

“Business Executive of the Year” Acceptance Speech

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Rotary International
Kansas City Downtown Chapter
Awards Luncheon

May 13, 2004

Introduction

Thank you for that nice introduction and for nominating me for this honor. Thank you, Rotary Club members for the award. I am honored and humbled and, quite frankly, inspired, given the history and values of this club and the history and criteria for this award.

I shared the fact that I was receiving this award with my friend Jeanette Nichols the other night. She told me that she was invited to speak here in 1951 on her experiences in Europe before and after World War II. She indicated that the individual who introduced her said she was only the second woman ever to speak at this Rotary and the last one was in 1929. I tell you that story because I believe it says, “Rotary has always been a leader”. Contrary to the sound of the story today, I believe that a woman in front of this group in 1929 and 1951 is a symbol of your leadership. I complement you and admire you. Leading, as a major international organization over many years, is tricky and serious business. Congratulations.

Last weekend, I had the opportunity to witness the graduation of more than 1,500 students. I shook their hands. I looked into their eyes, and I saw your sons and daughters, your employees, your colleagues, and your friends. I saw the future of Kansas City. Graduations are about celebrating accomplishments and they are about looking toward the future.

That is my frame for the next few minutes as it relates to UMKC: accomplishment and the future. I have three points.

1. Who is UMKC now, what have we done and why do you care?

2. Where are we headed and why do you care about that?

3. How does UMKC do business and why do you care about that?

As I address these points: the present state, the future goal, the how (the nature of this journey) and the behaviors you can expect, I hope that I will offer you some thoughts and challenges for your life and work as well.

First – The Present State

You have a wonderful university in Kansas City. I say that from the experience of leadership I have had at a top 20 public research university and a top 20 private university. I am proud of what we have done and you have a right to that pride, too, because you helped produce it.

As Chancellor, I am the CEO of one of Kansas City's largest employers.

- We employ more than 3,000 people with a payroll of \$175 million and total spending of \$270 million per year.
- We have a \$1 billion plus economic impact on our region every year.
- We produce a professional workforce for your businesses. Year in and year out we produce physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, teachers, engineers, computer scientists, life scientists, pianists, costume designers, stage designers, actors, singers, lawyers, business persons, and 1000 people with undergraduate liberal arts degrees.

Every year:

- 7 of 10 UMKC graduates stay in the KC metropolitan area after graduation.

As CEO, I experience many of the same challenges any business leader faces. We must remain competitive by finding ways to increase revenue while focusing on controlling costs. There are primary revenue sources we can affect; for example,

- Since 2000, we secured \$160 million in external grants and contracts, increasing annual federal funding specifically for research purposes by 161%.
- We have invested heavily in the regional life sciences initiatives, even through the recession when we gave \$30 million back to the State of Missouri so it could balance its budget.

But that is not all we do. As important, valuable, and pragmatic as these things are, in my view, they are rather pedestrian relative to who we need to be for you and for Kansas City. We must take our place as a force for economic development and social progress.

Second - Where are we headed?

Let me set this up with a bold statement but one I believe to be accurate. The presence of a major research university in a city has always added vitality, but it is *essential* in going

forward. Let me repeat that, *a major powerful research university is an absolutely essential component for our City and for any city.*

The primary driving force for economic and social progress in our society has shifted several times over the last 200 years. It has gone from agricultural to manufacturing, to service, to knowledge drivers, to the present *creative economy* – an economy driven by ideas. Social progress in this city and in the world is driven today by ideas. Social and economic progress is a function of individual and team creativity centered on idea generators. Creative people are those freed up intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually to create in science, business, politics, art, and literature, for the purpose of better health, a better environment, better solutions to urban issues, better solutions to racial issues, housing issues, family conflicts, conflicts in the middle east, and so on. *Creativity* is the determining factor. The world belongs to the creative class. I suspect that resonates with you as you work to find the right people to hire.

Now, universities are not the only generator of ideas, but they are the most powerful because they offer a safe haven for ideas and because they attract creators of ideas. Universities are, quite literally, flypaper for people who create (faculty, students, and staff) because universities give them the freedom to create and codify it into their job descriptions. And you know that that creating happens in social interaction among diverse populations in coffee shops, pizza huts, residence halls, student centers, and the like. The vibrancy of people with diverse backgrounds from diverse parts of the world, studying diverse things, having diverse hobbies, is freed up in spirit to create in conversation.

Does this city want to position itself as a leader? If so, this city must have a major research university – for the pragmatic reasons I listed above, and for the goal of effective participation in the creative economy. In case you are skeptical about UMKC in that role, let me ask you (as a citizen of Kansas City) these questions:

- If not UMKC, who?
- If not now, when?
- If not me, who?
- If not in partnership with you, then with whom?

That is what I am up to as Chancellor of your University.

Now let me tell you what that statement about creating a major research university as an engine for the creative economy means in terms of concrete next steps. First, we have to focus. Our focus is your focus: life sciences, arts, and several urban issues that are important in Kansas City. We have concrete steps underway in each of these arenas – including the public schools.

But what we are doing with campus life is even more critical and that is what I want to share. We are creating a vibrant residential campus in the heart of this city – actually in two heart chambers – the Plaza (Volker Campus) and Hospital Hill at 24th and Holmes

where our Medical, Dental, Pharmacy, and Nursing Schools are located, along with Children's Mercy Hospital and Truman Medical Center.

UMKC must be a *destination university* for students. A vibrant residential campus life for students makes us a destination of choice. A residential campus is a vital step. A residential campus life is the accelerator for the engine of the *creative economy* for Kansas City. A residential, destination choice university is the magnet and catalytic converter for creative talent.

We have begun:

- A new \$22.5 million residence hall, providing 561 undergraduates with state-of-the-art campus living will open in August, 2004.
- Students voted to increase student fees in order to fund the building of a new Student-Alumni Center, one that is modern and exciting with enhanced conference space, dedicated student organization and program spaces, exceptional dining options, retail outlets, and an innovative "one-stop-shop" for support services.
- Fundraising for a major expansion of the Miller Nichols Library has begun – a transformation to an Academic Commons, combining social, teaching, technology, study, thinking and conversation spaces into a state of the art library for the 21st century.
- Living-learning communities are in design – communities that merge residence life with course study, and the Trustees are engaged in an initiative on school spirit.
- Groundbreaking of the health sciences building is scheduled, with plans to model the same kind of campus life on Hospital Hill for our Nursing, Medical, Dental, and Pharmacy students.

We all want the best and the brightest young people in Kansas City. A strange thing happens to young people in college: they fall in love (often several times) and they often settle where they go to college, especially if that place is also a city where they have had internships, summer jobs, friends, and opportunities and are part of a creative verve. Keeping our kids here and attracting bright kids from elsewhere takes a vibrant residential life.

The destination university is the engine of creativity at UMKC and in this city. It is a big dream; it is a bold goal.

That brings me to the third point: **how do we do business? What characterizes our journey from here to there?**

This university, *your* university in this city, is climbing a high, rugged, perilous mountain and we have made enormous progress. I trust that is what brought me to your attention as a potential award recipient. We need your support and assistance. Maintaining the status quo at UMKC (while it may be easier) is not an option. Mediocrity is not an option. And,

yes, there is pain when you make the choices we are making because the summit we seek at UMKC is very, very high.

On a difficult journey, one faces the more existential question relating to the values of doing business – the ethical issues for which Rotary carries a significant quality brand. You have a Four-Way Checklist. We have five values and they are vital to our journey.

The existential question before all of us in this room is, “*Which is more important: the journey or the accomplishments?*”

- Is life’s journey more important than life’s accomplishments?
- Is the journey for a CEO toward her goals for an organization more or less important than the accomplishments she has and is the “how” more important than the what?
- Is how you live your life more important than what you accomplish?
- Is how you run your business more important than what your business accomplishes?

Think about it hard, real hard. If we did a survey, most of you would say *it’s the journey*.

But here is the paradox. Let’s say you have a dream for your company. On the one hand, you can’t produce great accomplishments without a value-driven journey. Your life or your organization will collapse (think of Enron). But, on the other hand, you can’t have a great journey without a big dream to which you commit totally. If the dream isn’t big, you won’t have a great journey, because your values will not be challenged or tested and you won’t grow. *It is* about the journey, but the journey will be hollow without the commitment to the big dream. So, the way out of this paradox is to *have the great journey* but only if you have the big dream and commit to it a strong heart.

We have a great dream at UMKC, one that we want to be your dream, and that is a first rate destination university for this city – a university that is central to the creative economy in this city. We are also engaged in a great journey on our way toward that dream. We fall sometimes. Occasionally, we run into chasms where we have to stop and find a way around or build a bridge across. It is perilous and challenging and not everyone that works in the organization wants to do it.

Our dream is to be the powerful research university Kansas City needs for the creative economy. I need your help and support for this difficult climb. Helping us, I am certain, will help you. How can you help? Talk about UMKC as being on the move. Talk about the emerging residential life program at UMKC; talk about UMKC as the “destination university” for students, faculty, community, and staff. If you are skeptical, find out about us. Get to know our students. When someone else is skeptical and critical, point out how important for the City it is for UMKC to be successful. Ask them to share their ideas, to become engaged with us, to ask us questions and to have an impact on the future of this city and this university.

Do me the favor of calling and telling me what you think I need to know or what I am missing.

In summary, my message to you today is this:

1. You have a wonderful public research university which is producing results for you and is continuing to accomplish in those domains central to this City's goals.
2. We have set a bold goal for ourselves – to be the university that is key to our city's move to leadership in the creative economy; we have acknowledged this as our goal and are taking the most vital step of creating a vibrant campus life to become a destination university.
3. Mediocrity is not an option for us and we are climbing a big, steep mountain. We have challenged ourselves on living our values because we have the dream and the heart for the journey.

Thank you for recognizing, with this award, the journey we are on at UMKC. I am personally having a wonderful journey here in Kansas City, and I thank you in this room for that. Let's do something big together.

Thank you very much.