



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## LEAVING A LEGACY

[Inspired by the author's presentation to recognize outstanding faculty members at one of the nation's largest and best community colleges.]

How many of you were hired during the first five years your college was open? The next five? The next five? How many of you plan to retire within 10 years?

If you are typical of most community college faculty, there is a strong correlation between those of you who responded "yes" to one of the first questions and those who responded "yes" to any of the last. That phenomenon is being repeated in community colleges all over this country.

So while you are my audience today, my remarks are really directed at the "veterans" in community colleges all over the nation. You have been part of the greatest educational achievement in recorded history. Never have so few done so much for so many.

Your college, like many others, started small and grew rapidly. When your college was established in 1969, it served 1,400 students. It now serves more than 40,000 credit and non-credit students each year. The number of different individuals served during its existence exceeds 350,000. While the numbers themselves are impressive, they are nothing compared to the individuals whose life stories have been influenced by the college:

- Thousands of young, first-generation college students who never would have gone to college without your low tuition and who never would have succeeded without the competent, concerned, conscientious, caring, committed (my five "Cs") people who work here.
- Thousands of older persons who entered the workforce after graduation from high school or became mothers and then returned to college.
- Thousands of men and women, young and old, who dropped out of high school to go to work or have a child and never dreamed that one day they would go to college.

- Thousands of retired people whose lives have been enriched by the opportunity to enroll in classes.
- Thousands of citizens whose employability has been enhanced by the education and training here.
- Hundreds (if not thousands) of employers who survived and prospered because of a well-trained workforce.

Very little of this would have happened without your college and the efforts of your staff, faculty, and administrators who, working together, have created a college that is viewed by your students, your community, and your peers in the state, as one of the very best community colleges in the nation.

As I think back to my first visit to this college and my visits since, I recall major changes. On my first visit, the college resembled a shopping center surrounded by open fields. By my second trip ten years later, things had begun to change. Roads had been built, and homes and businesses had begun to appear where the field had been. Today, I don't think there is a vacant lot within a mile of the college.

But these physical changes are nothing compared to the changes going on within the college. Over the years, you have developed a reputation for quality that marks you as one of the top ten community colleges in this country.

I vividly recall some work that I did here in the 1980's. One of my assignments was to help your college achieve recognition as one of the best community colleges in the nation. (At that time, there was a feeling that you were already one of the best; you just weren't recognized as such.) My audience was administrators from throughout the college. I led an exercise in which I asked them to list the top five community colleges in the country. For each one they named, I asked them to list two or three things that each college did that caused them to be on that list. We summarized the results. Not surprisingly, I found a lot of consensus in the group. Next, I took the list of achievements that had caused them to name each college and asked them to rate your



college on each. When they finished, we recorded the results. To conclude the session, I pointed to their ratings of their own college and said, "You asked me what you had to do to be considered one of the best." The rest, as they say, is history.

Those of you who today will receive recognition for your achievements represent a small sample of the quantity and quality of work done this year by the total population of human resources of the college. You are to be commended for contributing to the well-deserved reputation of your college. **But will you leave a legacy?**

Leaving a legacy has concerned me as the years have gone by (and the color of my hair has changed). I ask: "In what ways is this world a better place because of my having been born and spent years on this earth? In the field that I chose? In the institution where I spent most of my career? Contributions I have made?" More important, "What will happen after I retire? What have I done? What can I do to ensure that whatever positive things I helped create continue after I am gone?"

I want to focus on the latter—those things that you individually and collectively can do to ensure your legacy lives on. I limit my remarks about leaving a legacy to one observation and one recommendation.

The observation is this: You and I had it easy. We lived most of our careers in what scholars will refer to as "the good times of higher education." Oh, we had some difficult times—operating in temporary facilities, suffering through the dust and dirt of construction, sweating out millage elections, learning how to use a computer, and responding to changes in state regulations, accreditation standards, and federal laws. But they were nothing compared to what our replacements will have to face.

You see, we lived in an era of plentiful resources (or at least adequate) where the greatest skill we needed was the ability to add—students. With increases in students, we added people—faculty, classified staff, administration, programs, buildings, and parking spaces.

Our replacements will face much more difficult times. First, simple addition won't do it. They will have to know how to subtract—subtract as in reducing staff, administrators, faculty, and programs. But most important, they will have to be skilled in algebra. Algebra, as some of you may remember, involves (among other things) moving values from one side of an equation to another—without disturbing the balance. Algebra was the course that caused many of you to elect a career outside the sciences and mathematics. (I say "you" because one of my undergraduate degrees was in math.) Solving algebra problems wasn't easy. Solving the algebra problems of the community colleges of the future won't be easy either. Community colleges of the

future will have to wrestle with the tasks of meeting fast-changing needs of their communities without new money. That's algebra because it will mean having to close down a program that's no longer needed and taking those resources and opening a new program where there's a clear need. The difficulty lies in closing one and shifting resources to another. When you close a program, what happens to the people?

The recommendation is this: Get personally involved in the selection, orientation, training, development, and evaluation of your replacement or replacements (replacements because the college may have to hire two people to replace what some of you have been doing). There are two aspects of this recommendation—selection, and training and development.

First, selection. Get involved in the selection of your heirs (they inherit what you leave—the good and the bad). There is an old 1970's expression that has been credited to me, but is even more relevant today than it was then: "Resurrection is more difficult than giving birth." Your college has a marvelous comprehensive staff development program. But as good as it is, it is limited in what it can do to compensate when the wrong person is hired.

Next, training and development. They are fundamentally different. Training ensures people can meet the requirements of their job; development helps them grow and change as their job changes. To ensure that your legacy lives on, volunteer to serve as a mentor for your new colleagues (or heirs) and assist in their training and development. Remember: being as good as you were won't be good enough. Help prepare them to be better than you were because they will have to be!

For those of you who like challenges, you will enjoy the future. For those of you who will be there, your legacy will be determined by how well you handle the challenges. For those of you who, like me, will not be there, your legacy will be determined by the abilities of those you helped select and mentor.

One thing is certain. The future of the community college is going to be an exciting one. I wish you well. I wish I could be there with you.

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