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Leadership for the Twenty-First Century

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LEADERSHIP FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Inaugural Address
of
President Wayne Anderson
April 25, 1987
Illinois Wesleyan University

*Dear Lord of all the fields
What am I going to do?...
You? I? What difference is there...
Lord, let me shake with purpose.*

— James Dickey

A member of our faculty asked me to begin this talk by answering the question why anyone would want to be a college or university president. I would if I could, but I can't.

The president of the other Wesleyan University, described the position well. He said:

“After 15 years as a university president, I have finally learned what is expected of you. You should have the wisdom of an owl and the courage of a lion, the strength of an ox and the stubbornness of a mule, the cheery industry of an ant and the plodding endurance of a camel, meanwhile hiding the guile of a fox behind the charm of a kitten. All this, of course, without behaving like a jackass.”

It is a tough, if not impossible job — so maybe I am involved for reasons of acute masochism. Irrespective of motive, the indisputable fact is that I am here — and I join a line of extraordinarily dedicated men who have served this institution with distinction.

I want to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor Robert Eckley, his predecessor Lloyd Bertholf, and the other Wesleyan presidents who succeeded in preserving and advancing this institution. I could not share my plans — let alone dream my dreams — without the work they have accomplished.

That work, of course, was not accomplished alone; I offer my thanks and tribute to the faculty, staff, students, board, alumni and friends who have made a marked difference in the life of this institution. All of them have been leaders.

Leadership is my subject for today. What do I have in mind? John W. Gardner describes leadership as “the process of persuasion and the example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to take action that is in accord with the leader’s purposes or the shared purposes of all.”

With that definition in mind, let us discuss the leadership supplied by Illinois Wesleyan University — past and future.

Elinor M. Greenberg has written about leadership and its important characteristics which I will describe.

1. *According to Greenberg, leadership means taking advantage of opportunity when it presents itself.*

Illinois Wesleyan University did just that in 1850 when the institution was founded. The thirty founders — the so-called “Pragmatic Sons of the Prairie” — seized the opportunity to fill the large educational void in central Illinois. A remarkably diverse group, including the famous Peter Cartwright and the indefatigable John S. Barger, all came together in common purpose and common effort in establishing what was called Illinois University. Opening with two faculty and seven students, a new university was born.

Once again, Illinois Wesleyan must exploit the opportunities presented to it.

We must build on the solid foundation which has been provided. This means reaffirming the centrality of liberal learning in our academic program. Let’s listen again to John Stuart Mill’s observation that “individuals are individuals before they are lawyers, physicians or business people, and if you educate them to become capable and sensible individuals, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers, physicians and business people.”

We also have an obligation to persuade an all-too skeptical public of the invaluable nature of liberal learning.

We must also seize the opportunity to link the liberal arts, pre-professional and professional education into a fully coherent pattern — and a pattern which will enable Wesleyan to be even more distinctive in higher education. The recent Carnegie Foundation Report — *The Undergraduate Experience in America* — reminds us that “this unhappy separation between the liberal arts useful arts . . . tends to leave students poorly served and the college a weak and divided institution.” By carefully integrating these various thrusts, the university can win even more respect for its academic program.

2. *Leadership means anticipating what is going to happen and moving before it does.*

The University exerted exactly this kind of leadership in founding the School of Nursing in 1959, an action which anticipated rising professionalism in the field of nursing. This decision enabled the University to respond to the needs of the important area of nursing and foreshadowed the national movement to require nurses to hold baccalaureate degrees.

What should Wesleyan do in the future to play this leadership role?

We must become fully cognizant of the technological developments of our age. We must understand technology and the origins and implications of that technology. We must equip our students to deal with the ethical dimensions of technological and scientific advances.

Some day our graduates will be compelled to make moral judgments about complex situations of which we are only dimly aware at present. We must make sure that they have the intellectual framework, the skills and the sense of values to deal with such questions.

As the society's need for communication becomes clearer, Wesleyan must come to grips with programs in communications. In my view, we must make sure that all of our students can effectively communicate in oral and written form. We should focus on the nature of the communications process and enable students to delve deeply into this expanding and vital field.

It is terribly important that Wesleyan anticipate the increasing interdependence of the nations of the world and the relentless movement toward the creation of a global village — and act accordingly. In my view, we must encourage all of our students to seek liberating international experiences. Furthermore, we must sharpen our focus on the non-Western world, which we cannot afford to ignore or downplay.

3. *Leadership means seeing an old, familiar situation in a new way.*

John Wesley Powell extended his teaching beyond the classroom and took students with him to the Grand Canyon for invaluable first-hand learning experiences.

The early successes of Wesleyan orators in the 1870's led to the opening of the Wesleyan School of Oratory in 1892, which was led by Delmar Duayne Darrah. The school became widely known, and perhaps was a forerunner to the later development of a professional School of Drama.

The organization of four professional schools and the liberal arts college opened up new opportunities for a unique approach to undergraduate education.

In the future we must look at old situations in new ways. For example, we should look at interdisciplinary opportunities through a new lens. Following the advice of the Carnegie Report, we should not fall prey to the fragmentation of knowledge and narrow departmentalism which is so common to American higher education.

Let us present and study topics that transcend departments and divisions, employing new approaches to broad subjects. Such subjects include justice, peace and conflict resolution and biomedical ethics. Let us follow John Gardner's advice to leaders "to reach beyond the boundaries."

Let us continue our inquiry into general education, striving to develop an integrated program that extends from the freshman through the senior year. We need to enable students to build on previous learning and integrate a myriad of educational experiences by their senior year. Wesleyan must offer "value added" education in the years ahead. Well conceived general education can make that possible.

Furthermore, we must look at our library in a fresh, new way in order to offer the vital learning resources required of a first-rate undergraduate institution.

4. *Leadership means knowing your own talent and using it.*

In his inaugural address thirty-nine years ago, President Merrill J. Holmes said, "The first opportunity of Illinois Wesleyan University is in its relation to the individual student and what it may do for him." Before and after Holmes, Wesleyan has challenged students to develop their talents and abilities to the fullest.

The University has identified and recruited the finest teachers and created an environment in which they can effectively serve students.

In the future, we must know our talent and use it well.

I am advocating individual growth plans, individual goal setting, group goal setting, evaluation of performance for faculty and staff, and suitable recognition for services well performed. New faculty and staff development programs are also required if we are to provide added incentives for superior service.

We must do a better job of attracting, retaining and rewarding women, blacks, hispanics and other minorities. Commitment must lead to plans which must lead to action to make sure that this task is accomplished, and accomplished soon.

Further, we should take full advantage of the tremendous volunteer service rendered by the Board of Trustees, our Alumni Association, the Associates, the Board of Visitors, and other important groups. Not to make the fullest use of the extraordinary talent in these groups would do a great disservice to the University.

As a reflection of our deep concern for the individual, we should develop a wellness program. By doing so, we can demonstrate to those who are watching that we are a special and distinctive place.

Let me say something about governance. Knowing the capabilities of faculty, students and staff, it is imperative that we draw all three into the on-campus decision-making process.

The final decision makers — the Board of Trustees — should be encouraged to deal with important, substantive recommendations and issues to utilize fully their experience, talent and insight.

5. *Greenberg writes that leadership means assessing the competition's strengths and weaknesses and responding accordingly.*

For many years, Wesleyan has taken advantage of opportunities and openings in the marketplace of higher education. For example, to make sure a new four-year-old institution would have a graduation class, Wesleyan imported its first graduate from McKendree College to spend his final year at Wesleyan.

Once the university was established, it continued to fill needs not filled by others. Its preparatory school was one example; the Law School was another. Its January Short Term was another important innovation.

As we plan for the future, we need to be sensitive to the sharp competition which the future will present — for public attention, for students, for financial support.

We must present ourselves as an alternative — a better alternative. I mean one which provides excellent individualized higher education. I mean an institution that encourages a student's active involvement in the learning process inside and outside of the classroom. I mean that our students must learn the critical lesson of how to learn and how one can continue to learn. While others offer passive learning, Illinois Wesleyan can set itself apart by promoting opportunities for students to learn independently, which is essential if we are to prepare them well for the challenges they will face in the future.

The Carnegie Report targets another area in which American higher education is falling short. It is the area of assessment. We must work assiduously to find new ways of assessing the performance of students — to identify the impact Wesleyan is having on their lives. How else can we truly demonstrate the effectiveness of our program? How else can we thoroughly identify our niche in the market place? How else can we show that we have achieved what so many other institutions have not achieved, namely, a value-added undergraduate experience? Let us press ahead, beginning now.

6. *Leadership is sitting quietly alone and thinking clearly and then moving forward decisively.*

University officials established a Law School when the need was clear and they closed it when they felt it was necessary to do so. Facilities were built when deemed necessary, particularly during the 1960's.

In 1963, Wesleyan took decisive action in declaring that the University would meet the financial need of all students who were accepted to the University. This was an important and bold action for the University, which required a significant commitment of funds.

Taking this step, Wesleyan made sure that outstanding students would not be denied a distinctive Wesleyan education.

Future reflections on our situation will be mandatory.

We must continue our broadly representative planning process. We must never stop planning. Our plans should be subject to constant review and upgrading, and new people and ideas should be tapped as the process unfolds. Remember, the competition will not stand idle. External forces will not remain static.

The principal challenge of the future will not be the challenge of funds, or the challenge posed by competitors; it will be a challenge to our will. How determined will we be to become the best Wesleyan? How willing are we to pay the price for such an achievement? Are we prepared to pour our souls into that effort? The answer must be yes.

7. *Greenberg writes that leadership means knowing the goal you are after.*

Article three of the constitution of the University, adopted December 18, 1850, reads as follows:

"The object of this institution shall be to provide a system of education adapted to the wants of the country, and based on a system of religion and morality revealed in the scriptures."

In its first catalogue, a nineteen page document, published in 1851-52, to the present, Wesleyan has made plain its emphasis on liberal arts education as the core for learning and the base on which other programs would be offered.

In his inaugural address in 1940, William Edward Shaw, reminded his audience that "foremost in the minds of the founders of Illinois Wesleyan University . . . was the training of the leaders in the days ahead."

Wesleyan not only stated these goals; it has worked toward them.

In becoming the very best we can be, Wesleyan should attempt to raise standards for all of American higher education. We should become a leader in the field. Why should we attempt anything less? Why not take a chance at success?

We must make the Liberal Arts particularly compelling so that vocationalism is kept in perspective.

In preparing students with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes, we should prepare them to move into and succeed in the front ranks of leadership in this nation. This country cries out for leadership which is sensitive, ethical and effective. Let us set our sights on meeting this need.

8. *Leadership means risking.*

Risk is nothing new to the Wesleyan family. Founding a university in central Illinois in the mid-nineteenth century was a tremendous risk. A risk was involved in keeping it open and operating.

In 1855, there was a builder's lien against the "college edifice." The University was clearly at risk in 1857 when President Oliver Munsell worked for a year and one-half without any salary.

On New Year's Day 1881, a circular was distributed which advertised "college for sale at 10:00 a.m. at the south door of the courthouse to the highest bidder for cash." By the spring of 1900, the Wesleyan bank balance was \$38.77. Salaries at that time ranged from zero to \$1,500 a year.

The University took initiatives, recognizing the uncertainty of the outcomes. For example, the University opened admission to students who could barter farm produce for tuition, a gamble that paid off for the institution. Risks were taken with people, programs and investments, and the efforts worked to the advantage of Illinois Wesleyan. The leaders of this institution were not afraid to fail; they made a bold stab at success.

As Wesleyan has taken risks in the past, we must engage in risk taking in the future.

Real risks involve the prospect of failure. Let us test some ideas that might not work. Let us take a chance on programs that may not be pursued. Let us challenge people in ways that will be exhaustive and perhaps exhausting. Let us risk trying to be a great institution.

We must reserve room for an entrepreneurial spirit at Illinois Wesleyan. There is room for us to experiment in the fine arts, in nursing, in computers, in adult education, in other areas. Not all of our experiments will work. But a few may, and they might make a dramatic difference to the university and to students.

Let us invest dollars in people and programs — people with imagination and nerve and programs with purpose and potential. Responsible risks have paid off handsomely for some of the most successful institutions in America. They can for Illinois Wesleyan.

Leadership, according to Greenberg, means describing your own actions clearly enough so that others will know and understand what you intend to do.

9. President Francis G. Barnes did this for Wesleyan in 1905 when he visited 160 Illinois towns, giving five speeches a day. He communicated our mission as other Wesleyan figures have for many years. The recent task force on the 1990's clearly communicated hopes and ideas for Wesleyan's future.

In the months and years ahead, we should employ effective communication as the cement to unite our many groups — to establish the sense of community which the Carnegie Report and other studies have reported as missing on American campuses.

Through extensive communication, we can stimulate the necessary spirit of enterprise, energize the institution's supporters, and empower our community members so we can become the "change masters" described so well by M.L. Kanter in her book of that name.

10. *Leadership means putting yourself on the line for a better purpose than mere self-fulfillment.*

Over the years, Wesleyan has consistently fulfilled one of John Gardner's rules for leadership, namely, to "look at the larger realities." The faculty have sacrificed their time, energy and fulfillment to uplift their students. Staff have worked sacrificially to make student life here better than it might otherwise have been. Trustees have focused on the greater good toward which the university has aspired over many years. Students, alumni and friends have contributed their resources, expertise and time in meeting societal needs.

Sacrificial gifts have made a dramatic difference to Illinois Wesleyan, from one of the earliest provided in 1851 by Adam Guthrie who pledged \$75 in masonry work towards the construction of North Hall.

As we look ahead, all of us should participate in a larger cause — thereby filling a vital American need described by Alexis de Tocqueville.

As an institution chartered to serve the public interest, we must identify ways to serve the broad public interest. We must identify community service as a high institutional priority.

We should collaborate with our fine local school systems, and their outstanding leadership, Illinois State University, through its splendid president, the University of Illinois, other independent colleges and universities, religious groups — Methodist and others — local chambers of commerce and many, many other worthy organizations in maintaining and lifting the quality of life for the people of this region.

We can become a most helpful neighbor as we mobilize our resources to ameliorate community and regional conditions.

In this undertaking, let us never forget the leadership opportunity and obligation we have to serve minorities and women — in every way possible.

President Holmes said, “only as the college is related to its community can it train students in community interest and consciousness.” Let us be an example of the finest community spirit and service.

11. *Leadership is believing in something and acting on those beliefs.*

The actions of the founders were grounded in their belief in God.

Although the institution from the start was clearly Christian in orientation, individuals of other faiths and beliefs have been welcomed to membership in the Wesleyan community.

The opening of admission to blacks in 1867 represented an important commitment on the part of the institution, and appropriate action followed.

Illinois Wesleyan made its commitment to academic freedom and labored to encourage diverse points of view and backgrounds among its community.

As we face the future, we must not ignore our religious heritage.

In my view, we must recognize the integral role of religion in our academic program, making sure that all students are exposed to the study of religion, making sure that all students are confronted with critical questions of religious value, making sure that all students are challenged to develop values as frameworks for decisions they will have to make throughout their lives.

I think we should make a vigorous effort to make the relationship with the United Methodist Church as symbiotic as possible. Such a relationship can work to the advantage of both parties. It can help the church meet its mission in the world. It can extend the value and impact of the church.

Meanwhile, a close and mutually beneficial relationship can, as it does now in many ways, assist the University in its efforts to present its case to the world, to attract fine students, to obtain the necessary financial and human resources to strengthen programs, and to enlarge the University's vision of serving the world at large.

12. *Leadership means showing others how to do what you have done successfully.*

Wesleyan has done this many times.

For example, it offered a model school for little boys in 1863-64, which led to the Academy and the University's curriculum in elementary education. Its home study program for non-residents, which opened in 1874, was another model for emulation by others.

Furthermore, it has shown how efficiently a college or university can be managed, with balanced budgets and increased endowment offered as proof.

Illinois Wesleyan should attempt to become a model of leadership in the future.

It is within our reach to become such a model in many respects, including areas such as international programs, public service, inter-collegiate athletics, programs for women and minority groups, and in faculty, staff, student and trustee development.

We can also be a pathfinder in forging partnerships between business and higher education. If we add our reservoir of talent and cooperative spirit to that of the region's business community, we can set a high standard for other institutions to follow.

Let us take our light out from under a bushel. We have an extraordinary story to tell, and the story being currently written will be even more compelling. Let us encourage others to share our contagious spirit of improvement, reform, responsible risk taking and striving to be the best.

Alfred North Whitehead wrote:

"It is the business of the future to be dangerous."

As we confront the uncertain and fearful days ahead, the historian James McGregor Burns gives us two options for leadership. He says we can be "transactional" leaders to whom the interactions among people are uppermost. Or we can be "transformational" leaders who call on individual groups to advance themselves in significant and profound ways.

Let us be transformational leaders. Let us make Illinois Wesleyan University better than some of us ever thought possible. Let us work together in this worthy cause.

*"Dear Lord of all the fields
What am I going to do? . . .
You? I? What difference is there . . .
Lord, let me shake with purpose.*