

BYU Romney Institute—Administrator of the Year Award
Remarks by Kathy Calvin
March 21, 2019

Thank you, Lori Wadsworth for that generous introduction. I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet so many students and faculty today and appreciate your leadership and that of Dean Brigitte Madrian.

I am so honored to receive the Administrator of the Year award. And thank you for inviting me to your beautiful state! My husband John and I spent the last three days driving through your canyons and parks and wonderful communities. We will be back—next time on our motorcycle!!!

This award has celebrated so many giants of public service, including my friend Gail McGovern of the American Red Cross. Of course, we also recognize the late Governor George Romney, the inspiration for this program and a trailblazer in national service.

I'm also honored that my friend and former colleague, Bishop Aaron Sherinian, joins us. Aaron has taught me so much about the deep commitment to service built into your faith and culture. And he showed me what the power of the church can be in making this a better world! And let me also recognize Michael Scott Peters, the 2019 UN Youth Observer for the U.S. government, a proud Utahn! Another thank you to our UNA, Shot@Life and Nothing But Nets champions who are here tonight.

I'm here because I'm eager to learn how a new generation – with service in its DNA – sees the challenges and opportunities of public service. So, let me begin by thanking you for choosing this school and this path. We need you more than ever to be the leaders of tomorrow, starting today!

I'm sure many of you have been influenced by your families, so I also want to recognize them for all they have done to support you. And as I learned from my meetings with many of you today, your faith has also been a critical influence in putting you on the path to public service.

If I may quote from your book of scripture, “When you are in the service of fellow beings, you are in the service of God.”

In preparing for this evening, I watched a video from Apolitical.com, in which public servants around the world talked about what inspired them. They said:

- I want to shake things up.
- I want to make the biggest impact.
- I want to be hands on.
- I want to serve others.
- And, they said: Serving makes me proud.

Service is a force multiplier. It offers a powerful solution to much of what ails us today. It unleashes purpose and passion and instills confidence in our ability to make a difference. Service builds empathetic leaders and changemakers. And it is both a responsibility -- and a joy!

Whether your service is in government, a nonprofit, or the church...

Whether you are here in Utah or in a humanitarian setting on the other side of the world...

Whether you are working to improve local government, fight climate change, or advance gender equality...

You will be tackling some of the most real and pressing issues facing the world – and you'll be doing so at the most divisive time in our history.

In this era of reality stars and influencers, public administration may not be considered a 'cool' job. But I can tell you, it is exciting. It is meaningful. And it is needed more than ever.

We live in a world of unprecedented complexities and contradictions.

Extreme poverty is at its lowest-recorded level, yet wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few.

More girls and women are going to school and work, yet research shows that it will take at least another century to reach gender parity.

And while millions more children are now surviving infancy, millions are denied their rights to work, learn, and be free.

The statistics show us that last year was "the best in human history." But, for too many people, it doesn't feel that way.

So how do we create change in a complicated world? I don't have all the answers; in fact, many will come from your generation.

But one thing I know for sure: We must make sure the "public" is at the heart of "public service."

I realize this sounds obvious. But as your career progresses, you'll see that it is very easy for spreadsheets and numbers to overshadow people. For good intentions to overtake common sense. And for excitement around a new technology or idea to overshadow human needs and voices.

So, as you prepare for your next chapter of service, I want to share a few lessons from MY experience on how to remain true to the people we serve and strengthen our sector for the future.

But first, here's some valuable advice I learned from none other than J.W. "Bill" Marriott about his early years. In a book called "How to be a Better Listener," he shared this story:

“I had come home from school in 1954 at Christmas to my family’s farm in Virginia. Dad’s best friend at the time was Ezra Taft Benson, who was Secretary of Agriculture and later became President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and he invited Ike and Mamie Eisenhower to our home. So, here’s the President and the Secretary of Agriculture, here’s my father, and here I am. They wanted to take the President to shoot some quail, but it was cold, and the wind was blowing like crazy. My dad said, ‘Should we go and shoot quail, or should we stand by the fire?’ And President Eisenhower turned around and looked at me and he said, “What do you think we should do?”

Mr. Marriott then said: “That made me realize how Ike got along with de Gaulle, Churchill, Roosevelt and others — by including them in the decision and asking them what they thought.

So, I tried to adopt that style of management as I progressed in life, by asking my people, ‘What do you think?’ Now, I didn’t always go with what they thought. But I felt that if I included them in the decision-making process, and asked them what they thought, and I listened to what they had to say and considered it, they usually got on board because they knew they’d been respected and heard, even if I went in a different direction than what they were recommending.”

Mr. Marriott said that “What do you think?” are the four most important words in the English language. “Listen to people and learn,” he added.

And if you’re curious about how the quail-shoot story ended, the young Bill Marriott shared his opinion with the President: “It’s too cold. Let’s stay in by the fire.”

The smarter we get, the less we think we need to listen to other people. But as Mr. Marriott said, that’s where it must start ... and end. As you go into your careers, make sure the people you serve have a voice and seat at the table. Earn their trust by trusting them.

There’s a term in international development that I can’t stand: beneficiaries. The people we are helping aren’t passive recipients; they are partners in our endeavors and agents in charge of their own lives.

We need to listen to them, understand them, and respect them. Another great leader, Winston Churchill, said, “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

There are so many examples of how that can work. A few years ago, the nations of the world created the historic Sustainable Development Goals, a universal agenda to address social, economic, and environmental challenges by 2030.

The UN wanted to ensure these goals weren’t developed by bureaucrats alone in a room. So, they included input from governments, businesses, and civil society, but also 10 million individuals. They actually created a survey called My World that anyone, anywhere could participate in. The

result: a shared plan to get us to the world we want. A world with education, health, jobs, and peace. Because everyone everywhere was in at the take-off of the SDGs, we can be sure they'll be in on the landing.

Let me be clear about this challenge. Making sure no one is left behind must be the cause of your generation. And let me be really specific here: women and girls must be part of the conversation—and the solution.

I am not a member of the faith community that is host to this organization, but I know that this is something you are working on. I applaud that.

We know that women bring value to every endeavor. This is not just about inclusion. It is about acceleration. As the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last week, “When we exclude women, we all pay the price. When we include women, the world wins.”

And as the 38-year-old new mom and Prime Minister of New Zealand said, “Gender should not be a barrier for young women around the world. Let us all put a foot in the door, as we help bring women into leadership.”

As the first female press secretary for a Presidential candidate -- in the 1980's -- before many of you were born -- I can tell you we've come a LONG way, but we still have a long way to go when, 100 years after women got the vote in the United States, we are still predicting that it will be another 100 years before we have true gender equity!

We need everyone – women and men – advocating for equality around the world. Gender equality has been the cause of my life because it drives economic growth, promotes peace, and improves health. But most of all, because it is a human right.

You have the chance to move us beyond talking about equality to achieving it.

So how are you going to do that!? Well, I want to also be clear about another thing: it doesn't matter where you choose to lead and serve: you can infuse any job with a public service ethic.

I've had the opportunity to work in all three sectors: government, business, and nonprofit...some people call me “a tri-sector athlete.” In the mid '90s, I joined America Online in its infancy – a job that did not even exist two decades before when I was graduating from college. That experience taught me to remain open to opportunities I can't even imagine today. It also showed me the potential of the private sector to make a difference in people's lives.

Sixteen years ago, I got another opportunity I had never imagined: Working for visionary entrepreneur and philanthropist Ted Turner at the United Nations Foundation. I honestly didn't know much about the UN, but from all my previous jobs translating technology or policy for ordinary citizens, I was ready to take on the challenge of helping Americans see the enormous value of the UN and global cooperation in their daily lives.

In today's culture of division, it has been an incredible honor to support an organization whose mission is to bring people together to solve problems and help the most vulnerable.

What I've learned is that regardless of sector, every one of my jobs has given me a chance to have impact.

The nonprofit sector doesn't have the market cornered on compassion, nor does the private sector have it cornered on efficiency. No matter where you work, you can and should lead from purpose and passion for making the world better. Remember, we are trying to keep the "public" in public service! And as graduates of such an esteemed program as this one, you certainly know that with privilege comes opportunity, but also responsibility.

Can I give you one last piece of advice that I learned from a mentor? Approach your work as a marathon not a sprint and build relationships along your journey.

In a time of rapid change, big problems, and constant communication, you'll feel pressure to always be on the go and produce immediate results. Not everything can be accomplished quickly. Investing time and energy in relationships – personal and professional – will always pay greater dividend in the end. Fight the addiction of "busyness" and dedicate yourself to a full and deep life. Be prepared for change and welcome it. Seek help and give it. Have fun!!!

Thank you again for embarking on a path of service. Like no time ever before, you are poised to make a big difference on the world stage, and we need that. As you do so, never lose sight of the people we serve. That's where real change comes from.

I recently read that the bravest choice you can make today is optimism. It's much easier to give in to cynicism and despair. But the world we want will only be achieved when we choose action over indifference, courage over comfort, and solidarity over division.

I'll end with a quote from former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who said, "You are never too young to lead, and never too old to learn."

Thank you for letting me come here to learn -- and now get out there and lead!