

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT  
Marriott School of Management  
Brigham Young University

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Mitt Romney Accepting on Behalf of His Father George Romney, Deceased

Thank you very much, Brother Walters. It's an honor to be here, an honor to receive this award in my father's behalf, to have so many of my family members here. I'm sure those of you who are in the School of Management here didn't recognize that there were so many at your school; about half of the room is filled with Romneys. I see my father's sister who is here, his baby sister Merle and her son, and so many others from across the country have come to be part of this honor to my father. There are a couple things I would like to do. I was asked first to say what my father would have said. I can't do that very well, so I'm not going to do it very long. So I am going to talk about what he would have said if he was here, but I'm going to do something else as well and I'll come to that in just a moment.

First, what would he have said? I got out his addresses over the last several years—I had about ten copies in my files—and read through them, and I have a pretty good idea what he'd say if he was here this evening, speaking to people who are thinking of a career in public administration. He'd begin by telling you that America is facing the greatest crisis it's ever known in its history, and a crisis which it may or may not be able to succeed in overcoming. He'd say that John Steinbeck had looked at this country and said no other nation has been able to confront plenty, comfort, and leisure and remain great, and that Arnold Toynbee, the great British historian who surveyed the history of the world and the great cultures of the world, concluded that every nation that fell, fell by suicide. Finally, that George Kennon, an author who was a great strategist in world affairs, concluded after having examined America, that America has become a sick society, sick because of the incredible level of disintegration of our family structures in the United States. Sick, because of the rampant births out of wedlock. Sick, because of rampant immorality, lack of understanding of the true basis upon which our freedom has been established. Sick, because of the pockets of extreme poverty which exist in our country. Sick, because of the growing number of children who are uneducated and unable to be educated given the kind of families they have come from. He'd even say that Republicans would say that all that can be solved by turning it over to the free market, and the Democrats would tell you that all of that could be solved instead by having the government develop programs to make things better, but that hasn't worked; it won't work; it can't work. The private sector can't solve all their problems, the government sector can't solve all of our problems, but volunteers—people helping people—is what is essential to make a difference in this great country and to help us overcome the greatest challenge we've ever known. Only people can solve people problems; I've heard him say it hundreds and hundreds of times. You're going into public service—he'd say congratulations. If you're going into business, the private sector—congratulations. But don't forget that it is the voluntary sector—churches, personal volunteering, reaching out to others and lifting them one by one—that is what is essential to make this country the great nation it has always been. He believed very strongly in that famous prophecy of Joseph Smith, which is that the Constitution of this great land would hang by a thread. He believed that that was

occurring even as we speak. He didn't think, however, that his being elected as president of the United States was a glimpse in our eye and our hope, that that was the answer, that that was going to be the elder of the church that was going to save America hanging by a thread. No, he believed firmly that the elders who would save the church sit in this room and throughout the church, and that they are those who go to their communities and lift one another and volunteer and work with scouts, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, work with people who are less advantaged than they are and lift them up. That is what is essential, and the only course to bringing people back to the greatness which has always been America. That's what he'd tell you.

Now let me turn and do something else. And I believe every bit of that, by the way, and it's just as important to me as it was to him, although he spent a lifetime devoted to preaching that message. But the other thing I'd do is give you a little case history and a case example. I'm a big believer in real-life cases and learning from other people's lives. I went to Harvard Business School after I left Brigham Young University, and when I got there I found out that they taught everything through the case method. Can you imagine learning accounting without any textbook, without anything about what a credit and a debit was, instead just reading about real companies and trying to figure out how they were making their books work? That's how we learned everything, and I've come to believe that if you just learn about things in a theoretical sense that you really can end up with knowledge that isn't very helpful.

As a matter of fact, let me divert from my text here and tell one of my favorite stories, although I'll divert again. One thing that Felix Frankfurter's wife used to say (he was the Supreme Court Justice) was that he had only two faults in giving speeches. One was occasionally diverting from his text, and the other was returning to it. But the first part, which is just thinking about theoretical and practical learning, consists of an MBA student from the University of Utah who was out on a field trip in agricultural economics and was out by himself and happened upon a farmer with a large herd of sheep. He, being a betting man, went to the farmer and said, "If I can guess the number of sheep in your herd, can I have one?" The farmer said, "Well, that sounds fair, go ahead and take a guess." He said, "1,132." The farmer said, "Unbelievable! How did you do that?" He said, "Well, I get a sheep." Sure enough, he went down, picked up the animal, and started to walk away. The farmer said, "Wait a second. If I can guess where you go to school, can I have my animal back?" The kid said, "Yeah, that's probably a good idea, okay." And he said, "You go to school at University of Utah's MBA program." He said, "That's amazing, how did you know?" He said, "Well, put down my dog and I'll tell you."

We learn, I believe, more powerfully in examples sometimes than just through theories. I would submit to you that if we would study the life of George Romney, my dad, and think about what he has done and think about his life and study it carefully that there is meat for you which is virtually unique. If you were to follow in his footsteps in an important way, you would find your life happier, more fulfilling, with a richer legacy. You would meet your maker recognizing that you had fulfilled the mission for which he came to earth. Now I can't take you through all the aspects of this life that are required for all of those things to occur, but I can boil down for you the guiding principle which I see is, I think, about my father. That is the principle of integrity.

The word integrity we say a lot but don't know very much about what it means. I didn't think very often about what integrity meant until several years ago when several of the people in my firm were asked to go off to California for one of these team-building kind of things. We had these behavioral psychologist kind of people (I know they have some of them here at Brigham Young), but they took some of them to one of these seminars and at the end of the seminar these

psychologists said on the last day, "By the way, if you don't live your life with integrity, you will have higher levels of sickness, disease, marital disfunction, you will see your children leave you and you will be unhappy in your life." This is a strange thing to be coming from these psychologists! They went on to say integrity is living your life in business, in every dimension of your life, in a way which is consistent with your most fundamental values, your core values. I looked around the room at my partners and myself who were all there and I thought, "I wonder what their fundamental values are, their core values." How do you find that out?

They said, "Let us tell you how you find out your core values. Take out a piece of paper (which we did) and write down the names of the four people who have ever lived whom you respect most. They may be entirely different people; take them from different backgrounds if you can. Take down four people, and then next to the names of those four people, write down one or two values you associate with that person. Then look down those listed values and those that you repeat time and time again are your core values. These are the people you respect most and the values you respect most, and if you live in a way which is consistent with those, your life will be in harmony. But if you live differently from your core values, you'll suffer strain, sickness, pain, discord in your life."

Now as I thought about that it immediately came to my mind whom my father would have written down, four people whom he respected most. Of course the Master, totally by himself, and Joseph Smith, and then perhaps going to a different area, Abraham Lincoln and then Thomas Jefferson. The values, of course, would be an unwavering love and desire to serve our fellow beings. Another value would have been a willingness to stand up where everyone was and speak one's mind and act in behalf of that first value which is love of others. That's what characterized his life. Now you can say, well that's the guy's son up there, of course he's going to say that's what characterized his life. But I brought some proof. I have here a book, I'll call it Exhibit A. My sister-in-law collected articles that were written about my dad following his death. What's remarkable is not just that it's a whole book, but the things that were said underline not just a life of accomplishment, but someone who lived entirely consistently with his basic values, the things he treasured most.

Let me just read a couple of excerpts, and it's not going to take very long, don't worry. One comes from the Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press. At the time he passed away, both newspapers in his home state were on strike; all the writers were out. When they heard he had passed away, some of them came back to the newspaper and said, "We want to write an article. We want to write because this guy is a terrific guy." Now don't forget, he had been governor in the state of Michigan 33 years before his death. I called my brother wondering whether the story of his death had made it to the front page; when I got home I found out it was the entire front page. Here's what they said: "A Citizen First (headline of the paper). George Romney, who died Wednesday at the age of 88 was a man of such persistent principle, such passion for the public good, and such commitment to community that few even of his enemies doubted that this man was a genuinely virtuous person. Even if, or when, you disagreed with him, it was not hard to believe that George Romney was acting on the strength of his principles. More than anything else, he conveyed a strong sense that there was a man of strong moral compass." That's the front page; that's what they wrote.

Let me turn to another page here, another newspaper. This is an article by David Broader, national columnist, Washington, D.C. He concludes, "Romney was absolutely unique. He would look a problem in the eye, take it by the horns, throw it down. We could use some

more people like George Romney today.”

Then from another paper (you’re getting the theme here, you’re getting the drift): “George Romney Was a Rare Breed: Devout, Principle” (headline). Interesting, they begin with devout. “Never was he embarrassed of his faith. In any public setting, in any business setting, always people recognized that his faith came first. Devout, principle, that classic Jeffersonian citizen, a problem-solver, a shirt-sleeve worker, a liberal in his treatment of fellow humans, a conservative with other people’s money, a leader, not a manipulator. They didn’t make many like George Romney; they’re making fewer today. Americans need to only read his life story and absorb and internalize it.” And then finally this is an interesting picture. It’s got a picture of him up there as a political cartoon. It has a little picture here of a man with a huge jaw (we have this problem in our family). I can get in trouble with that; I got in the elevator in the Hotel Utah once—here goes another diversion—I was late getting into the hotel. I threw my bag in as the elevator door was closing to get it to open again, and it opened and there was President Kimball with Sister Kimball in the elevator. Can you imagine how embarrassed I was? I stepped in and there they were with the guard or the person who was getting them to their room in the Hotel Utah at that time. I introduced whom I was and President Kimball said, “You look like a Romney.” I said, “Thank you, I guess.” And he said, “What do you mean, I guess?” I said, “Well, we Romneys have such huge jaws.” He looked at me and he said, “Camilla here’s a Romney.” I exited the elevator.

This picture of my dad has a shadow, and it says “The lengthening shadow of a man—faith, character, leadership, service, remembrance.” And then it has this headline, “Romney’s Legacy.” What is your legacy, young men, young women? What will it be? What will they write about you? I’ve gone back and looked at elements of his life and said, “Have I acted like that?” Have you? Think about these things as you go about your career. Once as a very young person just starting off in his career, working for a trade association, trying to ingratiate himself into the business circles he was working in, this was 1947 after the war. American’s didn’t want to have to get involved with Europeans; they had their own problems after the war and they heard about all the troubles over there. Americans were fond of saying that they had gotten themselves in their own mess with their failed monetary policy. My mom and dad went on vacation to Europe about that time, as this young executive. They saw the suffering there, the hunger. He came back to Michigan and began campaigning to provide aid and help to people in Europe. He appeared before a Senate committee, was the third to appear, and he said these things: “We’re all like billionaires living in a few mansions in the middle of a vast world ghetto. Too often our actions belie our words.” Would we be so bold taking our career in such risk and jeopardy?

In 1957, now a successful business executive, he formed a citizen task force to study Detroit’s school problems. The task force he headed came up with some relatively novel and unpopular ideas; today they sound like Newt Gingrich or something, these things have been around for a while, but he came up with them for the first time. He said, “Catholic schools in Detroit are working. We ought to provide additional tax benefits to them.” In a highly Protestant area like Detroit, that was an outrageous thing to say, which he campaigned for. And then something else: “We ought to raise some taxes for our schools that need more money,” which he went about doing. Running for governor in 1964 he was in a tough race and needed the support of the party regulars, concluded he couldn’t support the party’s nominee for president, Barry Goldwater, because Goldwater had equivocated on Civil Rights. His staff and his friends

begged him just to say, "I endorse the candidate." What's wrong with that? It doesn't take a lot just to say, "I endorse the candidate." Who cares anyway whether some guy running for office endorses their presidential candidate? One of his friends, Max Fischer, as head of fundraising, recalls this. Dad said to him, "Look Max, it's a matter of principle, and whether I go any further in public service or not, I'm going to do it." And as governor, he fought for (can you believe it?) the first state income tax. Now by the way, this may be a terrible idea; I don't care what your political persuasion is, but it was very unpopular. He fought for it and got it, and then got reelected after he had done it. As a presidential candidate he said that the United States military and our government had brainwashed us about the purposes of Viet Nam and how successful we were there. That didn't help his candidacy a lot, but he said it, and believed it and said it again and again. As secretary of housing and urban development, he got up and said that public housing was a disaster and we ought to get rid of it and turn public housing over to private citizens. That was a long time ago; people are saying it again today. I never saw my dad dance with the devil of popularity, and I can never recall hearing my dad regret ever telling the truth boldly. How much happier, more fulfilling, more meaningful, our lives could be if we could likewise live our lives.

As a young boy, my father's mother died. Later as a young man he got ready to go to the east, where he was going to work. Of course, people in Utah were very concerned about what it was going to be like going east and what would happen to him there—he hadn't finished college, he couldn't either put the money together or the time together to do that—so he prepared to leave to go east. He said to his dad, "Dad, can you go with me to the gravesite where Mother's buried?" He got there and he said, "Father, this is as close as I can come to you and Mother in mortality. I want you to know I will never do anything to dishonor your name." May we be so wise to do likewise is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.