

N. Dale Wright Distinguished Alumnus Speech  
Friday, October 26, 2018  
Chris Brady, City Manager, Mesa, AZ

Remarks provided during a luncheon with the faculty, advisory board and MPA students

Thank you for the honor of being recognized as the Norman Dale Wright Distinguished Alumnus of the Year. Thank you to those in attendance from the faculty, Romney Institute's Advisory Board and current MPA students.

I would also like to recognize family members that are here with me today, my wife, Shawna, parents Michael and Margaret Brady, my brother David and his wife Heidi, my Aunt Carol Kingsolver, and Al and Linda Switzler who are all here today.

I would also like to give a special recognition to Vicki Okerlund and Tanya Harmon.

Vicki and Tanya are two of the most wonderful ambassadors for BYU. This dynamic duo is a significant reason why I have stayed connected with the BYU MPA. My friendship with Vicki and Tanya goes back several years. Today that connections continues in an annual event that I often refer to as dinner for truffles. Let me explain. Each year Tanya and Vicki travel to the Phoenix area with a group of MPA students that are looking for jobs or internships. During that week my wife Shawna and I host a dinner for the visiting BYU students and several of the BYU MPA alumni from the area. In return for our hosting dinner we are treated with BYU truffles. That is why I call this annual event dinner for truffles.

I am honored to be recognized by the MPA Program which in many ways reflects the core missions of this great institution of Brigham Young University. Receiving this award which is named in honor of Dr. Wright is also personally significant to me. In 2002 during his retirement recognition event, Dr. Wright made this observation, "We may never know the impact of our actions, but we can be assured they have one." Dr. Wright was correct, he has had an impact on me.

Soon after returning home from my mission, I was left wondering what I should do with my life and where I should go with my studies at BYU. I was an undergraduate student majoring in political science and I was not sure what my

future path should be. As Yogi Berra once said, “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.” That is where I was going, “someplace else.”

About this same time, I was visiting with one of my roommates, who happened to be attending the BYU MPA program. He was my first contact with the MPA program. He convinced me that if I was interested in working in city management that I should look in to the MPA program. I soon set up an appointment to meet with Dr. Wright, whom I found out knew my parents from the time they both were attending BYU. My initial visit with Dr. Wright was encouraging, but he was also clear that the program required a commitment of my best efforts and that the classes would be challenging and rigorous. He encouraged me to apply to the MPA program as long as I was willing to take on the challenges of the program. He spoke of the successes of those who had completed the MPA program and the opportunities that might be available for an MPA graduate. Today, I still remember the feelings I had following that visit. I had feelings of purpose and optimism. I began to believe that this was the path for me.

Dr. Wright along with many others such as Doyle Buckwalter, Gary Cornia, Gloria Wheeler, Kirk Hart, and Bob Parsons to name a few had a great influence on me during my time in the MPA program.

Today I have been asked to provide my vision for successful public service and how we can make an impact on improving the governance of organizations.

My public service career in city management has included the opportunity to work in some great communities in the states of Utah, Texas and Arizona.

Today I serve as the City Manager for Mesa, Arizona. Mesa started out as a small Mormon pioneer settlement but now is a city of nearly a half-million residents, which ranks it as the 36th largest city in the United States. Additionally, Mesa is a significant contributor to the Phoenix metropolitan area.

As the city manager for a very large organization, like Mesa, my role is less about how I can apply my technical skills for the benefit of the city and more about how I can provide the vision and support to accomplish the goals of the city. Today, more than ever, my role is directly related to performance of many different individuals, employee groups and teams. Empowering employees to take

ownership in delivering responsive services to Mesa residents and encouraging employees closest to the issues to make decisions is my responsibility.

How is it possible to get so many different employees to pull together and work toward a shared vision? Even after a shared vision is identified, inspiring employees to understand how their efforts are linked to the success of a shared vision is key. I can assure you that I am still working on this ideal situation. However, I believe that all organizations can experience an increased measure of success as it establishes and communicates its fundamental core values or principles.

Every year I take the opportunity to meet with most of the four thousand employees of the City of Mesa. We call it the City Manager's Roadshow. The Roadshow provides me the opportunity to speak about the current issues facing the city and the opportunity to reinforce the City's core principles of customer service. The City of Mesa has defined its core principles in a statement that is known as the City of Mesa's Employee Values.

The City of Mesa Employee Value Statement has been around for several years. At every opportunity I remind employees of the importance of reflecting on and recommitting themselves to upholding these values. My message to city employees is that Mesa city employee values will continue to endure and will not change with the seasons or get replaced by the latest upgrade from Apple or Microsoft. The employee values are intended to be lasting and define a long-term commitment by all city employees. Stephen Covey once wrote, "Principles are deep, fundamental truths, classic truths, generic common denominators. They are tightly interwoven threads running with exactness, consistency, beauty, and strength through the fabric of life." (Stephen Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People)

Today, I would like to share with you the City of Mesa's employee values. I believe these three core values are important for the success of almost any organization. My experience is that when these values are understood and followed they can inspire great performance and loyalty to an organization.

The first Mesa employee value is **KNOWLEDGE**: *“The City of Mesa empowers employees to take pride in their work by applying their skills and knowledge to deliver professional services.”*

*Peter Drucker, who was once given the title of, “the man who invented management,” provided this insight, “knowledge has to be improved, challenged and increased constantly or it vanishes.”*

My first job after graduation was with the City of Houston, Texas (with a population twenty times larger than that of Provo). I was confident that my experience working as an intern for the metropolis of Provo, Utah had prepared me well for my real-life adventures in the Bayou City. I arrived in Houston with my wife and two small children and with little idea as to what I was getting into.

I was quickly introduced to the chaos and clutter of preparing and monitoring budgets for one of the largest bureaucracies in the country. I was immediately pressed into service, learning new and different ways to monitor budgets and preparing reports for my supervisors to review.

Writing skills were important, financial analytics and the creation of endless spread sheets were essential. My assignment was to monitor the budgets of my assigned departments. However, I soon realized that I wanted to know more than just how to balance budgets and monitor expenditures for a few city departments. I wanted to learn how cities worked and how decisions were made regarding policy and management.

I worked hard to gain the confidence of those that I worked with to trust me in my efforts to help them organize and deliver their work so that it could be presented to the City’s executives in a meaningful way. In a short period of time, I became the publisher of the Mayor’s financial and management report that was presented monthly at a city council meeting. Each month I had the opportunity to learn about the most important issues facing the city. These experiences provided me the additional learning opportunities and insight that I was looking for.

The second Mesa employee value is **RESPECT**: *“City of Mesa employees serve a diverse community of residents. We respect all those we serve and strive to deliver services equitably and efficiently.”*

*The poet Edwin Markham expressed the importance of human priority:*

*"We all are blind until we see  
That in the human plan  
Nothing is worth the making if  
It does not make the man.  
Why build these cities glorious  
If man unbuilt goes?"*

*(Edwin Markham, "Man-Making," Poems of Edwin Markham, p.6 (1950))*

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated many gulf coast cities including the City of New Orleans. Katrina was a Category 5 hurricane that resulted in the death of more than 1,800 people. The Mayor of New Orleans ordered the evacuation of an estimated 1.2 million people from his city. However, several thousand residents were not able to escape Katrina's rising flood waters and devastation. In a desperate attempt to save thousands of displaced residents, the New Orleans Super Dome was converted into a shelter of last resort for those unable to evacuate from the effects of the hurricane.

Within a short period of time the Super Dome was overwhelmed and was no longer able to provide shelter for the refugees. In a desperate plea for help, the City of San Antonio along with other major Texas cities was asked to shelter and care for thousands of refugees from the impacted areas. With less than a twenty-four-hour notice San Antonio was told to be prepared to receive the first group of evacuees who were being moved out of the Super Dome. My assignment was to work with the City's Emergency Operations Chief and locate suitable shelters for the arriving, dislocated refugees. Overnight we were to prepare shelter sites that could accommodate thousands of refugees and include supplies and services such as meals, bedding, clothing, medical assistance along with many other basic life-support needs. We had to coordinate with FEMA, the Red Cross and many other volunteer groups. As soon as we set up one shelter location we had to move on to the next site. Eventually we housed more than 25,000 refugees.

With the support of many groups and individuals, San Antonio made every effort to welcome the refugees to our City. The Mayor of San Antonio publicly welcomed the new temporary residents to San Antonio and declared on national

television that the city was open to any and all victims of the storm. We soon recognized our role was more than just providing temporary shelter, but also the need to restore back the dignity and hope for many unfortunate fellow human beings. We were able to convert large industrial buildings into mini-cities, reactivate abandoned shopping centers and open-up vacant office buildings to house the refugees. Many of the individuals that were sent to San Antonio expressed their gratitude for the compassion and care they received. This benevolent embrace by the city and its residents for its neighbors from Louisiana continues to be a point of pride for San Antonio.

The third Mesa employee value is **INTEGRITY**. *“City of Mesa employees seek to earn the trust and confidence of those we serve. We earn the public’s trust through our daily honest and transparent actions.”*

*The Book of Mormon gives an account of a community of people who were, “. . . distinguished for their zeal towards God and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things . . .”*

In 2002 I was asked to serve as the lead representative for the City of San Antonio in negotiations with Toyota Manufacturing to locate a new assembly plant for the next version of the Tundra pickup truck. This manufacturing plant would provide for 2,000 jobs and represent an investment of \$1.2 billion. San Antonio was on a short list of cities that were seeking to attract the manufacturing plant to their community. Toyota required that each community had to first identify and secure property in order to qualify for the final site selection.

Finding a site that could accommodate the size and location for a two million square foot facility was very challenging. The preferred site in San Antonio for the Toyota Manufacturing Plant was a 2,000-acre ranch south of town. The family who owned the ranch could trace to their ownership of the land through their family line all the way back to the first settlers of Texas who were granted the land by the King of Spain. Some of the family members who were heirs of the ranch were reluctant to sell their property knowing that generations of family members had lived and worked on the ranch. There was also lingering distrust of

the government because of a previous attempt by a regional water agency to condemn the property so that a dam could be built over their land.

Before we could negotiate a final price for the land, the family members had to believe that they were being treated fairly and that they would be given some acknowledgement for their contributions to bringing Toyota to San Antonio. In the end, the most important commodity that we had to offer in our negotiations with the property owners was that of trust and fairness. Our investment in the relationship and building trust became just as important as the financial consideration for the sale of the land.

During our research of the ranch property we discovered a hand-written note on a historical land map that mentioned the existence of a burial site located on the ranch. There were no official documents, legal disclosure of a cemetery, or mention of a burial site on any of the official records. Since there was no official record, we could have easily ignored the map and submitted the site to Toyota.

This was further complicated by the fact that in our research we determined that there were some historical references to a cholera epidemic in the area during the mid-eighteen-hundreds. Some of the family members suggested that there was a possibility that some of the slaves that had been working on the ranch had died from the cholera epidemic and were buried somewhere near or on the ranch site.

Of course, we were getting close to the deadline to have the property under contract and available to present to Toyota. Despite knowing that this information could possibly represent a significant delay to the project or even a rejection of the site, we made the decision to share all that we knew with Toyota. While they were not very excited about the new information, they did appreciate our transparency and openness. They allowed us a few more weeks to determine if there was a burial site on the ranch.

There was only one way to find out if there was a cholera burial site. Go dig. Good news we did not find any buried bodies on the site and there is a Toyota Tundra manufacturing plant in San Antonio today.

In conclusion I believe successful organizations must identify and practice their core values and principles in order to serve their customers effectively. Mesa's core values of knowledge, respect and integrity have provided a guide to its

employees in providing quality services to our residents. These values will continue to provide the necessary vision for our City for years to come.

Once again, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for this recognition. Thank you for all those who have made this a wonderful moment. I applaud all of those here who provide important services to your community.

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