6-10-2015

DeNooyer Leadership Talk

John M. Dunn
Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn

Part of the Higher Education Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn/714

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President John Dunn by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
Dr. John M. Dunn  
DeNooyer Leadership Talk  
"Leadership and the Power to Transform"  
June 10, 2015

Opening
Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak here today. I am honored to be here, and that honor is certainly heightened because I am mindful of the friendship and strong connections between the DeNooyer organization and Western Michigan University.

The University
• One of the first things I always like to do is share just the basics about Western Michigan University. I know you are all area residents and some of you are alumni of our wonderful University, but I also know how fast time flies and how easy it is to lose track of new information—to lose track of change and its implications.

• As an institution, Western Michigan University is best described as learner centered, discovery driven and globally engaged. Those are the three tenets of our strategic plan. Nearly all that we do falls under one of those three qualities.

• And I always like to share the basic stats:
  • We have nearly 24,000 students  
    -19,000 undergrads  
    -5,000 graduate students  
  • We're one of just 207 research universities in the United States--and one of only five in Michigan--according to the Carnegie Foundation rating system, the gold standard in higher education.
• We offer more than 250 degree programs. 104 of those are at the graduate level, including 30 that lead to a doctoral degree.

And we're internationally known in an enormous range of disciplines--from supply chain management to aviation, jazz performance, evaluation and medieval studies. Here's a good example. Each spring, we host more than 3,000 of the world's leading experts on the Middle Ages. They'll come from London, Rome, Tokyo and Melbourne and from other places around the globe where the name Kalamazoo means just one thing--WMU's annual International Congress on Medieval Studies.

Our community connection
This community has been home to an amazing institution for years, but this past academic year has been one unlike any other in our history. Our constant is our connection to this community. This past year's successes I attribute to leaders across this community being willing to do the two things that are vital to the role of leadership:

• The ability to look at resources with fresh eyes, and
• The willingness to embrace change and recognize the potential benefits change brings to our organizations and our community.

Change is what we as a community are all about. In 1903, members of the business community came together and mounted a campaign to convince the Legislature to locate a college for teachers--a Normal School--here in Kalamazoo. The group organized, fundraised and committed a 20-acre site and a building atop Prospect Hill as a location for the new school.

Those business leaders made that effort because they wanted, in their beloved city, an institution that could be a change agent, an institution that would be good for business as an economic development asset, and a school that could showcase Kalamazoo's commitment to education.
The group of business leaders evolved into the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce. The school they worked so hard to establish became Western Michigan University. Ever since then, this community and its University have been allied to bring about change, economic development and world-class educational commitment.

A Year of Change
Change, growth and commitment--those are constants. But this past year has been full of more change than most, and that has left Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo fundamentally changed.

One of those changes, of course, is the creation of the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. Another is the affiliation that created the WMU Thomas Cooley Law School. Both of those developments grew from people embracing change and examining resources and potential with a fresh perspective.

Because of the willingness to do those two things, WMU has moved from a comprehensive research university to one of only 90 universities in the nation with both a medical school and a law school under its aegis and the opportunity to offer legal and medical education to its students now and for many years to come.

In this era of state budget difficulties and cuts to higher education appropriations, we and our community partners had to reassess our assets and change what we did and what we offered. New state funding is the usual way that public universities grow. That is not an option these days, so we did it by tapping the private sector and moving to the unusual model of private professional schools within a public university.

For the medical school, of course, that meant securing the incredibly generous support of individuals and corporations whose roots are with the names that are synonymous
with innovative life sciences--Stryker and Upjohn. We will always be extraordinarily grateful for that support.

For the law school we have formally affiliated with a private school that has a similar commitment to the same basic educational values we hold. We are now able to offer the two signature professional graduate programs--law and medicine--that are characteristic of great national universities.

**Stryker School of Medicine--beginning**

It was late 2007 when, as a community, we started talking about the possibility of a medical school in speculative terms. We had the ingredients--great hospitals, a research university eager to grow, a community tradition of innovation in the life sciences and--perhaps most important, a desire to leverage our strengths for economic development. We had a solid infrastructure, but there were those among us who were able to look past what many other communities would envy. They said, "This is terrific--but how do we make it better?"

It seems like a century ago, but today, just seven years later, we have a medical school that Dean Hal Jenson happily points out has the best name for any medical school in the nation.

This partnership involving Borgess Health, Bronson Healthcare, WMU and the entire community was launched last fall with 54 students from 14 states. They're pursuing a curriculum based on preparing doctors for the way they'll work in the 21st century.

In fact, the whole medical school is based on innovation. It is named for medical device pioneer Dr. Homer Stryker, and the school is at home on the W.E. Upjohn M.D. Campus that bears the names of the person who launched Kalamazoo's involvement in the pharmaceutical industry.
As a community, we'll benefit by having top-notch medical care opportunities, a pipeline of young physicians eager to start their careers nearby and the likelihood of a number of spinoff firms, as the discovery focus of the medical school takes off and leads to the commercialization of new products. It happened because we took a fresh look at our assets and set a new direction.

**Cooley Law School**
Our second monumental change in 2014-15 was completion of a formal affiliation that created the Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School--with campuses in Lansing, Auburn Hills, Grand Rapids and Tampa Bay.

The affiliation grew out of decade-long relationship with the Lansing-based law school that is the nation's largest and most diverse law school. We share a common mission and vision with Cooley--both WMU and Cooley are committed to access, diversity and adding value to the lives of the students we serve.

The formal affiliation is a just a few months old at this point, but we're already on a path that will bring the beginnings of legal education to Kalamazoo and dramatically expand opportunities for students through such programs as an accelerated degree program that will allow students to shave a year off earning both a bachelor's and law degree. We're just beginning to explore some additional benefits of joining legal education and the assets of a research university. Look for new developments and joint programs in areas like accountancy, intellectual property, the foster care arena and health care.

**Transformative opportunity in Kalamazoo**
I hope you noticed that there's a continuous theme running through these accomplishments. It's a theme of change not just for the sake of change, but change that
enhances opportunity, improves access to higher education and transforms lives and communities.

One of the things I was asked here to talk about is my personal philosophy of leadership and how one can take leadership to the next level. The attraction and the qualities that drew me to Kalamazoo are those I just laid out—the ability of a community to embrace change and the capability to continually look at assets and resources with a fresh perspective.

Along with those traits, this community has always promoted opportunity by improving access to higher education and recognizing its power to transform lives. We have the belief that higher education can do that and that some places do it better than others. The opportunity to lead a university that uses access and opportunity to change lives has proven a great privilege—even more than I had hoped for.

My own life was literally transformed by the opportunity to study at a large public university. For the first time in my life, I had the opportunity to live, study and work with people from around the world. That time and opportunity set the direction for my life's work. It left me permanently committed to the idea that access to education and a diverse student body are the greatest gifts we can give to young people.

The importance of such opportunity and access is slowly emerging as a prime consideration in how we evaluate quality in higher education. National assessments of quality in higher education are changing to recognize what institutions like Western Michigan University do to add value to individual lives—and our nation.

My favorite assessment, for example, comes from Washington Monthly magazine, which assesses universities on the good they are doing for students and the nation when it comes to producing Ph.Ds. and new knowledge, encouraging service, and adding
value and success to individual lives. They get it. It's that value-added quality and commitment to the larger community have long been our hallmarks. This is the second year WMU has appeared on Washington Monthly's list of top-100 national universities and its second appearance in the magazine's more recent "best bang for the buck" category. They got it right. We're a value-added institution. We're an opportunity university. We roll up our sleeves, and we get the job done here.

These are the kinds of accomplishments those Kalamazoo business leaders had in mind back in 1903. Together, this University and this community have lived up to the vision.

**Tools from a personal belief system**

Again, I'm trying to be mindful of the topic I was asked to explore in my remarks. I do believe education is a change agent. That conviction has been a guiding principle of my career. Let me also briefly outline some of my beliefs about how we best take advantage of the opportunity for change. I share these tools and beliefs with you because they are personally meaningful, have served me well and, I think, have given me the power to help create change.

- I've already tried to act on one of those beliefs in today's remarks. **Acknowledge those who have made our successes possible.** We do not achieve success alone. For every triumph we celebrate, there are people around us who helped make it possible. The bigger the achievement, the more people helped make it happen. Those people need to be acknowledged, thanked, honored and praised. Successful leadership is the product of teamwork, and every member of an organization plays a role that is critical to the success of that organization.

- Here's another personal operating principle. **I believe in the power and meaning of words.** Some people believe, as Lily Tomlin once said, that we developed language because of our deep inner need to complain. I don't believe that. I believe words have
meaning, and good word choices can build bridges between people and between points of view. Words poorly chosen can erect barriers. And words well chosen can have a wonderful healing affect as well. (Tell the "That'll happen" story)

Those two well-chosen words turned my horror and fear at that moment to the realization that mistakes happen and I would get past this one--even if it was a humdinger. I've remembered that moment of extreme kindness for a lifetime. Those words had power I could not have imagined.

• And finally, my core beliefs include the conviction that we are happiest and most successful when we are serving others. We have been given so much and we have so much that we can give back. Albert Schweitzer, when reflecting on the future, once commented that the only truly happy and productive people in the world would be those who learn to give. That's a discovery that many of you have already made.

We do not achieve success alone. Words have power and meaning. We need to serve others. These are simple, personal beliefs that are part of my philosophy for living. Because I think about them often and have articulated them so many times, they give me a wonderful platform to start from when someone says, "Tell me why this is important" or "Tell my how you think we should handle that." There is, quite simply, incredible value in thinking about what you believe and putting your beliefs into words and, of course, putting your beliefs into action.

In closing, I'd like to invite you to campus--whether you come for a quiet summer stroll through the center of campus, a trip to Miller Auditorium for a performance or a fall football game, you are always welcome. We consider you part of our community.

Thank you for your attention and interest. I'd like to open the floor to any questions.