

Senior Last Lecture
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Speaking with you tonight is certainly humbling. 29 years ago when I was in your seat I really never thought about being 50 years old, let alone that some day I would be speaking to a future graduating class. In fact, the implications of being your speaker frightened me out of sleep a few weeks ago.

I was living it up in the Hotel California. But this one is in Paris (I'm not making this up). It's a quaint little hotel off the Champs Elysees where my niece Courtney Green and her roommate, Jackie, had stayed with me in November when they came down by train from their Miami-Luxembourg program. I had been teaching at INSEAD (known as the Harvard of Europe) earlier in the week but had made a deal with myself that I would treat myself to a visit at the Louvre on Saturday afternoon if I spent the morning doing the first draft of this presentation. (Some things never change – you see I'm still doing it. I used to tell myself in school here all the time – Lynda, you can't go Tiffy's for a toasted roll until you finish this paper.") Anyway I had so much anxiety thinking about what I would say to you that I woke up at 3 a.m. ready to write. Now I've spoken with business leaders in over 25 countries around the world, but without a doubt I consider this the most important speech I've ever made because of the opportunity to influence you – our future leaders.

Anyway I got my trip to the Louvre and here I am delighted to be back here at Miami and very excited that Tara Cooper and Jen Stewart asked me to talk to you about leadership. I have been on a quest for the last twenty years to identify what creates world-class leaders and the world-class teams they lead. I've studied and learned from leaders in all kinds of industries all over the world. And some of what I've learned from these world-class leaders I have translated into Leadership Lessons I want to share with you tonight.

Oprah Winfrey started a magazine last year with one of my clients, Hearst Publishing, called Q, some of you may subscribe. Each month she writes a column called "What I know for sure." So tonight – you're going to hear "Lynda on Leadership – What I know for sure."

But don't blindly believe me, don't take what I say as truth with a capital T. Just listen because the most important thing you can do for yourselves tonight will be to reflect and ponder and argue with yourself and with me, but please, please do this - Silently!

So let's get started!

Gail Sheehy in her book Passages talks about the fact that our goals and focus changes as we go through different phases of our life. For you seniors she suggests your focus is on establishing purpose and looking ahead to your career. For people my age – we're concerned about our legacy – the influence we leave behind.

I would agree with Sheehy – however, if you wait until you're my age to focus on your legacy, it may be too late. Instead, I believe as you sit here on this beautiful night reflecting on your past and anticipating the brightness of your future, you are already forming your Leadership Legacy and that your concern about the mark you will leave on the world should begin today – right here – April 24, 2001.

And so tonight – while we spend a few minutes together, the questions I want you to sit and ponder is:

What will be your leadership legacy, and what will be your leadership legends – the stories you will tell others about how you led your life when you look back after 10-15-30 years?

Twenty-nine years ago – if someone had asked me those question(s) I suppose I would have had two reactions:

The first would have been- how the hell do I know where I'll be next year – let alone 30 years from now? And second – who says I want to be or will be a leader who has a legacy and legends to tell?

To your first probable question – my reply is – you're right – you cannot in your wildest dreams predict what your leadership journey will be. Mine as you will learn has been an unpredictable joyride (although not always joyful). When I sat in your chair a month before graduation I had just been rejected at the four graduate schools to which I had

applied with the hope of becoming a clinical psychologist. My leadership dreams of becoming a female Freud – gone. I was depressed and disappointed. So, I went – like many of us do – to my Dad and he helped me redirect my career toward business, read aka “get a real job!” I ended up landing one of the highest paying jobs in my graduating class (and did I ever gloat in front of the guys!) I proudly declared to my KKG sorority sisters in that first year that Ms. Magazine was published – NO KIDS for me – I’m outta here I’m going to be a millionaire! More about that later, too.

To the second part of the question- Do you want to be or will you be a leader? I have one simple answer – you have NO choice. You have no choice about whether you will make a contribution to your field – to your career – to the organizations you join or to your family. The only question is what will it be. Let me repeat – You have no choice about whether you will leave a leadership legacy.

You have no choice whether you will influence others around you and serve as a role model for them, whether they be professional colleagues, a soccer team you end up coaching or your own children.

Several years ago when there was some discussion about the influence that professional ball players have on younger kids – Charles Barkley of the NBA Phoenix Suns – now retired, said “I ain’t no role model – that’s not what I’m paid to do” – I remember at the time thinking: My friend – you have no choice.” And so I say to you tonight the only thing we don’t know – you don’t know – is how wide the circle of your influence will be – and exactly what mark you will leave on those whose lives you touch.

So beginning tonight I want you to think about how your Leadership Legacy can be shaped by these points of leadership power. I think of them as a bright 5-pointed star:

- 1) The Power of Character
- 2) The Power of Courage
- 3) The Power of Creating
- 4) The Power of Caring

5) The Power of Choice

“So now let me tell you what I know for sure.”

The Power of Character

At the tip of your star is the Power of Character. You are not going to hear me talk about the power of charisma or the power of charm tonight. Because the force, which attracts people to you as a leader, is not about how slick you talk or well you work a room. The loyalty which will inspire others to follow your lead is born out of who you are at your core – what your values are and the authenticity and congruence between your actions and your words.

I have worked and consulted with business leaders and their organizations around the world. If there is one consistent theme from followers who are cynical and distrusting of their leaders it is the complaint “Our leaders don’t walk the talk.” People want truth and they want authenticity.

As Jack Welch, Chairman of General Electric, has said, “...we know that without leaders who ‘walk the talk’ all of our plans, promises and dreams are just that...talk.” You already have a set of beliefs and values that have shaped your choices over the years. They brought you to Miami and have influenced you to choose a career and now you’re off to your first job. That job – maybe even your career – will change. Your view of the world will change – Your opinions will change. What likely will not change is what you stand for – what your convictions are – what you care about. Those define who you are and attract others to you. Don’t ever let go of those – When times get confusing or tough, go back to your True North values to help you find your way.

The Power of Courage

I rarely look back – hey it took me 29 years to come back to Miami. But if I have one regret as I use this time to reflect back on my life – it’s that I didn’t take as many risks as I could have. There were, in hindsight, some roads not taken – some forks in the road where I took the more conservative safer path – maybe I could have been the next Barbara Streisand or maybe Notre Dame’s Women’s Basketball coach. In hindsight,

though, I've always landed well – so if I had trusted myself more – the path not taken might have served me better.

On the other hand – I am most proud of those moments when I have spoken out and acted on the courage of my convictions. It's about listening to yourself and finding your voice. Writing my two books, writing articles, and speaking to audiences like this one has forced me to clarify what I believe and to courageously speak out. The most recent example for me – the No Kids For the 45 year old with a hysterectomy, two stepkids and three grandchildren told my 58 year old husband on Mother's Day after 20 years of marriage "Honey I've changed my mind." And off we went to adopt a beautiful little girl from China. That, believe me, took courage.

As you go through life if you're never scared or embarrassed or hurt or if you're not bemoaning your mistakes – that's a sure sign you're not taking chances. Look at it this way – if you go out on a limb there's only 2 ways the story ends.

I use a lot of sports analogies when I work with leaders and teams – probably because I have a Father who played for Woody Hayes – after Woody coached here at Miami and I was a cheerleader all through high school and my Freshman year. When I think of leaders in sports I think of Jack Nicklaus – the golf leadership legend from my hometown – Columbus, Ohio – I was recently watching clips of his career and recalled how in the early 60's when he was challenging then champion Arnold Palmer how he had to face legions of people who taunted him and presumably wanted him to lose. It took not only skill but courage for him to take on that leadership role.

Leadership can be lonely. Leadership requires working harder – working smarter – sometimes being ahead of the curve taking an unpopular stand. It will take conviction and perseverance.

The Power of Creating

I love the Walt Disney quote "If you can dream it you can do it." Earlier I said that you probably don't know where or how you will lead. For some of you that may not be true – you may have a very clear idea about how your life and career will unfold. To you, I say go for it and – more power to you – just watch for that unexpected curve of opportunity when it appears!

For those who are still floating in a sea of confusion – I say don't worry– your fuzzy dreams or your wildest dreams have a funny way of taking shape. Remember I told you earlier that back when I was sitting in your seat I was forced to change my leadership dream of being a psychologist. Well – the world works in funny ways. Five years after starting with Ohio Bell I had moved into a middle-management position and was attending a leadership development program in Cleveland, Ohio. The seminar leader said: “Okay now – I want you to imagine yourself 10 years from now – where are you living – what are you doing?,” and now turn immediately to someone next to you and blurt out what comes into your head. Out of my mouth I heard myself saying: “I will be an organizational psychologist, I will live in New York City, I will own my own consulting business and consult with clients around the world.” When we went around the room sharing our “VISIONS” everyone laughed at me. I was a middle manager in a telephone company in Cleveland, Ohio. I had only been to New York City when I was 11 years old. But later that year I started my Master's in Organizational Psych at Bowling Green. In 1979 my husband and I moved to New York and in 1987 I started EquiPro International. Exactly 10 years after I had the courage to blurt out that wild leadership vision.

I have personally witnessed how a leader's vision can galvanize an entire company and industry. Over the years we have done a lot of work for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals – makers of Viagra (wrong audience – you're too young for that!) Celebrex, Zithromax, etc. When we first started working with them they were #10 in their industry in terms of sales and were considered a well-run but B+ player. Bill Steere – their Chairman – has led that organization over the last 10 years to the #1 position by setting forth a Vision of being #1 and keeping everyone focused on it – from the researchers who are supposed to be discovering blockbusters to the sales force that are trained to be the best in the world. Their employees are hard-working, loyal, and proud, and he has motivated them through his vision.

So for those of you who are not sure about your leadership path right now – my advice is this – STOP worrying – it screws up the creative process – anxiety wastes energy. Instead – start daydreaming and saying to yourself – “If I were King or if I were Queen and had all the power I needed where would I go – what would I do?” And then really, really listen to the whispers in your head – the thoughts that wake you up in the night – that is your soul talking.

The Power of Caring

A lot of what I've been asking you to think about tonight is about you. But to paraphrase John Donne – no man is an island. You will not create or live your leadership legend or leave your legacy without the help and support of others.

And I maintain that you will not enjoy the fruits of that help and support, you will not build loyal teams without genuinely and authentically caring about others and giving of yourself to your organization, your community, to your family, to your friends. One of the challenges you will face as a leader is finding a way to balance all the demands on you as a leader for your attention and caring from all your stakeholders – your colleagues, your family, your community.

Leaders who care coach others. Right now you'll be the new kid on the block and you'll need a lot of coaching. Ask for it. Learn from it. Then when it's your turn to help someone else and, as you move up your career ladder, be there for others.

I was given a lot of leadership responsibilities in my first job. At age 22 I was a supervisor in charge of a 1st and 3rd shift operation in the Accounting Department. It was a management development program where they put college grads on the firing line. Oh it was the firing line all right. I had 35 people reporting to me and on the 3rd shift I had some "bad apples." And as a new "kid" boss, they were out to test me. Anyway, within 2 weeks I fired someone. I just know my boss at the time, Bob Zelley, must have gone sleepless some nights wondering what was happening. But we got good results and within the year the good news was I got promoted to manager. The bad news is all 4 supervisors now reporting to me a) were older than me and b) wanted my job. All I could remember was my father telling me- respect your people – treat them all from the janitor to the president with dignity and get results and you'll do fine. That's what I had to learn – My father proved to be right. Remember this: as you get older, your parents get smarter.

The Power of Choice

Earlier I said tonight about your leadership legacy “You have no choice.” Well, that is my belief – but in reality you do have a choice and that is my last Lesson in Leadership for you tonight.

To paraphrase Yogi Berra or Alice in Wonderland – “When you see a fork in the road take it.” You are about to step onto a new path – cross over a bridge – I would heed instead what Henry Kissinger said – if you see a fork in the road – don’t just take it – ask yourself will this path reflect my True North values.

Earlier I mentioned some regrets I had. But as I look back almost thirty years – I must say I have very few regrets – because the original major choices I made as I was leaving Miami – to take a job with Ohio Bell instead of pursuing my dream of being a clinical psychologist, to marry my Miami University pinmate were not choices that were locked in for life. I’ve gone on to make other choices over the last 30 years that have resulted in a rich and satisfying life.

What forks in the road have you taken to get to this place today? What questions do you have? I suspect that there are some of you right now with more questions running through your heads than answers:

- Have I selected the right job offer?
- What happens if I don’t get an offer?
- How will I like living in Chicago – or Indianapolis or Boston?
- Should I go on to school – or get a real job?

If you think this is the last time these types of questions come up in your life – Think again! I still have questions:

- Should I merge our business with another?
- How long to I have to work in order to get Carylyn to Miami University? They just get phrased differently. So as a leader you must learn to trust and listen to your inner voice to help you recognize when to make the next choice.

Here’s a little hint I Learned and I’ll leave it with you tonight: Take a moment and mentally write down the two things you most want to do when you graduate. Now draw a line through the item you listed first. That is perhaps the one that others want you to do for them. The research suggests that the items you listed second is the one you want to do for you.

You will walk away from your Miami experience with one thing that no one else has. There will be hundreds of people with your degree and thousands of people who want to do what you want to do for a living. But you are the only person who has made these choices at your forks in the road and the only one who knows how you should lead the rest of your life.

So, if any of you are sitting out there – like Courtney Green – my niece who’s pondering the career choices ahead of her – Do your homework – get perspectives on different choices from those whom you respect, but at the decision point – go with your gut – trust your instincts. These are not the only forks in the road – there will be hundreds more and remember this very important thing – you can always make another choice.

SUMMARY

So this, my friends, is what I know for sure. We have created for you a 5-point Leadership Star – it will always be there watching over you and reminding you that as a leader you have.

- 1) The Power of Character
- 2) The Power of Courage
- 3) The Power of Creating
- 4) The Power of Caring

And

- 5) The Power of Choice

All at your disposal.

But remember – what you don’t have is a choice of whether you’ll be a leader. Tonight you are launching the next phase of your leadership journey. I have challenged you to find your Leadership Star and let it guide you as you end this journey and begin another.

But don't wait until May when you graduate or July when you start your new job or September when you begin graduate school. I challenge you to ask yourself am I in a leadership path today? How can I create, care, show more courage and more of my character today? What choices do I need to make now? I want to thank you for the opportunity to come back to Miami – my leadership roots and to reflect with you on what I know for sure. Enjoy the ride and remember as you're looking up on your leadership star something Oprah Winfrey once said that caught my eye: "I look out into the future and it's so bright it burns my eyes."

Good Journey. Thank you.