

LEADERSHIP AS THE FOUNDATION FOR BOLD ACTION

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Mamie, thank you for the wonderful introduction. Like most in this room, I have been on a life journey that is quite different than what I pictured in my early days – marvelously wonderful, challenging, and sometimes painful in the lessons I had to learn. I feel like a kindred soul to you today.

President Tate, Honorary Luncheon Chair, Mamie Hughes and Co-chairs Joni Cohen and Giselle Posey, Members of the Women's Foundation Board, grant recipients and honored guests of all ages: I am honored to be here, to recognize and celebrate with you the substantial achievement of the Women's Foundation. Ten years and a legacy of hundreds of women and girls whose lives have *directly* connected with your programs and grants....Congratulations to all of you who have taken part in this story.

In fact, your story is a powerful point of connection for me today. In my preparations for these remarks, I asked many of you to tell me that story –the story of the early days of the Women's Foundation.

As your story unfolded, I heard a potent history lesson of courage and persistence, and an unleashing of the human spirit across this community. I heard of weekly, early morning breakfast meetings at Jeannette Nichols' house; of the very personal struggles of individuals to accept their new roles in this young organization.

I discovered you all did your homework, learning from the solid research you conducted in this city. I heard about the epiphanies of many women as they discovered not only the power in the money they controlled, but in the fact that *they even controlled the money in the first place!*

And, I heard, and this is what inspires me the most, about women asking women across the social and economic strata as well as across the racial divides, what do you think we should do and will you join with us?? In reaching out, you accessed the energy, wisdom, ideas, and resources of the collective and forged that into results. I tell you—I know just how scary that is...you have no control of other people's creativity; you have no idea if it will work; you risk; you buck the tide. I say this is leadership of a very special type, leadership that lays the foundation for bold action. That interests me because that is also what we are up to at UMKC – laying the foundation for bold action.

I wasn't there, but I bet I can describe fairly accurately the sequence that brought this reality today to fruition. Several of you in this room met over coffee. Those few women gave each other courage, and the idea for this foundation began to emerge as a whisper floating around – judged by many to be a bit of a far out and impractical dream. Gradually the idea took shape, and soon was regularly in the conversation...but still it was viewed as impossible. And then it became a plan that was well underway, and deemed to be possible – *maybe*. And here we are with this reality today.

Now we say, “Of course it was possible; why did we ever consider it impossible??”

That kind of a shift – making the impossible happen – that is what we are up to at UMKC.

At UMKC, we also have a bold dream, one that was first a whisper among a few; then it was an impractical, far-out dream of the Chancellor and 80 others. Now it is somewhere between the stage of “clearly impossible/why bother”, and “maybe this will really work; maybe we should help out.” You are an example for us. We are committed to making what some thought and think is impossible, possible – and real. How??

Here is our picture at UMKC –

Unlike you, we don't start with a blank slate. We start with an institution that is strong and a major asset to this city. Just a few reminders:

- Year in and year out, UMKC turns out hundreds of professionals for this workforce....70 dentists, 60 pharmacists, 70 nurses, 90 physicians—at a time of acute shortage in the health professions;
- We train lawyers, business men and women, engineers, computer scientists, costume and stage designers, actors and actresses, poets and creative writers, communications professionals, Ph.D. scientists across all fields and especially in the life sciences, and another 1500 or so individuals with undergraduate degrees, 75% of whom stay here and contribute to this economy;
- We attract millions in federal dollars for research in biology, dentistry, biomedicine, chemistry, psychology, and the education of children;
- 125,000 people receive *free* medical and dental care *each year* through our students;
- Our faculty, staff, and students win gold medals, Fulbrights, and “best in field” awards on a regular basis.

So we start strong. But we don't want to get just a little better---we want to take a giant leap forward, a quantum leap (and I use that word quantum purposefully). In short we want to take a bold action, and what we are up to now is laying the foundation for that action.

I don't have time to paint a full picture of that bold dream although I would love to. Suffice it to say that every great city has a great university that provides ideas, research results, venues and talent to fuel the city's economy and quality of life. We must play that role for this city. We carry the name “Kansas City.” We are your “brand.” We will have achieved our bold dream

when UMKC is putting Kansas City's name on the map – not just now and then...but clearly and consistently.

We will do that first and foremost by partnering across the region to drive forward your priorities in life sciences, technology, the arts, the public school systems, and the professional workforce. You will see us

- Lead in the life sciences—next step, a major health and life sciences complex on Hospital Hill;
- Deepen our prowess in the arts---performing and visual arts;
- Collaborate with the public schools—where we can do the most good is in the recruitment of students from those schools to continue their education with us, and in the preparation of many of those same students to go back and teach in those schools;
- Focus our efforts on developing a skilled workforce where it is most needed: in business and industry; in the health professions; in engineering, law and technology;
- Create a vibrant learning and residential experience with an expanded community of students living on the Volker campus; involved both academically and in their city's programs and issues;
- Engage socially and economically – including strong participation in the downtown revitalization effort.

SOUND IMPOSSIBLE????? YES....but no less so than what this dream looked like ten years ago to those early founders of the Women's Foundation.

So, what can make our dream happen? What do you have to do to lay the foundation for bold action...to make what seems impossible—possible and real.

I am a scientist. I must respond to that question with a framework on leadership that is rooted in the most rigorous of the sciences. I want to compare and contrast two dramatically different ways to lead an organization, each rooted in two dramatically different assumptions about how the world works.

In my experience, most organizations operate more or less under four unstated assumptions, each of which I believe is deeply flawed.

Flawed assumption # 1: The world is predictable. If you can just get enough information, if you can just get the organizational chart right and the policies and procedures right, then there would not be any surprises. And you would be in control. Is that the experience of anyone in this room? NO. The world is simply not predictable. The policies, procedures and

organizational chart will never be just right. Leadership that is the foundation for bold action is leadership that expects unpredictability, viewing it as fertile ground for bold action.

Flawed assumption #2: All good ideas originate in the appropriate box on the organizational chart. If it is a finance problem, the solution will be with the person in the finance box; if it is a personnel issue, the discussion should occur only with the people in the boxes over in Human Resources. I ask you, is that your experience? The world does not work that way. We all know that ideas and solutions exist across the organization; in fact there is collective wisdom in *any* organization, if you could just get to it – and that wisdom exists at all levels on the organizational chart.

In most organizations, these ideas don't have a way to go anywhere; they don't have a way to come out. The leadership at the top can't get access to them. Leadership that is the foundation for bold action is leadership that sets up the culture to access those ideas, and in so doing accesses the energy of the collective.

Flawed assumption #3: The organization is made up of separate parts with the only useful human interactions being those that follow reporting lines and policies; as if the organization is devoid of entangled and complex human relationships. How many people here believe that a personal relationship doesn't give you the ability to bypass the policies and get results? Haven't we witnessed people do that; haven't we done it ourselves? Of course. It is the way the world works. Why not celebrate that action? Leadership that lays the foundation for bold action is leadership that turns those entangled and complex relationships into a powerful asset, relegating the rigidity of the organizational chart and the policies and procedures to secondary status.

Flawed assumption #4: Issues have solutions that are either right ones or wrong ones; there is no "gray." Is that your experience??? The world doesn't work that way. Leadership that lays the foundation for bold action is leadership that sees the gray and says maybe we are not asking the right question. Time out, let's listen to others. What is it we are trying to accomplish?

In short, when organizations operate as if the outcomes are predictable, as if ideas and solutions don't exist across the organization box, as if relationships are secondary to organizational charts and procedures, and as if there is no gray or complexity in their operations, they squelch the spirits of the very people we, as leaders need – and it is counterproductive to bold action. It provides no access to the human spirit where creativity resides. We operate like this because we believe leadership has something to do with control; and it doesn't. And because it is scary as a leader to unleash the creativity of other people. That is what we are up to at UMKC. It is scary, and I need your support.

Now, as I said, I am a scientist and I cannot resist grounding this leadership framework in science – even though probably few in this room care a whit – but indulge me 30 seconds, because this part really excites me: The assumption of predictability in an organization and those other flawed assumptions – are based on a Newtonian view of the way the world works...that is, they are based on the rules of the universe discovered by Sir Isaac Newton, back in the 17th Century.

Fortunately, as a result of all the work in physics in the 20th Century, we now know that Isaac Newton's description of the order of the world is flawed. What a relief that is! So, let's give that one up. We now understand the world in quantum terms. In the middle of this last century, we came to grips in science with the fact the world is fundamentally unpredictable – it operates in accordance with the laws of quantum mechanics rather than the rules of Newton.

OK, that's all you have to hear about quantum mechanics...just know that what you did in founding the Women's Foundation was grounded in the most serious of sciences; what you did suggests you knew all about quantum mechanics.

What we are up to at UMKC is grounded in the most serious of the sciences.

UMKC is becoming a quantum institution and that is the reason the picture, which I painted a few minutes ago, is possible. We can take a quantum leap because we accept unpredictability as opportunity; our policies turn unpredictability into an asset not a liability. We celebrate the fact that great ideas can emerge in many places and we are set up to bring them forward. Our organization instead of squelching people with the rules, provides pathways for their ideas to come forth from across the institution, and from across this community. We know we don't know everything, so we ask a lot of people: *what do you think?* We celebrate entangled, marvelous relationships; we put those entangled relationships to work for us. And we embrace "gray"; things might not be as simple as true or not true. So, we listen – really listen to each other – in order to reach a higher level of understanding and make certain we are asking the right questions.

My deepest commitment as a leader is to produce a climate – a work environment – that lays the foundation for bold action. That process is grounded solidly in theory; it is what I know how to do, and it is serious business. You have a leadership team at UMKC that operates in a quantum world. They and I need your support as friends and colleagues.

Finally, to all of you today, and in particular to the young women in this room, take to your hearts, as well as to your heads, this view of bold leadership.

Organizations at their roots – from the largest governmental complex, to a corporation, to an institution of higher education like UMKC – all of these "organizations" are more than policies, procedures, organizational charts and business-driven "bottom lines." If you want bold action and you want to have fun at the same time – they must be more. And, the operating rules of the universe are on your side. Say that out loud to your bosses and your colleagues; don't apologize for a leadership model that unleashes the human spirit; don't be self-conscious about the power of embracing relationships as a force for boldness. You have quantum mechanics on your side.

It is a great honor to share this celebration with you. I congratulate all those *people* – both men and women – who have forged a commitment to this organization. I honor you for your civic engagement. And I thank you for the opportunity to share with you the foundation for bold leadership, and ask for your help and support.

May peace be with us all as we celebrate, with a particular deep appreciation this year, the rich traditions of these holidays, and as we enter the year 2002.