

WID Annual Meeting  
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## **Keeping the Passion in Your Work**

By  
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Let me begin by saying how genuinely pleased I am to have been asked to speak today. WID is an organization dear to my heart, one whose growth and development has in many ways paralleled my own professional career.

In preparing for today, I've often thought of the first WID meeting I went to almost 30 years ago. I was the newly appointed Vice President for Resources at Wheaton College – just 35 years old, full of beans and eager to make a connection with other women in senior positions in development. There were just seven or eight of us at that meeting – think how many women we all know now who are or have been chief or senior development officers, a tribute to WID and how far we have all come. But for me, that meeting was the beginning of many friendships and professional relationships that have enriched my life up to the present.

I am also delighted with the topic I have been given – “Keeping the Passion in Your Work” – it has caused me to think about what fuels my own enthusiasms. And now that I am about to enter a new chapter in my life and work, about which I will say more later, that reflection has been especially important to me personally.

The topic – keeping passion in your work – is, however, a highly personal one. Our passions are unique to each one of us. My husband and I, who just celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary last weekend, have very different passions. He's a Republican, I'm a Democrat; I court and thrive on change, he hates it; I love the ballet, he falls asleep; he loves the symphony; I'm bored stiff; he sees the glass half empty, I see it half full – and on it goes. You may wonder, as many of our friends do, how we've stayed married so long!

Our passions as they apply to our work are also quite individual. I first learned that lesson from Margaret Buyer, who was the gift recorder at Wheaton. Margaret was extremely competent, reliable, accurate and consistent. I proposed to Margaret that she move into a middle management position, supervising two or three others and delegating the day-to-day gift accounting. She turned me down flat. She liked what she did, she told me, and didn't want any more responsibility. I realized that Margaret's job satisfaction was quite different than I imagined – or than my own.

In tackling my topic, I will attempt two things today. First, I'll offer some maxims or general principles that might apply to any of us in finding passion in our professional lives. Second, I'll offer my own personal experiences to illustrate those maxims. I've been very lucky in my career opportunities but not all of them were expected or sought. And my personal experiences may or may not illuminate your own choices and

dilemmas. For me it's all about challenge and change, leadership and making a difference!

I am reminded of Jill Kerr Conway, one of my favorite authors of women's stories, including her own, who writes "about what women were not supposed to acknowledge - ambition, love of adventure, the quest for intellectual power, physical courage and endurance, risk-taking - and the negative aspects of mother/daughter relations always so relentlessly sentimentalized. " I especially like the latter, as the mother of a very strong-minded daughter - and recently an equally determined little granddaughter. And I promise not to mention them again - unless you want to see pictures of the baby later.

I also will reference another favorite author, John Gardner who wrote a book called *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society*. Though the book was first published in 1981, it continues to be relevant to those who seek and invest in professional development, our own and others. "What is needed," Gardner wrote, "is an attitude.... that sees learning as lifelong, that never ceases to seek out undiscovered possibilities in each of us."

So here are my maxims for keeping the passion in your work.

### **Follow the Leader**

I have been very fortunate to have worked for, learned from and been inspired by remarkable leaders:

- Ted Sizer, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who gave me my first job out of college, then lured me to Phillips Andover where he was headmaster and where I cut my teeth on fund-raising and capital campaigns.
- Tish Emerson, President of Wheaton College for 16 years, who taught me how to be fearless in the face of tough times and the rewards of going against the conventional wisdom

I have worked with other remarkable leaders - Jim Mongan, the MGH CEO when I arrived at the Institute and now the CEO of Partners Healthcare, whose integrity, values, analytic insights inspire me still; Fred Stott, my boss at Andover, who taught me all I've ever needed to know about fund-raising campaigns back in the 1970's and provided a model of creative and lifelong devotion to a single institution. Fred was born in an Andover dorm and spent his entire professional career at his alma mater.

Beyond the specific lessons I learned from each of these individuals, I learned how important leadership at the top is to having a productive and satisfying work experience. And I was inspired by them to seek leadership opportunities for myself.

**Be willing to leave your comfort zone - seek reassignment; embrace reorganization - become a risk taker.**

I am not a natural – or even a very skilled – athlete but I love both sailing and downhill skiing. I am sometimes terrified but I still gain an enormous amount of self-assurance conquering my fear when the wind is blowing 25 knots or the slope ahead is unfamiliar and steep.

My first job at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I left my comfort zone. I was interviewed by the very handsome and very young Dean, Ted Sizer. I told him I never took any education courses in college so I might not be qualified for the job. He replied, “If you’re educated, and I assume you are, you can do it!” I never forgot that he took a chance on me and the lesson that obvious credentials are not necessarily the most important qualifications for a job.

Early in my career, my responsibilities mostly entailed writing and editing, one of my core competencies. I was hired in 1973 by Phillips Andover to write the case statement and develop the communications plan for a \$50 million Bicentennial Campaign, including writing all the speeches for the leaders for campaign events. At some point, I screwed up my courage, went to my boss with a quivering lip and said, “You know I can do more than write other people’s speeches.”

By the time the Andover campaign was over and \$53 million raised, I had managed regional campaigns around the country, written and developed the planned giving program, staffed in and participated in major gift solicitations and ran the campaign staff meetings (my boss hated meetings and was terrible at orchestrating them). It was a fabulous incubator for learning virtually all aspects of development, with more work than staff, constantly shifting and expanding opportunities for all of us – and a boss who was creative and supportive enough to grow a young and mostly female staff as the campaign grew.

Many years later Matina Horner, as chair of the board, approached me about the presidency of the Institute. I protested, among other things, that I had no background at all in health care and since the Institute is a graduate school and I have a baccalaureate in English Literature, I doubted the faculty would accept me. Matina persisted and finally said to me: “What the Institute needs is a leader – and if you know how to be one, you can do this job.” It was the most empowering and exciting job offer I’ve ever had. So I took the job, even though the Institute had a \$1m operating deficit, the CFO had been fired and Partners Healthcare and the MGH had decided that the best course was probably to divest themselves of the Institute and spin it off to another college or university. Once again I left my comfort zone.

Let me pause here to tell you a little about the Institute. The MGH Institute of Health Professions, an academic affiliate of [Massachusetts General Hospital](#), is an innovative and independent graduate school that operates within the framework of [Partners HealthCare System](#). A progressive leader in developing comprehensive models of

health care education, the MGH Institute prepares advanced practice professionals for careers in the fields of nursing, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, medical imaging and clinical investigation through a distinctive combination of academic study, clinical practice and research. An average of 760 students are enrolled in graduate level and certificate programs, with an increasing number of courses available online. It is one of the most dynamic, collaborative and creative environments I've worked in and one in which I have learned an enormous amount from my colleagues.

### **Touch the earth (from John Gardner)**

We work at these wonderful institutions, with amazing, brilliant and creative people doing remarkable things – and by learning about and sharing in their passions, we fuel our own.

Working in higher education, I have always found commencement and the opening of school ceremonies wonderfully inspiring and invigorating. When I was at the MFA, I used to stroll the galleries on my lunch hour and think how lucky I was to have all that great art as the backdrop for my work

And while I don't have any graduate degrees, I believe I have attended – and for the most part enjoyed – enough faculty lectures to earn one. When I left Brown, Frank Rothman, the former provost paid me a wonderful compliment. He said you are the only development professional I've known who seems to genuinely understand and value the role of faculty.

When I came to the Institute, as interim president, having never worked in healthcare (and moreover I don't like being around sick people or doctors!), I asked the faculty to teach me about their disciplines and professions. I realized I first needed to learn an entirely new vocabulary. Now my vocabulary runs the gamut from aphasia to zenotransplant with otolaryngology in the middle! Soon after I arrived I asked a member of our nursing faculty if I could accompany our students during their clinical rotation at the hospital, having had no exposure to and little understanding of clinical education. I was overwhelmed by how sick the patients were, by the wealth of technology that surrounded them and was being used by the caregivers and by the compassion our students had, even though they were clearly novices.

Seek out direct experiences that deepen your understanding and appreciation of the work your organization does – that's touching the earth and it is one of the rare privileges we all have.

### **Cultivate optimism – Enjoy the ride**

This is often expressed as “keep a sense of humor.” Unfortunately, I only know two jokes and am seriously deficient as a humorist! Besides optimism is a habit of thought, one that seeks the strategic advantage, the benefits in even the direst circumstance. Optimism focuses on the future in a hopeful and positive way. It's what helps us move

on from a frustrating or negative experience. Most effective fundraisers have to be optimists – who else would carry on in the face of so much rejection, whether of our grant proposals or our major gift solicitations.

Perhaps the greatest test of my optimism came during the coed controversy at Wheaton College. Following a very successful \$26 million campaign, the trustees determined that coeducation offered the best future for Wheaton. I remember going home and telling my family that Wheaton was going coed – and that it was going to be wonderful. They said I was crazy! And they were right. The decision was challenged in the press and in the courts, opposed by alumni and donors, some of whom claimed they had been defrauded in the fund-raising campaign.

I am probably the only development professional you will ever meet who systematically offered to return over \$16 million in gifts to over 3000 Wheaton donors. And how do you offer to return gifts? You approach it the same way you solicit them: you visit your largest donors; phone your middle donors and mail to all the rest. It was a painful and difficult exercise. And how much do you think we returned? Just \$120,000 was returned, with \$100,000 of that going to a single donor.

Painful and difficult as the coed controversy was, I learned a tremendous amount from the experience. I learned that true change and growth are often painful and controversial. I learned that conflict can be constructive. And I learned that if people don't like the outcome of a major decision, they are almost certain to dislike the decision-making process.

**Network like crazy and identify role models and mentors who can inspire you.**

Now the fact that you are all here today and active in WID tells me you already know this. I once arrived at a WID event with the speaker who said, "There's no greater high than walking into a room full of women with whom you share a profession." You can feel that energy here today. And it's one reason why I have always been active in professional organizations, where I have met amazing people and had a chance to give back to a profession that has been very good to me.

Personal role models have also been important to me - someone to admire, someone about who you want to grow up to be like, who gives you a glimpse of the possible. Some of mine have been Jill Kerr Conway, the late Ann Richards, long ago the VP at Mills College, whose name I've forgotten but who was the first woman I ever heard of who was a college vice president, Rita Bornstein, former Vice President for Development at Miami University who went on to a very successful college presidency.

Finally, everyone recommends that you have mentors but rarely are we told to choose mentors with power; all but two of the most important mentors in my life were men. And that's not unusual for high performing women. A study by the Families and Work Institute in collaboration with the BC and Catalyst surveyed over 1000 corporate executives on what attracts and retains women executives. They tested several

assumptions about the differences between men and women with some fascinating results. Eighty-seven per cent of all executives surveyed, and a majority of both men and women, said that the person who had helped them most in their career was a man.

I chose mentors who had the power and the experience I needed and wanted, who could and did open doors for me. It's even better if your mentor is your boss – someone who is invested in you and your career. There was recently a wonderful article about all the people who have become college and university presidents who worked in the administration of Chuck Vest, the former president of MIT – now that's a mentor!

Finally recognize that you need different mentors at different stages in your career. It is likely you will outgrow your first mentor as you surpass his or her level of experience and responsibility. And when you do, it's time to find a new mentor – someone who has traveled to territories unknown to you but where you want to go.

### **Forgive yourself the unimportant stuff**

Guilt is a wasted emotion – especially if you're a working wife and mother. Like the late Ann Richards, I don't want my tombstone to read, "She kept a clean house." I once overheard my mother say to my husband "The windows look dirty." Replied my husband, "Don't let Ann hear you say that – she'll hand you a bucket and a rag and make you clean them."

"What do you do for yourself?" I was often asked when I had two small children, a husband and household full of pets. "I go to work," I replied. The balance in my life has always come from having at least two spheres – my work and my home. When things are going badly at work, I can go home; when things are in turmoil at home, I can go to work. Of course, hell was when neither was going well! That's when you go on vacation!

Balance often seems to mean having enough leisure or recreational time and, while I know that's important, it's not my passion! When they were small, I had a cartoon on my refrigerator. One little kid says to another, "You mean your mother isn't there with cookies and milk when you get home from school?" And the other little kid replies "No, but my mommy comes home every night smarter than she was the day before!" Of course, it is no surprise that when I had a sabbatical at the end of the Wheaton campaign, my teenage daughter said to me, "Mom, don't tell me this means you're going to be home every day after school baking cookies?"

**(For my next maxim, I'm going to steal from the country and western singer, Kenny Rogers) Know when to hold'em, know when to fold'em and know when to walk away – and know when to run!**

I have never worked at any institution longer than ten years – and I know myself well enough that I begin to get itchy and restless at about year seven or eight. I am sensitive to the view of the development profession as having the high turnover, of development officers as hired guns without institutional loyalty. But my restlessness has more to do with my own passions. I get bored and then I'm not as creative and productive after a certain point. A few stories should illustrate.

In my 9th year at Wheaton, Tish Emerson and I were driving down Worth Avenue in Palm Beach on our annual fund-raising trip. At a stoplight, I looked up and said to Tish "If you had a new vice president, she would make you go up and see Mrs. XYZ in her penthouse." (Mrs. XYZ was a Wheaton alumna with a fabulous art collection, who had never succumbed to our many blandishments.) Tish replied "And if you had a new president, she would go up to see Mrs. XYZ!" At that moment, I think we both knew that a fresh perspective was needed for us – and for Wheaton!

Knowing when to walk away may not simply be a matter of boredom – sometimes it's a matter of fit. My shortest tenure – and I'm not proud of it – was as Associate Director of the Museum of Fine Arts. It's the only job I took as the result of an executive search firm and, if I am to be totally honest, I took it in part because they offered me more money than I had ever earned! I had my doubts. I had never worked in the arts before. I knew the leadership of the MFA was not especially strong; but the attraction of working in Boston and the glamour of the museum were all very alluring.

Two months after I arrived at the MFA, I received a call from an old friend at Brown saying they were looking for a new VP for Development and would I be a candidate. I asked him for a day or two to think, talked with my closest friends and called back to say that I couldn't abandon a position I had just accepted. I hung up, virtuous but frustrated, thinking that timing really is everything.

Twelve months later Brown called again to say the search had been reopened, the job was still available. By then I knew that neither the culture of the MFA was not a good fit for me. I said while I would not be a candidate, I would be willing to have a private conversation with the President, Vartan Gregorian, to understand better what he was looking for. And that's how I became the first woman to serve as the chief development officer in the Ivy League.

I'm now in my tenth year as President of the Institute – and yes, it's time to move on. I love this job but I don't want to remain through diminishing effectiveness. Last week I informed the Institute community that this would be the final year of my presidency. I'm looking forward to opening a very different chapter in my life – and I am open to what new adventures will fuel my passions in the future!