

2000 National Ruby Award Lecture

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"EXCELLENCE IN TIMES OF CHANGE"

By

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I am extremely honored to have been selected to receive the Epsilon Sigma Phi Distinguished Ruby Award for 2000. I am also humbled to be listed among the previous recipients, many of whom I looked up to as mentors and leaders in Extension. To be identified with ruby recipients of the past is a high honor and no doubt the highlight of my career.

To receive this award, based on nomination by your colleagues makes it especially meaningful. One does not win the Ruby Award because of their individual efforts, but because of the colleagues who do the true work of the organization. For this award I thank those Extension colleagues in both Idaho and Montana for their great work. Several of our Idaho faculty will also be recognized at this conference for their accomplishments. I have also been fortunate to have supportive University administrators, and I thank them.

This award is also meaningful for several other reasons. First, I spent the first two-thirds of my career in Montana, the birthplace of Epsilon Sigma Phi in 1927, and the state in which I was initiated into Epsilon Sigma Phi. Second, it is the first award in the 2000's. Third, winning the Ruby Award this year is coincidental with Agnes' and my 40th anniversary, the Ruby year for anniversaries. As with faculty and colleague support, a supportive spouse, as Agnes has been, also plays a large part in this recognition.

I quote Albert Einstein to express my feelings at this time. "Many times I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received".

My talk title, "Excellence in Times of Change" in keeping with the conference theme, may suggest that we tend to think about change as if it were a temporary condition, and that if it can be endured for a given period of time, we will return to a calmer, more normal state. We know calmer times will not return and that our "new normal" is filled with change, and at a much faster pace.

Change over the centuries is well documented as the country moved from an agrarian society to an industrial society, where many of the same skills of the workers transferred from one period to the next. We then moved to the information age where worker skills did not transfer as readily. The agricultural and industrial workers, by and large, did not become knowledge workers of the information age. We have now moved from the information or knowledge age, which for many of us in Extension was comfortable, to the technology age, which is comfortable for some and very challenging for others.

There are simple prescriptions for how we should conduct ourselves during these times of constant and rapid change. You have heard them. Do more with less, which is an interesting admonition but one to which we have had to adjust because it has happened to each of us. Work smarter, not harder, which doesn't give us much credit in the first place. Today the average person works twenty percent more than they did five years ago. That is working harder. When we work harder or longer do we maintain our quality or excellence?

Serving the public from the perspective of education and service is not an easy task. We do not have captive audiences in Extension and if we do not provide quality and excellence in everything we do we will not be completely successful. As we deal with personalities of our various constituent groups, farmers, ranchers, families, youth and volunteers, we must cope with their headaches, their hormones and their hang-ups. It is not easy. Our work requires a great deal of emotional labor. Excellence, however, does not require as much emotional labor as does mediocrity. Doing quality work and the emotional feeling of success feeds the heart. The better we do our job the better we feel about ourselves. Even when times are tough, we need to maintain a good attitude about our work and the people with whom we work. Pleasant, cooperative relationships make our work easier. Good relationships build understanding and if the job gets too demanding people will accept that we can't meet all the demands.

As leaders, we must be architects of excellence and set high standards of performance. We must be intolerant of mediocrity. Our standards, and the standards of performance our organization sets for itself, will dictate the level of excellence and quality for the future. Any high caliber organization is merely a reflection of its people. Excellence is obtained through a sense of personal responsibility. It does not just happen; it is grounded in action. We have to make it happen, and how we do that is very important. It is not about managing change, but about leading people through the transitions.

Any discussion about change and its impact on excellence would not be complete without reference to Spencer Johnson's book, "Who Moved my Cheese?" This book has been on the best sellers list for over a year. "Who moved my Cheese?" is a simple parable about change. The four characters in the book, two mice named Sniff and Scurry and two little mice-sized people named Hem and Haw, live in a maze where change takes place. Cheese is a metaphor for what we want in life, a job, relationships, wealth, health, recognition, spiritual peace or whatever our particular cheese may be. It is in the maze where we look for the cheese we want and it is not always easy to find. In the story, when the cheese is gone, Sniff and Scurry very soon go out into the maze to

find new cheese. Hem and Haw, the little people, are much more reluctant to do so. Eventually Haw decided it was time to quit analyzing why the cheese was no longer where it had been and to get going to find some new cheese. So he began to go out into the maze to find new cheese and tried to encourage Hem to do so as well. Hem thought things would return to the prior state and refused. Haw put up signs for Hem to follow and when he found new cheese he reflected on what had transpired. If Hem would only read the "handwriting on the wall" he too could experience the new cheese. Haw left Hem a message, sharing the insights he had learned.

The "handwriting on the wall", which was written on a wall of cheese, provided seven key messages:

Change Happens
They Keep Moving the Cheese

Anticipate Change
Get Ready for the Cheese to Move

Monitor Change
Smell the Cheese Often
So You Know When It Is Getting Old

Adapt to Change Quickly
The Quicker You Let Go of Old Cheese,
The Sooner You Can Enjoy New Cheese

Change
Move with the Cheese

Enjoy Change!
Savor the Adventure
And the Taste of New Cheese!

Be Ready to Quickly
Change Again and Again
They Keep Moving the Cheese

If Extension is to continue to provide quality and excellence in education and service to meet the needs of our clientele, we should take a close look at the handwriting on the wall. I, for one, think our cheese has moved. We can't expect different results from doing the same things in the same way. Can we adapt to the changes taking place? Several excellent efforts have been or are being made in this regard.

One effort is by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP). Myron Johnsrud and David Foster have taken the leadership to develop a very brief paper titled, "The Cooperative Extension System--A Vision for the 21st Century." The paper

outlines the changes in rural America, the opportunity, the challenge and the process for Extension. The process is to appoint a special committee to address the challenges and to prepare a comprehensive position paper that can serve as the Extension System's call to action for the 21st Century. Engagement will be the central theme to address the challenges we face.

The brief paper calling for this action emphasizes changes in rural America from the agrarian age to the current communication technology environment and the public's increasing expectation for instant access to information.

Quoting from that paper:

"Advances in agricultural technology have led to production efficiencies and a corresponding economy of scale that profoundly altered the economic structure of rural America. As a consequence, agriculture, once the economic engine of rural America, now provides the economic base for only 18 percent of non-metropolitan counties. America is now a metropolitan-centered economy in a global economic environment. Throughout most of the 20th century, Extension improved the lives of farm families through an educational process that introduced research-based technologies and methods to apply them. Its success is well documented."

I would elaborate by saying that the success and efficiency of production agriculture is in large part due to the success of agricultural research at the land-grant universities and at USDA and the success of Extension in getting the research to the agricultural people. That effort from the agricultural programming component of Extension has a proud history and should continue. More efficient, larger farms, however, have had a tremendous impact on the smaller rural communities. As fewer and larger farms emerged, there was less reliance on the local implement dealer, the local grain elevator and the local clothing or grocery store. Eventually they also consolidated and got larger, or simply went out of business, leaving many rural communities without these services and the many jobs they created. You know the story. Unfortunately, the land-grant system, the USDA and those of us in Extension have not, in most states, come back in a major way to help these rural communities survive.

Quoting again from the ECOP paper:

"The need for life-long education and the application of knowledge to improve the lives of citizens and the communities in which they live is as great today as it was when the Morrill, Hatch and Smith-Lever Acts were passed. What has changed is the nature and needs of the people living in our rural and metropolitan areas. What also must change is the way in which Extension responds to those needs."

The paper goes on to discuss the opportunity for Extension for the 21st Century. Again I quote:

"The needs of people and their communities are varied, their opportunities are often unique, and the road to a desired quality of life is complex. If Extension is to play a central role in 21st century America, it must move beyond the bounds of traditional connections. It must draw upon the capacity of the entire land-grant university system and an array of federal, state and local agencies; the private sector; and public and private colleges and universities.

Extension, through its network of campus and community based offices, is well positioned to serve as a focal point for community education and service through redefined engagement within communities. This engagement with people and communities is the bedrock that forms a foundation for charting an appropriate course for the future. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities describes engagement as follows: "Engagement goes well beyond extension, conventional outreach, and even misconceptions of public service. Inherited concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents. Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity. By engagement the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among partners for what each brings to the table. An institution that responds to these imperatives can properly be called what the Kellogg Commission has come to think of as an "engaged institution."

Two of several challenges the paper suggests for Extension are:

- Define its vision to meet the information and educational needs of 21st Century people and communities.
- Build on the concept of "the engaged university" to access research-based knowledge and technical expertise of the entire land-grant university community in its educational challenges.

The findings of the Kellogg Commission Reports and the 21st Century paper being drafted by ECOP are two efforts that are extremely important to Extension for the future.

Joel Barker, in his book, "Paradigms--The Business of Discovering the Future" says you can and should shape your own future because if you don't, someone else surely will. He also identifies three keys to the future of any organization that wants to fully participate in the 21st Century. The keys are anticipation, innovation and excellence. Anticipation provides you with the information that allows you to be in the right place at the right time. Innovation is how you gain the competitive edge. Excellence is the base for the 21st Century and the necessary price of entry. Without excellence you won't even get to play the game. This suggests that this project being undertaken by ECOP to look at the vision of Extension for the 21st Century is a crucial step for our system.

A year ago I did a survey of all state Extension services to determine where Cooperative Extension is positioned within the states' university. Sixty-one responses were received out of a possible 73. Only one 1962 institution did not respond. The results showed that 35 state Extension organizations are positioned fully in the College

of Agriculture, with three having shared reporting lines outside of agriculture. At 23 universities Extension is positioned outside the College of Agriculture. Of the 1862 institutions, 18 are at the university level with two having shared reporting. Our institution is one of the two that has shared reporting. One Extension director told me recently that in a lot of states Extension is part of agriculture, but in his state agriculture is one part of Extension. There is, of course, a College of Agriculture in that state as well.

My vision for Extension, to meet the changing needs of rural America, is for a university-wide Extension, creating an atmosphere where the entire university can readily be called upon to serve the needs of our county faculty and the people in their counties. This does not suggest we diminish our role in agriculture or our other traditional programs in family and youth. Again, it has been our success in agriculture that requires us now to look more broadly at university-wide assistance to adequately serve the needs of the people. The Colleges of Agriculture do not have the sufficiently broad research base required to deal with the complex issues of rural America. We must look to other colleges as well. I realize that my vision is not shared by some agriculture deans, those that see the movement of Extension out of the college as a loss of resources for the college. It is my contention that county faculty should be separate from the College of Agriculture, in a separate university wide unit, so that other colleges at the university see them as a conduit to and from the counties for broader educational programming. I would like to provide funding for Extension specialists in every college of the university.

Another effort underway is to expand our resource base beyond agriculture. We cannot rely on CSREES to do this because of their structure within USDA, whose goal clearly is focused on agriculture, with some support for family and youth. The Program Resources Committee, which we created in 1996 as part of the ECOP Budget Committee structure, with leadership from Linda Kay Benning, has been successful in expanding resources in the nutrition area. We need to build broader partnerships in order to enhance our resource base beyond the more traditional agricultural areas. We must broaden our funding portfolio in order to broaden our programming portfolio, so that we may properly serve all our people. A broader mechanism for funding will eventually also help us better serve our traditional agricultural constituents as agricultural political clout continues to diminish. Reapportionment in 2002 will also certainly change the face of our state legislatures.

The Kellogg Commission report "The Engaged Institution--Returning to Our Roots" states:

"The engaged institution must accomplish at least three things:

1. It must be organized to respond to the needs of today's students and tomorrow's, not yesterday's.

2. It must enrich students' experiences by bringing research and engagement into the curriculum and offering practical opportunities for students to prepare for the world they will enter.
3. It must put its critical resources (knowledge and expertise) to work on the problems the communities it serves face."

Much of the report is about access. Not only access to our campuses for all students, regardless of their situation or status in life, but access to education in our local communities for those that are time or place bound. Outreach or distance education is all about access. Extension needs to help develop a system that brings broader educational opportunities to our rural areas. Rural learning centers as part of the Extension network is one solution. Those of us in the west have great distances to deal with but we must find solutions. Learning very directly impacts earning. In 1997, median annual earning for workers age 25 and older was \$26,000 for high school graduates and \$40,100 for those with a bachelor's degree. The unemployment rate is also lower for those with more education. Educational opportunities for people in remote areas should be a priority. If we are to anticipate excellence, we must do all we can to provide broad educational opportunities to all our citizens.

As Extension changes in the 21st Century and as we anticipate or maintain excellence we must do all we can to enhance the quality of our faculty and staff as well. Professional development is a key purpose of Epsilon Sigma Phi. As we enter the New Millennium, dealing with a new economy, the technological age: we need to consider new ways of doing things. While we take pride in our past accomplishments, we must create new pathways to success.

As we look at the expertise of our own faculty and the rapid changes in technology, we must adapt quickly enough in order to help our constituents adapt. Our faculty must be on the proper side of the digital divide. Our more mature faculty must be encouraged and trained to enter the digital age and understand how to operate in the new economy. There is a great deal of concern about our public school teachers being technologically up to date. We must have that same level of concern for our Extension faculty and staff. Our people will increasingly respond to questions using e-mail with less reliance on the telephone. They will increasingly use the web to conduct research. Raising the level of expertise among all our employees is essential to excellence.

Several states now have Internet Masters Programs, similar to the Master Gardener Program. The ultimate goal in this is not so much to learn how to use the computer but to use the computer to learn. We also need to help rural people understand how they can participate in e-business, to market the efforts of their hobbies or small-scale production. Our constituents will be more dependent on the new technology and we will have to provide education and leadership in this area.

It may be necessary to reconsider our programming priorities and how those priorities are determined. As we set priorities at the local level we should be sure that we solicit

input from those people that will tell us what we need to hear, rather than just what we want to hear. If we let the true needs drive our program decisions, we should be able to develop additional support groups, many of which will likely be community based. These groups can have a significant impact on our reapportioned legislatures. I am convinced that we need new collaborators to maintain current support in agriculture, families and youth for adequate future funding.

In summary, the will of our people in Extension to serve the public and their continued quest for excellence will insure that Extension is a vital and useful organization throughout the 21st Century. We must look ahead and be willing to change quickly with the times. We must accept change and move with the cheese. We must have a clear vision for the 21st Century and become an instrumental component of our engaged institutions. We should look closely at our position within the whole of our university structure and position ourselves for the greatest benefit to the people of our state. We must look to serve new audiences that will be willing to support us in the future. We should be the primary source of access to all our people in rural communities and we must provide educational opportunities to our own faculty and staff so they can maintain their excellence.

I said earlier that excellence is obtained through a sense of personal responsibility. Let me retell an old story. An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer of his plans to leave the house-building business and his desire to live a more leisurely life with his wife and his family. He said he would miss the larger paycheck but they would get by. The contractor was sorry to see this good builder go. He asked him if he would stay long enough, as a personal favor, to build one more house. The carpenter agreed, but his heart was not in his work. He did not use the best materials and his workmanship became shoddy. The house was not up to its usual standards. It was an unfortunate way to end his dedicated career. When the carpenter finished his work, the contractor came by, but instead of inspecting the house, he handed the carpenter the key and said, "This is now your house, it is my gift to you for your long service." The carpenter was shocked. What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house he would have done it so differently. Are we doing the best we can? We build our lives a day at a time. We do our jobs a day at a time. We can choose what kind of carpenter we wish to be, but we can't go back and rebuild what we have done. Our attitudes and choices today will build the Extension of tomorrow. If we build wisely, Extension in the 21st Century will serve the people and strengthen the legacy that was created in the 20th Century.

Thanks again for this honor!