summer to speak at this event, I didn't hesitate because I knew it would provide me with an opportunity to do something I haven't had the chance to do before. That is to say a very heartfelt "thank you" to all of you who support, provide, and/or encourage a culture of education within this community. You wouldn't be here this morning, at this hour, if you didn't believe, like I do, that we possess no greater responsibility than to facilitate the development of our young people. When I first visited Tiffin during my interview at Heidelberg, I remember to this day the sign on 18 that said "The Education Community". I thought, what a great proclamation. Nearly 8 years later, I am indeed proud to be a part of this education community. So, thank you. Thank you for what you do and how you do it.

When I began to think about what I was going to talk with you about this morning, I literally drew a complete blank. Nothing of significance was really coming to me. Then came a stretch of time earlier this summer and, bam, there it was. Let me share with you a couple of things that happened.

First, I began my stint as interim president on July 1st. I was appointed back in mid-May and while I had a fair amount of time to mentally prepare for July 1, it was still a considerable adjustment for me and my family. Speaking of my family, I have 3 children, 9, 7, and 5, and back in May after my appointment as president was going to be made public, I was sharing with my kids daddy's new job and upon what I thought was good news, my oldest daughter began to weep. I asked her what was wrong and she tearfully looked up at me and said "we don't see you enough now; what's it going to be like when you're president?" Ouch.

Second, I recently purchased a Blackberry in an effort to become better organized, more efficient. In many ways, it has done just that but for reasons I will address in a moment, it has created some other issues in my life. Let's just say that I now know why they call this thing a "Crackberry".

Third, several weeks ago, my wife and I sat down one night to watch 'The Bucket List'. I promise, I'm going to pull this all together in a moment. Anybody see this movie? Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman are both dying and they decide to create a list of things to do before they pass. It's a pretty funny movie with what I thought was a great, meaningful message. Let's just say it made me think about my own priorities.

Finally, Professor Randy Pausch, author of "The Last Lecture", recently died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 47. A father of three, he prepared for his death by writing and talking about fulfilling childhood dreams and leaving a lasting legacy. His lecture last year at Carnegie Mellon has been viewed on YouTube by roughly 6 million people.

Taken together, these four moments helped me craft my remarks this morning.

If you haven't figured it out just yet, I want to briefly talk about balance and priorities. And what better time to take stock of this than right before the academic year begins?

Let me just begin by saying that if some of my former friends and colleagues knew that I was providing advice, if you will, on life-work balance, they would probably keel over with laughter. Nevertheless, here I am. Because as both you and I know, circumstances such as the examples I provided above, allow or permit us the opportunity to reevaluate where we are and what we are about. And for me, I'm in that moment right now, whether I like it or not.

And so, as we all sit here this morning and from our many perspectives, how do we put our finger on whether or not we adequately achieve a healthy balance in our lives? In an instant, my daughter's tears made me very quickly understand that, from her perspective and in her world, I had some work to do and progress to make relative to balance. You want to talk about a teachable moment? What about you? Have you asked yourself whether or not balance is in your life?

In an attempt to earn your applause at the END of this talk, I did do some research on work-life balance, as well as engage in some personal reflection on this topic. What did I learn? In a nutshell, here you go. These are my takeaway's as I call them :

1. **Figure out what really matters to you.** You need to figure out what you WANT your priorities to be, not what you think they should be. Big difference. And once you know what you want those to be, the important thing is to devote your time and attention to just one priority at a time. In this world of multi-tasking, this can be difficult. This is where the Blackberry is most evil. Separating work time from personal time has been compromised due to this little monster but I'm getting better. And the important thing is that I know that I need to get better!
2. **Learn to say no.** Again, this is hard for me to share because if there is something I have a hard time doing, it's saying no. But as my life becomes more complex and my priorities defined, often not by me by the way, I will need to hone this skill. Done respectfully, the guilt and sense of obligation will diminish as you will have more time to enjoy those activities that are meaningful in your life. For those of us who love our hands in the cookie jar, so to speak, saying no is tough but it's critical if we are attempting to prioritize.
3. **Protect "you" time.** Just as you wouldn't skip important meetings, doctor's appointments, or your kid's ball games, your private time deserves the same respect. Be it a morning walk in your neighborhood, a good workout at the Y, some moments in the evening where you have the chance to unwind and regroup or just talk privately with your spouse, it's important to find good me time. For me, some good me time is often time with my kids. I get invigorated by their laughter. By their curiosity. By their innocence, although with each passing month, that innocence appears challenged! Being with and around them helps my creativity; it helps me think differently; it helps with context and perspective. Point is, you need to find those moments of the day that get you

ready for the next day. And the next day. And the one after that. Waking up renewed, with a smile on your face ready for the day's challenges and opportunities is the goal.

4. **Quality over quantity.** Because time for all of us is so scarce, it is increasingly important to consider HOW we spend our time rather than how much. I feel pretty strong about this one when it comes to my work at Heidelberg. Expectations are high for me, for example, when it comes to visibility, accessibility, and productivity. Expectations are high for all of us. In trying to perform and meet these expectations, while at the same time trying to have some sanity in our lives, we need to be efficient with our work. Someone once said, "Judge me by the quality of work that I do, not by the hours I'm in the office." I really believe that.

Our culture also sometimes equates levels of stress with importance and success like stress is supposed to be something of a marker of accomplishment. Remember the term 'burnout'? Parker Palmer, in his book "Let your life speak", wrote that normally burnout occurs by doing too much. But for him, burnout occurred through trying to give what he didn't have. Wow. That struck me as so profound because as I think about the stressors in my life, they are often those things that I have little or no control over.

To conclude, let me just say that I'm obviously no expert in the field of work-life balance. What I have been able to discover, however, through some brief research, personal reflection, and personal experience is that striking an appropriate balance in our lives is a continuous process. The demands on our time change frequently, as we know, and thus continuous adaptation of the circumstances around us is required if we indeed seek a healthy work-life balance. And you know who wins? Everybody. You, your family, your employer, your friends. And for me, this is where the rubber hits the road. The people around you, because in the end, it is the depth of connection we have with those close in our lives that will be cherished and remembered long after our careers are over.

Let me leave you with this nugget of a quote.

"Every day is a new day of learning. We can excel and exceed our own standards by consistently upgrading our outlook and attitude towards those around us. Our position, our power, our status... nothing is permanent. What will remain is fond memories of those around us. It is not the altitude of our achievements, but our attitude, acts of kindness, and consideration towards others that matters."

Thank you so much and again, it is honor to be here with you this morning.