

Good evening, Ladies and Gentleman, Invited Guests, Honorees, Leadership Tomorrow Board Members and the Leadership Tomorrow Class of 1999. Welcome to our Graduation.

First, I want to thank my classmates for asking to speak on their behalf. It is rare for one to have an opportunity to speak for a group that they think so highly of.

I remember coming home from the first day of school just after my dad was transferred to a new city and my family was forced to relocate. Of course to all children, moving is very traumatic and knowing this, my parents were especially attentive to me after I returned home from school that day. They met me at the door and quickly asked, "Well...how do you like your new school?" "I don't like it!" I said in my most intemperate tone of voice. Of course their immediate response was "ohhh, why, what happened?" "There's three boys and ten million girls!!!", I blurted out!

Well, that was then, and this is now, and I don't mind telling you that I would relish that ratio today. And of course, I was exaggerating a little. But at that point in my life, I was feeling a bit overwhelmed, much like many of us feel when we are driving south to Orange County from Los Angeles on the 405 at about 5:00 p.m. Once we begin to feel that way, we start to think, "I am in one car among hundreds of cars on this freeway, what can I do?" "I am only one citizen among thousands of citizens in this community, what difference can I make?" "I am only one human being among millions on this planet, how can I make our world a better place?"

I was asked this evening to speak to the Mission of Leadership Tomorrow, which is "Through its Programs--Expands Knowledge, Empowers Citizens and Promotes Community Involvement", It seems to me that this Mission Statement provides the answer to all three of those questions. When we perceive ourselves as being unimportant or incidental it is usually because we are feeling powerless to affect any real change in our situation or the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

History tells us that Thomas Jefferson was elected President by one vote in the Electoral College. California gained statehood by one vote. And we were recently reminded several times that Andrew Johnson survived impeachment by one vote. So, has one person changed the course of history or otherwise made a significant difference? Of course they have, but reading about it or being lectured to about it appeals to our sense of logic. Feeling powerless is emotional, which is why I think, the lessons of the past often have little or no influence on decisions we make here in the present.

Our class experiences this year have been wide in scope and diversity. We saw what was possible at Lakewood Junior high school in Irvine when the Principal had the courage to bring a business perspective into education. We experienced the emotional support, that can be generated for someone suffering from any one of life's many tragedies by the combined talents of four actors in Stop Gap. We sat in tiny Alternative Repertory Theater which, provides an opportunity for young playwrights to bring their imaginations to life, and exists in downtown Santa Ana only because of one woman's dream. We listened in an Orange County Superior Courtroom to a habitual drug user talk about a future without drugs because one Judge made him commit to changing his life.

It is "real" time experiences like these offered to us through Leadership Tomorrow that appeal to our emotions thus providing us that sense of empowerment. A feeling that yes, I CAN do something. But, empowerment always brings with it responsibility. It is this responsibility that I believe serves as the greatest challenge to the Leadership Tomorrow Class of 1999. To meet this challenge, we can no longer just try to be interesting, we have to be interested...as we found Keith Greer of the Irvine Ranch Company and Bill Vardoulis of the Transportation Corridor Agency to be. We can no longer expect to be served, we must be serving...just like those volunteers we witnessed at Save Our Shelves just before Christmas. We can no longer wait to be asked to help, we need to be helpful...as was Joan Gladstone of Gladstone Public Relations when the Orange County Bankruptcy broke. We can not wait to be cared for, we have to care the way Larry Paul cared about getting the Back Bay dredged. Then, we will be meeting the challenge. Then, each one of us, in our own way, will be making a difference.

I'll leave you tonight with a quote from the noted anthropologist Margaret Mead only because she said it so much better than I could ever say it. "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Good night and thank you for sharing this special night with us.