

ILLINOIS MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE ACADEMY
A Pioneering Educational Community

COMMENTS: AUGUST 21, 1991

OPENING INVITATION TO IMSA COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS

Dr. Stephanie Pace Marshall

Good morning and welcome. Every year I look forward to us rejoining as a community, and this year is no exception--not only because of the foundation we have built as architects of a unique learning environment, but also because there are now 208 of us with 34 new staff and 100 new students and that represents unparalleled support from the General Assembly and the Governor.

We were the only institution of higher education not reduced by the General Assembly.

And we interpret that as a strong vote of confidence for what we have accomplished and our vision for the future. As Dr. Richard Wager, Executive Director of the Board of Higher Education told me, "We have a winner in the Math and Science Academy."

As I have said many times before, each year gets harder as I struggle to shape the thoughts I want to share with you. Pretense and rhetoric are so much easier when there is anonymity.

But I have always expected you to do hard things, and in fairness, you should expect no less of me; and so whether or not you agree with my perspective and how I am constructing a refocused context to our journey, you will hear my candid view about the needs we have in the 1991-1992 school year.

In June, when I talked with the faculty, administration, and support leadership staff during our retreat, I presented a list of options for a title. This conversation is also untitled, and I invite you to select the one upon which you attach the greatest meaning.

Here are your choices:

- The Parentheses of Sunday
- Shaping the Shadow
- A Heart Journey to the SEE
- Comfort of the Tide

Last year at this time I read some thoughts from the *Tao of Leadership*; I want to return to this text because it will set the framework for the comments I make and stories I will tell. And I quote...

“When you cannot see what is happening in a group, do not stare harder. Relax and look gently with your inner eye.

“When you do not understand what a person is saying, do not grasp for every word, give up your thoughts, become silent inside and listen with your deepest self.

“When you are puzzled by what you see or hear, do not strive to figure things out, stand back for a moment and become calm. When a person is calm, complex events appear simple.

“To know what is happening, push less, open out, and be aware. See without staring, listen quietly rather than listening hard. Use intuition and reflection rather than trying to figure things out. The more you can let go of trying and the more open and receptive you become, the more easily you will know what is happening.”

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Each year at this time, I reflect again on our mission; the commitments we have made; and the remarkable work we have done; and I find myself trying to create more basic and compelling interconnections between what we are striving to do as an educational institution and the needs and demands of an evolving new world view--one that has come under jeopardy in recent days.

Within those interconnections, I seek greater and greater clarity. I look within to find the essence of complex meanings; as if I am peeling away the layers of an onion, I am seeking to understand more profoundly how people within organizations can impact the world in positive and often dramatic ways. Within this framework, I began to think about what the next “discovery level” is for us.

We are now beginning the second half of our first decade. We are moving into a second evolutionary wave, and it is more difficult and complex than the first.

Difficult because, as individuals and as a community, we do not yet have all the knowledge or skills necessary to enable us to accomplish the goals we are now beginning to clarify; and complex because we will literally be transforming ourselves and the Academy.

Through the initiatives of our Strategic Plan, we are challenging the paradigms of traditional schooling, and in so doing are challenging our own professional practices-- analyzing the critical attributes of previous successes through a new set of lenses as we struggle through our own growth trajectory and the spaces between the way it has been and the way we believe is possible.

We have been striving to create a very special learning community. A community where EACH one of us feels significant; where EACH person makes a difference to our success; where learning and competence matter; and where our work is significant and creative.

We have acknowledged the difficulty and complexity of our journey; we have talked about the pain and exhilaration of change--the insecurity, the disequilibrium, the disappointment, and the frustration we often feel because we have few peers.

And through that, I have come to the gradual awareness that change has no constituency; it is a lonely pursuit.

Although one of our belief statements states that 'all people are capable of changing and bringing about change,' change is not a natural process. Systems are designed to maintain equilibrium.

It is only the courageous that actively seek change and are willing to unlearn and let go of past mindsets or behaviors in order to re-create themselves.

Despite the fact that we view ourselves as ordinary people, going about our work day-after-day, when I step back, it becomes clearer to me that the work we are doing is extraordinary, the efforts we are putting forth are remarkable, the changes we are striving to accomplish are unique to American education.

Whether we talk about a concept-centered curriculum, the examination of reflective teaching practice, the establishment of outcomes of significance, the development of a living and learning environment that enhances our students' capacity to learn and grow, or the design and development of quality standards for our work, we have chosen an uncommon road.

I have said quite literally to those new staff whom I interviewed this summer, IMSA will be the hardest but most challenging and important place you have ever worked, so only come here if you want to put your time, energy and love into meaningful work; if you want to create something significant, if you want to safely wrestle with ideas, if you are comfortable living and working as a member of a team within an interdependent community; if you are willing to re-examine and alter past behaviors, and if you want to help to shape an environment that can facilitate the development of remarkable people.

Don't come if you think you have all the right answers and simply want to implement them, but do come if you have some unfulfilled dreams.

Warren Bennis one of the most prolific writers on the concept of leadership said, "the founding fathers...were dreamers...on a grand scale. ...As individuals we need dreams in the way we need air, and as a society, we need true leaders; uncommon men and women who having invented themselves can re-invent America and restore the collective dream."

Within the framework of second-order change, what do I believe is our next level of growth? What do I think we must next examine in order to continue to develop the learning environment we believe is crucial for the children who will lead our world in the next generation?

Over the last several months we have talked a great deal about organizational re-creation, about curricular re-creation; and about instructional re-creation; but now, *now* it is time that we focus on community and personal re-creation.

Our Mission Statement says that we will develop leaders--but we cannot develop leaders unless we are leaders ourselves. And that requires that we become fully integrated human beings.

That we deepen our capacity for personal growth; that we continue to clarify what is important; that we seek to define our own guiding vision; that we assume control of our life and our own re-learning; that we listen to our inner voice; and that we come to peace within ourselves by learning to understand the complex dynamic and wonderful tapestry that is each one of us.

We are our own raw material, and we are the sculptures and artists of our own life.

Through an unfolding and gradually intensifying personal loss, I have now received a rare gift of time to continue that journey into myself.

Many of you know that loss has been a part of my life.... My father died when I turned 17, my grandparents, who lived with us died shortly there after. My brother, my only sibling and soulmate, died four years ago at the age of 39; and my mother is now dying of Alzheimer's.

She was born in England in 1916; came to this country with an eighth grade education; worked in numerous jobs in New York City, and then married my father, a nuclear engineer. She was 45 and unschooled when he died.

She passed the GED, using his engineering books, got a job as a teacher's aide in a school for special ed students, and attended college at night.

Eventually she received her Bachelors degree, two Masters degrees, and one of the highest scores on the LSAT at age 65, before she decided to retire and not go to law school. She had been a teacher of autistic, schizophrenic children for almost 20 years.

But now this remarkable woman does not know me, or worse yet, does not remember herself--she has lost her history; and in my quest to continue to understand mine, she and my husband and I spend every Sunday together.

We pick her up from the nursing home in Naperville, and bring her to our home, and then do nothing all day; Bob and I talk with her about her life and her brothers and sisters. We tell her how much we love her, and that she is safe. We tell her how pretty she is, and we rub her face and hands. We give her hugs, and I sing to her the songs she sang to me as a child.

She cannot speak very well but she tries; she occasionally laughs, and she clings to our hands with great tenacity, and sometimes I see in her eyes a depth of awareness that tells me she really does know who we are--because we have communicated within unspoken bonds always having been partners in the same pattern--but what she has given me, and I have accepted, is the time, the opportunity, and the gift to more fully understand myself.

On these very special Sunday's, I do NOTHING, but I re-learn EVERYTHING...and it has brought me greater patience, tolerance, appreciation, compassion understanding, and perspective...and a profound awareness of what is really important....

I share this with you because I believe there is a piece of us in that story.

As a community of people who have chosen thus far, to spend our professional lives together, IMSA can only grow when each and every one of us has taken the time to become and know ourselves.

Norman Lear has written that his father gave him this bit of wisdom, "Norman, first and foremost, find out what it is you are about, and be that. Be what you are, and don't lose it."

Personal re-creation or self-reinvention requires us to be authentic--literally we become our own authors. We discover our own internal energies and desires, and our own way of making them real and we permit ourselves to discard often tenaciously held old baggage. When we write our own life, we have, in the words of one of our faculty, "staged our own enlightenment."

"To become a leader, says Bennis, "you must become yourself, and become the maker of your own life."

And perhaps one of the most critical dimensions to becoming ourselves is to follow our hearts and do what we love.

Lynn Cheney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, said, "Those who follow their hearts in choosing careers will most likely end up laboring at what they love. They are the ones who will put in the long hours and intense effort that achievement requires, and they are the ones who will find the sense of purpose that underlies most human happiness."

How do we know we are doing what we love? Some people seem to have always known. But most of us have not. We have to spend time figuring out what we want to do when we grow up.

Warren Bennis offers four tests to determine how we can best learn to understand the things we love.

The first test is knowing what you want and knowing our abilities and capacities, and recognizing the difference between the two.

The second test is knowing what drives us, and knowing what gives us satisfaction, and knowing the difference between the two.

The third test is knowing what we value and what our priorities are, and knowing what the values and priorities of our community are, and measuring the difference.

And the last test is having measured the differences between what we want and what we are able to do, what drives us and satisfies us, and what our values and our organization's values are...are we able and willing to overcome those differences so that we can achieve what we have committed ourselves to do?

Unless each and everyone of us spends time on reflection and resolution; unless we make our learning, and UN-LEARNING conscious; unless we re-examine what we are doing, why and how we are doing it, and the relationship of our activity to our needs for personal and professional meaning; unless we master ourselves by letting go of safe, but often dysfunctional behaviors, we will not have the internal stamina nor desire to master the context of change that will be critical to move the Academy forward.

Again, I return to the words of Norman Lear, "All journeys are filled with potholes and mines, but the only way we can move beyond them is to approach them, and recognize them for what they are.... Everywhere you trip is where the treasure lies."

...PAUSE...

In an intriguing movie called "Defending Your Life," the main character is killed in a car accident and finds himself in Judgment City. Judgment City is the place where the decision is made whether or not you can move forward into a new level of being and understanding, or you must return to the Earth in another form to live your life again.

The story is a fascinating one. The protagonist sits in a room with his attorney and the prosecuting attorney and nervously watches videotapes of snapshots of his life, and he is asked to explain and justify his behavior in each one. (Kind of a frightening thought.) After all the relevant video clips have been shown, the judge decides if he can move forward or be returned to Earth.

What is interesting about this movie is that the critical factor in making this determination was whether or not he had conquered his fears; whether or not he had used the experiences of his life to deepen the knowledge of his life.

Why do I believe the next step in our journey is for each of us to focus on who we are and what we value as individuals and professionals?

T. S. Eliot said that between the idea and the reality falls the shadow.

I believe we have a remarkable opportunity to *shape that shadow*. But our ability to be creative through the paradigm changes of our own design, requires, as Ghandi said, “that WE be the change we wish to see in the world.” Our ability to do that requires self-knowledge.

Second-order change of the type that we have committed ourselves to are changes that intentionally challenge widely shared assumptions, and hence generate widespread discomfort. We must, therefore, help ourselves and each other through this period of inevitable individual and institutional turbulence by minimizing the risk of change and creating a safe and trusting environment.

The power of IMSA to become not only an external catalyst for change, but also a powerful learning environment that enhances capacity and the development of remarkable people, rests on our ability to care for ourselves and each other.

Only when our professional mission is aligned with the mission of the Academy will we, as a community, be willing to establish the covenantal relationships we require to achieve authentic paradigm change.

There is a profound little story that speaks to this process, of external bonding through internal self-awareness. It is written by Richard Stine and is called *Off to Sea*, (S, E, A), but I believe it would be more appropriate if it was called SEE, (S, E, E).