

Create Your Own Acronym of Leadership

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Thanks, it is really a pleasure to be with you today. I love coming back to Miami and really don't get to do it often enough. The best part of each visit is the opportunity to meet with you, to meet with students. I freely admit, I return to New York after each visit having learned something new.

And I have certainly learned something today. The idea of a conference that reinforces Miami's leadership values is just another of the many things that make this university special. My first real leadership role was as editor of *Recensio*. I had a staff of xxxx and a budget of xxx. I had to coerce busy students to meet deadlines and look beyond personal likes and dislikes to create a remembrance that would be universally acclaimed by all students. It was challenging, it was fun and it was scary. I had been working nearly xxx years before I got that level of responsibility again.

You heard from Curtis Zimmerman and trust me, I am not going to try and do what he did! Instead, I would just like to take a few minutes to ask you to think about what you want to be the essence of your own personal brand of leadership.

I have had the privilege of working with some of the most outstanding leaders in this country. People like Dick Grasso, president of the NYSE as well as Muriel Siebert, the first woman to have a seat on that august body. And, Lance Armstrong, who is now leading the battle for cancer survivors. Obviously, these people and other great leaders share common traits. But they are also different in many ways as well.

I've spent most of my career in marketing and communications. And I know that each day we are bombarded by thousands of "messages" – commercial messages trying to sell us a product, ideological messages trying to influence our point of view, personal messages from those we love and care about. And messages like those received today on how to be a better leader. So with all of this "noise" how do we focus on what is really important? How can you remember what you heard today and apply it to your life?

For me, the mnemonic devise of an acronym has always worked. So my challenge to each of you is to create your own acronym of leadership by identifying those traits that will define your leadership style, traits – by identifying how you spell "leader". Let me help you a bit.

"L" for me is "Listen". I believe you must listen to those you are trying to lead, and you must listen to your heart about what is right. But for you, "L" could be "Look" because it is important to look where you are going if you want others to follow. Or it could be "Learn", because a real leader never stops learning. Or, importantly, it could be "Love" –

it is much easier to lead when you love what you're doing. Great passion for the task at hand often separates the great leader from one who is merely good.

"E" is "Ethics". Today, more than ever, the people who lead must do so in ways that are ethical and moral, not just legal. But your "E" could be "Evolve" because standing still often means falling behind. We live in a world that is changing at an ever-increasing speed and a leader must evolve with that change. Then there's "Evaluate", learn from your actions and those of others, don't accept everything at face value. Another "E" is "Excellence", striving for the best will ensure that you succeed. But set your own bar, create your own definition of success. And there's "Energy" – I have never met a leader who is happy to sit on the sidelines. There is an old saying that if you have something that needs to be done, give it to a busy person. Leaders are always busy. And finally there is "Earn" and I don't necessarily mean money – though there is nothing wrong with being financially successful. What I mean is earn the right to lead. Be willing to do anything you ask others to do. Respect everybody you work with and treat them as you would like to be treated. Take responsibility for your actions.

My "A" is "Aspire". The ads for the Army say it perfectly: be all that you can be. That is the highest aspiration of all. Other "A"s? "Achieve" and "Accomplish" are both the culmination of aspiration. Set a goal and reach it. Don't settle. I also ask you to consider "Alternative". When you make a decision, take time to think critically. Evaluate options. Think out of the box.

"Demonstrate" is pretty easy for "D". In all of your actions, show that you – here's another "D" – "Deserve" to be the leader. Never take it for granted. Your team won't. "Devotion" is another attribute of leadership – to the people on your team, to the task at hand. Believing in what you want to accomplish will enhance your ability to lead. And don't forget "Delegate" – I promise you that no one, no matter how smart, can succeed alone. An important "D" for me is "Dialogue" – leading is not a lecture, it is a conversation. That is the most fundamental part of direct and honest communications. And, of course, there is "Deliver", when I was running a large public relations firm, our philosophy was to make realistic promises and then over-deliver. Nothing is worse than not fulfilling a commitment.

And, finally, "R". "Recognize" the skills and talents of your team. Give credit where it is due and your team will work harder. "Revolution" could also be part of your leadership style. Sometimes the only way to get things done is to throw out the status quo and lead a revolution. And that probably means you'll need to take some risks. And there's "Reputation" – nothing is more important. It is the currency of leadership success, it is your face to the public. It is your legacy. It is about being "Responsible" for your actions.

"Return" is what I am doing in my career right now. Taking all of the skills learned in over thirty years in corporate America and applying them to help a cause I believe in – Gilda's Club, an incredible organization that provides free support to people with cancer

and their families and friends. Giving back is certainly the last letter in my Leadership acronym.

Listen. Evolve. Aspire. Demonstrate. Earn. Return. That's how I spell Leader. Think about how you want to spell it as you remember all that has transpired today.

I want to leave you with one final thought.

You are being asked to assume leadership at a challenging time in our country. As a nation we are still dealing with the aftermath of an act of terror that has shaken the very core of what we believe. An act that has changed the world view of all Americans. It is an incident you will never forget.

I was a freshman at Miami when my world view changed the first time. I know that still today, every person my age knows exactly where they were at the moment they learned John F. Kennedy was shot. That was a defining moment for our generation and our country. How shocked we were. It was hard to imagine that someone would shoot the president.

But over the next four decades, we became a little blasé and got used to hearing about a world leader being shot ... we got used to hearing about war in Ireland or Israel or Iraq ... we got used to hearing about innocent victims in countries with names we couldn't pronounce. But at least we knew that as long as we lived in the US we would be safe from those terrible images of death and destruction we sort of paid attention to every night on the TV news.

Or so we thought. Until 9-11-01. On that day, 3,000 innocent people were killed and with the wonders of modern media, we actually saw it happen.

I ask that you learn a lesson from my generation. We became blasé and complacent. Please don't allow yourselves to do the same. Fight for what you believe and don't become so focused on your own family, that you forget the family of mankind.

As attendees of this conference, you have already shown that you can be leaders of your peers. In the future you will have the opportunity to guide the fate of your generation and that of your children and grandchildren. That is a sacred trust.

The future is in your hands – and as I look around this room, that makes me feel terrific.

Thank you.