

Installation Address
February 16, 2009 (President's Day)

Chairman Fisher and Trustees, Faculty, Staff, Students, and friends, thank you for being here today.

Several acknowledgements:

- Jean Wurster, First Lady for the 18th President; Fred Corriher, 19th President; Dr. Bob Knott, 20th President
- Drs. Bill and Diana Ellis—Provost at Hardin-Simmons University and long-time friends
- Dr. Dick and Mary Jo Maples—former pastor and long-time friends
- Shannon and Mike Hays—our daughter and son-in-law and the proud parents of our grandchildren, Madeleine and Payton
- Annette—wife, partner in the presidency, and chief advisor

When I was inaugurated as President of another institution in Texas, the date was September 11, 2001, so it was with some trepidation that I checked the news this morning, hoping that World War III had not broken out. Since apparently that hasn't happened, I want to spend my time this afternoon talking about something that I consider critical to the future of Catawba College.

At the beginning of the fall semester, I asked our faculty, staff, and students to consider three questions: Who are we as an institution? Who do we want to become? How do we get there?

Today I want to address the last of those 3 questions: How do we get to where we want to be as a college?

To move closer to an answer to that question, I want to ask another simple, but necessary question: What does it take to build a great institution?

Talent? -good, great, necessary, but talent is not enough.

Worthy Goals?—good, great, necessary, but goals are not enough.

Vision? -good, great, necessary, but vision is not enough.

Resources?—good, great, necessary, but resources are not enough.

Every institution has talent, goals, and vision, and some even have access to sufficient resources. But not even every institution with all four ingredients achieves greatness. What, then, is lacking?

My experience, my reading, and my discussions with numerous successful academic leaders have led me to this simple, but critical conclusion: **Great teams build great institutions.**

Basically, an educational team might be defined as a finite number of people who share common goals and a common vision built upon the commitment to educate their students. But almost every college or university has a faculty and staff that fit that description.

What, then, is the essential element in building an effective, successful, great college team?

I think such teams are born when team members make the decision to work together as a real team. While that sounds simple, the truth is that the decision to work together as a team is not a natural act. It requires some commitments that do not come easily nor naturally to most of us.

I want to talk about teams and team building, because we have so much opportunity in front of us right here right now at Catawba College. We want to make certain that we make the most of the talents that we and those around us possess; that we establish worthy goals and initiatives and then work hard and smart to achieve them; and that we keep in the forefront our vision of preparing students to reach their highest potential.

In his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni condenses team failures to 5 general causes:

1. **Absence of Trust**
2. **Fear of Conflict**
3. **Lack of Commitment**
4. **Avoidance of Accountability**
5. **Inattention to Results**

Acknowledging the need to overcome these 5 elements to achieve success, and adding several others, I want to use this forum today to talk about the critical nature of teamwork for Catawba College and its future.

1. A good team must have **Trust** in its fellow members.

Trust engenders courage and cooperation. Having the courage to trust is important because we must be willing to take risks without guarantees of success.

As Team members we need the freedom to say: I'm not sure; I don't know;
I need help;
You're better at this than I am;
Even ultimately, I was wrong.

Building trust among team members is essential for success because Trust is the foundation of teamwork.

2. A good team appreciates Individuality.

Each team member must value the uniqueness of other team members and work to create an environment that appreciates all team members for their different perspectives. A good team needs to be able to approach problems and opportunities from a variety of different angles. In his landmark book *Good to Great*, Dr. Jim Collins reminds us that to achieve success we must have the right persons in the right places working together. Each team member has a place—a job to perform that contributes to the whole. We each bring different talents, skills, abilities, and personalities to our tasks—and each of us has a unique contribution to make.

3. Good teams must acknowledge and accept Conflict.

Disagreements on teams are inevitable—there will always be differences of opinion, spoken or unspoken.

“Good” conflict among team members—as we engage in passionate debate about issues and opportunities facing us—should be acceptable. At times disagreement will be uncomfortable, but the fear of personal disagreement should not deter a team from having productive debate. The keys here, I think, are **respect, good manners, and trust.** A refrain in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* is applicable here: “It's not personal, it's just business.” Keep the focus on issues, not personalities.

4. Good team members are Committed to the team.

Commitment is not necessarily consensus.

Every idea needs to be heard and considered. Inevitably, not everyone will agree on the final decision. The commitment required of successful teams is the **commitment to decisions**, providing that the decision is in line with the vision, the mission, the principles, and the goals of the college.

Commitment begins at that level: commitment to mission, to principles, to vision, and to goals! Commitment is **collective ownership** based on a sense of common cause. Support is critical even when there is not a consensus.

5. Good teams must be **Accountable**.

If we embrace trust, respect individuality, accept civil disagreement, and adhere to commitments, then the next step becomes evaluation—assessment. We need to be honest in assessing ourselves and our teams and acknowledge that we are all accountable.

This includes appreciating achievement. Each team member must Value and reward performance from other team members, from our own smaller team, and from the teams of others.

Lencioni describes the psychology of a dysfunctional team member: the dysfunctional team member attributes the failure of others to their character (an internal flaw), while attributing his own failure to the environment (an external flaws). The dysfunctional team member, when successes occur, reverses this formula: I am successful because of my character; you are successful because of the environment.

At Catawba College, **People** determine our performance capacity more than anything else. Technology, equipment, and processes are important, but the best of these will never overcome poor performance; conversely, excellent performance will overcome a great deal in the way of mediocrity in other areas. Everyone at Catawba—students, faculty, staff, Trustees, alumni, yes, even administrators--everyone needs to make her best contribution to our team if we are to achieve our best as an institution. We must accept the the **responsibility** of being a member of a larger team.

Therefore, we need routinely to be asking ourselves, “What am I contributing to the accomplishment of our overall mission?” “Where can I make a difference?” What are my teams contributing to our success? What else can we do?

6. Good teams measure themselves by collective Results.

We need to be results driven. Not at the sacrifice of people or integrity (the ends do not justify the means), but our jobs as leaders inevitably revolve around making certain that the right things are being done the right ways, that the right results are being achieved. Results are both quantitative and qualitative. Perhaps the leading guru among non-profit management professionals, Peter Drucker, says: “The excitement isn’t the job—it is the result.”

But honesty demands that we acknowledge the difficulty of staying focused on collective results: self-interest and/or self-preservation constantly pull at us. We tend to focus on the immediate at the expense of the important—of stressing ourselves and our area above everything else.

There are, I think, two overriding threats to achieving team results:

1. **Ego** is the ultimate team killer. It is insidious and ubiquitous—it lurks in every one of us. As much as we want our teams to win, we want to win as individuals even more. On the best teams, no one is satisfied until everyone is winning.
2. A close corollary is the “**My Team**” syndrome: it is our tendency to place a higher priority on the smaller team of which we are a member than on the larger team that we serve.

The key to overcoming both of these is to **focus on the overall results**—to embrace a collective pursuit of the best interest of the whole. To see and focus on the **bigger picture**. The true measure of a successful team is that it accomplishes the results that it sets out to achieve. Successful teams are big picture-**results** oriented, and they establish and track key measurements for success. Good teams must be able and willing to sublimate lesser goals for the greater good. We each need to understand our roles as team members in achieving the college goals and initiatives. This involves cooperation and collaboration.

7. A good team recognizes the necessity **for** and adjusts **to** change.

Several years ago I read about a true boating story that I want to share with you. The incident took place on Lake Isabella, about an hour east of Bakersfield,

CA. A couple—new to boating—was having a problem. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn't get their brand new 22-foot boat working correctly. It was very sluggish in almost every maneuver they attempted—no matter how much power they applied.

After an hour or so of trying to make it speed up, they putted into a nearby marina, hoping that someone there could tell them what was wrong. A thorough topside check by an employee of the marina revealed that everything was shipshape and in perfect working order: the engine ran fine, the outdrive went up and down, the propeller was the correct size and pitch—nothing seemed to be wrong.

Finally, one of the marina workers jumped into the water to check the hull of the boat—and seconds later came up choking on water he was laughing so hard. Now remember, this is a true story. Under the boat, he discovered, still securely strapped in place, was the trailer.

Too frequently as individuals and as institutions we are not performing up to our full capability because we are stilled trapped to our trailers—whatever those trailers may be. The law of the shovel says that when you find yourself in a hole, you stop digging.

As we approach the future, a question we must consider is, “**Can there be improvement without change?**” We don't need to change for the sake of change, we need to look at change for the sake of improvement. Most work is doing the same thing over and over again. When we begin to fall into a comfortable, pleasant routine, it is time to force ourselves to do something different. The bromide of burnout is too frequently a copout for boredom. We all need different stimuli—we need to push back from the day-to-day and look at the big picture. We need to acknowledge that if we do the same things the same way we're going to get the same results. The only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth of the hole.

We should constantly be reshaping, refocusing, resharpening our organization, our teams, ourselves. The things that we are not doing well need to be rethought. The things we are doing well, we need to reexamine and formulate strategies for doing better whenever possible.

A recurring question in higher education ought always to be, Are we operating for yesterday or for tomorrow? **We need to be future oriented**—looking for opportunities and acting on them. Not just reacting.

8. **And last, a good team must be ready and willing to act.**

Making good decisions is important, but having the desire, the skills, and the commitment to get things done is critical. **Good teams are action-minded.** One of my heroes, Paul “Bear” Bryant once said that “It’s not the will to win that matters—everyone has that. It’s the will to prepare to win that matters.”

Perhaps the toughest balance for most organizations to handle is between being too cautious and being rash—maintaining the proper balance between opportunity and risk. Drucker writes, “I’ve seen more institutions damaged by too much caution than by rashness.”

For most things at Catawba College, there are plenty of ideas as to how they can be improved and plenty of talent to implement those ideas: the question we must ask ourselves is, “Are we willing to act and persevere to convert good ideas into effective results?”

St. Augustine has wisely said: “One prays for miracles, but works for results.”

Effective, quality teamwork sounds relatively simple, but we all know that it requires us to surrender something of our professional egos at times, to disappoint those on our smaller teams at times, to get outside ourselves and our comfort zones at times, in other words **to act unnaturally.**

What we do at Catawba is very important: we seek to bring about **change in individuals and in society** at large. **We are in the opportunity business:** we open doors of unlimited opportunity for our students—we have no idea how they can impact the world.

If we—or any of the people we work with—allow our jobs to bore us or we think that what we do is not important, then we’ve stopped working for results. Let me say it another way: to do our jobs to the utmost, we have to believe that our jobs mean something. We need to remember—we need to remind others—that what we are doing has important consequences: education provides hope, education provides opportunity, and education changes lives that change the world!

In 1951 Catawba College President A. R. Keppel reported to the Trustees that “Although this has been and is the most difficult year of my administration, and although and because many problems had to be faced, it is my unqualified opinion that our greatest challenge now is to press forward. Only as we set our sights above the obstacles that confront us can we hope to surmount them.”

I can readily identify with president Keppel—this has been the most challenging year of my professional career.

Today, however, I stand proudly and humbly before you as the 21st President of Catawba College, **confident** in the knowledge that we are positioned on the brink of taking our next major step as an institution of higher learning. Although and because there remain difficult and trying days ahead of us, I believe that it is critical that **we—together as a team**—make certain that our steps are forward and upward.

For more than 150 years Catawba faculties, with the support of dedicated staff members, committed Trustees, alumni, and friends, have been about the business of changing lives in and out of the classroom. We have educated doctors and lawyers, ministers and business persons, educators and environmentalists, civil servants and performers, social workers and scientists, politicians and poets. Today we have the best faculty and the best staff that Catawba has ever had. **Our challenge is to make the most of our potential.**

This afternoon, as we join in this ceremony to officially install a new president of Catawba College, **I invite you, I encourage you, I challenge you—faculty, staff, student, Trustee, alumnus, friend—to commit yourself to making our team the best it can be**, to work together—even under the most challenging circumstances of these difficult times—to lead Catawba College to achieve its maximum potential.

While our natural inclination is to hang our heads in such times, my old friend Robert Browning challenges us: “Look up, advance! All now is possible.”

My prayer for us today is that of the prophet Isaiah: “Those who wait upon the Lord shall mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Thank you.