



THE MILLENIAL PRESIDENT

It is wonderful on this lovely August day sprinkled with Jersey sunshine to once again join with all of you as we begin the 2006-2007 Academic Year here at Ocean County College. It is very good to see both new faces and familiar faces out there and I join with each of you in the anticipation of return, renewal and a new beginning.

My thoughts this morning are, first, with Judy Icklan as she continues her courageous fight against leukemia. We are heartened by her remarkable progress and ask that each of you keep her in your thoughts and prayers as she continues during these weeks and months to make her journey back to health. Her spirits are excellent and she and Jim are deeply thankful for all the extraordinary outpouring of support they have received from the college community.

As I deliver this epithalamion, I am also thinking this morning about our progress as an institution, about our coming together in a renewed spirit of collaboration and civil interaction to continue, together, our commitment to essential institutional change. The subject of our Colloquium keynote speaker, Richard Sweeney, is the Millennial Student. I think you will hear

in his remarks this morning a subtext echoing the theme of the deep cultural changes needed by colleges and universities to respond to the demands of this generation of student learners at this particular moment in history. I think you will also both hear and intuit things about the new shape of knowledge and the new paradigms required to capture this altered universe of discourse, the millennial ontology. These will be challenging ideas that will take us far beyond the worlds of registration and student orientation and deeply into the heart of our cultural identity. T. S. Eliot has told us, “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

It is at this starting place that I’d like to begin this morning to share with you some ideas, not about the millennial student, the topic our guest speaker will address today, but about the millennial college president. Because I hold this position and perform this role today, I am, de jure, a millennial president. To explore whether that means anything other than a temporal coincidence, let me look back thirty-five years ago to the words of Alvin Toffler from his popular book, *Culture Shock*. He said then:

In the three short decades between now and the twenty-first century, millions of ordinary, psychologically normal people will face an abrupt collision with the future. Citizens of the world’s richest and most technologically advanced nations, many of them, will find it increasingly painful to keep up with the incessant demand for change that characterizes our time. For them, the future will have arrived too soon.

I remind you that Toffler is speaking here before the fall of the Soviet Union, before the rise of world-wide terrorism, before the triumph of global

market forces, and before the introduction of cell phones, e-mail, cable TV, and the world-wide web, which, when it arrived in the early 1990s, took only four years to acquire 50 million users. It had taken radio forty years to gain 50 million listeners.

And so, as I explore what it means to be a college president in these times and when I arrive back to where I started, Toffler seems uncannily prophetic now. The future has indeed arrived too soon, and I am coming to know it, as are we all, for the very first time. What to do? What do millennial college leaders do in this strange and brave new world?

I think the first and most obvious commitment, a kind of existential premise that must be assumed by the millennial president, is a deep and abiding commitment to change and to action. Albert Einstein observed that “we cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that we used to create them” and Woodrow Wilson said, in his inaugural address as President of Princeton University, on October 25, 1902, that “We are not put into this world to sit and know; we are put into it to act.” Indeed, whether it is meals on the run, ubiquitous mobile digital communications, or a new billion-dollar industry surrounding use of the Game Boy device, our contemporary world is one that demands our attention to change and to action, lest we become irrelevant.

In his 1996 book, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*, Robert Quinn suggests that the three most popular hiding places for those leaders who would avoid the inevitable commitment to deep change that comes with the territory of the Millennial leader, is to focus on task over

vision, to narrow options, and to lapse into denial. These three dynamics, he observes, working together, spell what he calls death in the comfort zone and suggests that millennial leaders really have only two choices: They can experience ‘slow death’ or they can make ‘deep change’. Or, as the great Mahatma Gandhi put it, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

In a recent survey of community college presidents seeking to identify “issues facing community college leaders at the millennium,” one president commented: “The major issue facing community colleges is change. Community colleges are going to have to adapt to the new technologies, to sharing resources, and to collaborative partnerships.” (141, CCPM). Another president noted: “The skills I need today are different from the skills that I needed when I first came into the job. I expect they are going to be different in the future, and the very near future at that.”

What are these skills? What characterizes the Millennial President? I believe it is what Jim Collins refers to as “Level 5 Leadership” in his 2001 book, *Good to Great*: A combination of personal humility and professional will, relatively free of ego or self interest, combined with incredible ambition first and foremost for their institution, not for themselves. Harry Truman, whose presidency is being treated very well by historians, said it well: “You can accomplish anything in life,” he said, “provided you do not mind who gets the credit.” Level 5 leaders are catalysts “of commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.” Millennial leaders “display a workmanlike diligence – more plow horse than show horse,” and “set up their successors”

for ...greater success in the next generation.” They “are fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results. They are resolved to do whatever it takes to make the (institution) great, no matter how big or hard the decisions.”

And all of this of course runs counter to the wishes of all who find comfort in the prevailing paradigm, setting up a constant tension in our professional relationships that tests the limits of our capacity for caring, for kindness, for that paternal responsibility inherent in any leadership position. And so there are risks.

One writer¹ looked at it thusly: “Kindness and intelligence don’t always deliver us from the pitfalls and traps: There are always failures of love, of will, of imagination. There is no way to take the danger out of human relationships.” Change is often difficult, often uncomfortable, often frightening. My responsibility, and our collective goal, is to foster change that preserves the institution’s ability to retain its *raison d’etre*, its meaning, its value ... and to speak clearly about the new value proposition to all who will listen... parents, taxpayers, students, faculty, trustees, the media, and our colleagues in higher education, all of whom are facing the deep-change-or-slow-death option of this Hobson’s choice with which we grapple. And, through it all, it is up to all of us to provide a place where we can all find security, happiness, prosperity, and satisfaction.

Thank God, our grappling is producing enrollment growth, new financial resources, and new energy. That convinces me that we are breaking free of the constricting old paradigms of our past and finding

common cause in the brave new world of a new paradigm, yet to be fully defined and understood. And I hope, I dearly, sincerely hope, we are doing it with the compassion, caring, and tenderness of the truly strong, the truly human.

W.H. Auden wrote, “Almost all our relationships begin and most of them continue as forms of mutual exploitation, a mental or physical barter, to be terminated when one or both parties run out of goods.” Prescient words for our millennial situation, certainly. As an institution we dare not “run out of goods,” so to speak. As individual professionals, we lose our way profoundly when we no longer feel it worth our engagement to understand the changing world around us. That is slow death professionally. Millennial Presidents cannot escape this new reality where change is the constant.

I am proud to say that examples of how our college has adjusted to this new reality abound, but let me cite a couple of them: Professor Zhang Wei, Visiting Professor from Xian International University in China, will be starting her final semester here at OCC next week, teaching one English and one Business course, as well as a survey course at Kean University. It's been a wonderful experience for both Wei and all of us at OCC.

The course at Kean will be a collaborative effort. Professor Zhang and her OCC team will teach "Contemporary Encounters with The Peoples' Republic of China: A Reconciliation of Cultures." She will be accompanied by an OCC "pro bono" team, including Dr. Xiao-mingYang,

Dr. Marilyn Kralik, Dr. Katherine Tietge, Professors Rob Furstoss, Barbara Napolitano and Karl Kleiner and by Dean Richard Strada, a great group!

Another example of our participation in global education that we take enormous pride in is the addition to our faculty for the Fall semesters of 2006 and 2007 of visiting Professor and Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Inas Abou-Youssef. Dr. Abou-Youssef is an Associate Professor of Communications at Egypt's Cairo University, a widely-published writer on journalism, women's social roles, and Middle Eastern culture, and has recently been appointed by President Mubarek to the Egyptian National Council of Women. Dr. Abou-Youssef will teach courses for us in Middle Eastern culture and gender roles. She is the sister of Dr. Maysa Hayward, Associate Professor of English and Literature here at the college. We extend our warmest welcome to Dr. Abou-Youssef and express our gratitude to the Fulbright program for this opportunity for a cultural exchange from which we all will profit greatly.

I also want to note that we have recently written a new chapter in campus collaborations with the formation of the Sambol/Citta Garden Project Group, comprised of Phi Theta Kappa students being advised in this project by Dave Wolfe. They are working to establish a new garden design for the campus mall. Recently, Sue Taylor, April Wennlund, and Triche Sherman of PTK reported to the Board of Trustees on the group's progress and were instrumental in the development of the proposal which led to a successful bid award for the garden project. The project is being funded by Mr. Richard Sambol and Mr. Joseph Citta as a replacement for the Arboretum, which they have funded for many years. So our new garden,

funded by former trustees, planned and defined by our students, approved by our current Trustees, and guided with the help of faculty advisors and administrators signals just one of many ways in which members of the college community can come together to collaborate for success and, no pun intended, to grow a better garden.

I think a second awareness that I have come to as a millennial president is that I need to model a very vital, energetic, collaborative, interactive, integrative leadership style. We no longer live in an era where certain processes can be set in motion and be expected to continue, unchanged and unchecked, by the force of their own stable energy alone. The energy-fields shift, new opportunities arise hourly, and the millennial president must be in constant dialogue with all segments of the institution simply to continue to know what each is doing and how that affects what everyone else is doing. Team work, team meetings, conversations with all campus constituencies, visibility, accessibility, community outreach, professional outreach, serious contact with the world of ideas—all these describe the new activist president. Systems must be put 'in place' that assure meaningful collaborations and communications across the campus. No longer can the President's office be a sanctum sanctorum—but, rather, must be the hub of campus conversation, the sharing place.

Recently, a popular TV commercial has used an old song by The Who, called Magic Bus, to promote its product. It's a catchy tune that many of us who were around when The Who was a chart topper will remember. I'd sing it for you, but I'm trying to avoid slow death, not cause it. But maybe you recall the words, "Every day I get in the queue (too much, magic

bus); to get on the bus that takes me to you (too much, magic bus), I'm so nervous, I just sit and smile (too much, magic bus).” Hearing it reminded me of one of the signal concepts in Collins’ book, Good to Great. It has to do with creating a positive culture of self disciplined, fully committed people intent on making the organization better than good, making it great. He refers to this phenomenon as “getting the right people on the bus” as necessary to avoid the stultifying effects of bureaucracy and stimulate a culture of disciplined thought and action. More than anything, this concept involves openness to changing who we are and what we do.

Now, OCC has undertaken a lot of change in the past few years, but without doubt the biggest adjustment we will make is finding ways to integrate with Kean University in delivering something entirely new, something better than higher education has ever produced. Success in this Kean – Ocean Alliance will require that Kean make huge changes; and, naturally, that OCC will make fundamental, deep change our ‘mantra’ as well. But the payoff, the value of making this deep change will mean survival, relevance, growth, opportunity, and yes, more change...exponential change. This will happen in spite of the slow-death and defensive resistance that some of our peers in higher education will choose, the consequences of which will be decline, cost inflation, and loss of esteem, or even demise, as students and their families vote with their feet and their wallets. Mark my words...although some will say I exaggerate: Those who are uncomfortable with the notion of deep change to begin with will argue that the scions of higher education’s royal stock will always be there. Well, maybe. But look at the evidence: at General Motors, Ford, the entire U.S. electronics industry, and at Toms River National Bank (and thousands of banks like it).

Also consider the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain which a year ago had 18,000 employees and a circulation of 3.7 million readers ... It is now gone, a “total eclipse,” as cited in the August 27th New York Times story on the demise of the nation’s second largest newspaper company, an empire of some nearly 40 newspapers, including the Philadelphia Inquirer. What happened? The Internet happened.

We at OCC stand, however, a great chance of ‘making it’ precisely because we have, relatively speaking, so little history, so little tradition. It is the same story with Kean University. We are both prototypical American public colleges, ‘colleges of the people’. We are the future, and all those hoary and proud institutions we have always looked up to and who have looked askance at us will now have to acknowledge what we are rapidly becoming... the brave new world of higher education: low in cost, accessible, sharing resources to generate efficiencies, productive, and yes, most of all, high in quality. Remember this: you have an aisle seat in the front row of tomorrow’s big game. But first you have to “get on the bus” to get to that game.

Why am I so excited about our Kean Ocean Alliance? Because it is the very sort of deep change strategic move that could remake both of our institutions into something entirely new, something not yet invented. I know that Dawood Farahi, Kean’s President, understands all of this deeply and urgently. We have spent many an hour discussing a future wherein State supported institutions become first state-aided, then state-affiliated, then state related, at best, as public funding becomes a progressively smaller percentage of the funding pie.

At Kean's graduation exercises which I attended this past spring, I saw the vitality, the diversity, the energy and desire to grow and succeed that infuses every great enterprise in all its dimensions, in all its aspirations. The highest compliment I could pay Dr. Farahi and his Board was to say, "You remind me of us at OCC." It is a magic bus and it's a great feeling to be in the queue ... and I know our friends at Kean have been blown away by what they have seen here at OCC!

As a millennial President, it is also crucial for me to ensure that our enterprise is configured by a particular organizational structure where all parts of the college serve the learning needs of the student, needs that we must be constantly assessing and redefining. As Woodrow Wilson said upon his arrival in the Nation's Capitol as President, "We are not here to merely make a living. We are here to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. We are here to enrich the world, and we impoverish ourselves if we forget the errand."

It is thus my ultimate responsibility as president to insure that no individual and no segment of the institution loses sight of our commitment and does not place personal or departmental needs above those of service to the learning needs of our students. We are a learning centered institution and it is my job to see that we both define clearly what the learning needs of our students are, and then focus on the primary mission of serving those needs. Every ounce of professional energy we have must be devoted to that outcome.

And it is this notion of professional energy that sets up my fourth and final significant challenge as a millennial president. I must work daily and diligently to eradicate the quaint and outdated notion that professional positions at a community college consist of a single professional dimension. The days are long gone when a single task defines what any of us do as college employees. None of us can stand behind a counter, sit behind a desk, or stand in front of a classroom and believe our job is accomplished when a bit of information is delivered, a form is filled out, a class is taught. We are now all professional generalists who exist to serve our students in multi-dimensional ways.

As you will learn about millennial students, they are technologically adept and not only capable of but desirous of multi-tasking. We need to be responsive to this quality by being multi-dimensional ourselves. In short, our students expect and it is our job to give them the “complete” employee, one who responds to students’ educational needs on many levels. This student generation is used to being embraced by what has possibly become the most protective and consumer-orientated parent generation in history. Some call the millennials the “Baby-on-Board,” “Have You Hugged Your Child Today” generation. It is my job as President to see that this type of support for student learning is proffered here at OCC and used to transform students into what Neil Howe calls “the powerhouse generation.” In his book, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, Howe concludes that “with millennials rising, America needs to start thinking bigger. Test them. Challenge them. Put difficult tasks before them and have faith that they can do themselves and their nation proud. Lead them. . . We are entering a new

era. Colleges and universities will buzz with activity, change, new pressures and new arguments.”

Perhaps during no time in history have the haunting words of Bob Dylan presented more of a challenge to America’s colleges and universities:

Come gather round people
Wherever you roam,
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown,
And accept it that soon
You’ll be drenched to the bone;
If your time to you
Is worth savin’,
Then you better start swimmin’
Or sink like a stone,
For the times they are a changin’.

It is ultimately my job to see that we as an institution keep “swimmin’.” We must engage our students on their terms while also engaging them on our terms with the learning and humanistic knowledge-base that our academic culture is founded upon. And we must do this in the brave new world of the 21st Century, in different ways than we have in the past, but with the same commitment to quality and to the success of our student learners that has been the hallmark of this wonderful institution throughout its forty two years. This is no mean task. But the academic world has always been called upon to do the difficult thing—to teach students how to live in the present while keeping the past alive and the future possible. I know we can do it. We all just need to get...on...the...bus!

¹ Barbara Grizzuti Harrison