"In Search of Passion"

SUCCESS
To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people
    and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
    and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better,
    whether by a healthy child, a garden patch,
    or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier
    because you have lived.
This is to have succeeded.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I've yet to meet anyone who didn't agree that the positive, affirming things Emerson describes are more meaningful than the traditional measures of success involving numbers.

Based upon the student responses to several different methods of inquiry, with special help from Laura Williams, we at TMCC can be very proud of what we have achieved by anyone's definition. Our success looks especially good by the traditional measures when we ask students, "How are we doing?" Our students feel good about their education, respect and admire their faculty, and have a positive image of their institution. They continue to return for subsequent coursework, the ultimate vote of confidence.

There is a difference between the Emerson approach to success and the achievement reflected in the student responses. That difference can be summarized by a single word; a word note often associated with organizational theory but one which, recently, has come into vogue even in that context. It is a word I would like to invite your attention to, to center today's remarks around, and to make the focus of my energies during the coming academic year. The word is PASSION.

Until quite recently, it was unheard of for a college president to use passion as even a peripheral theme. As a central theme it has been unacceptable. Some of you may retain that unfortunate reaction. But the adverse reaction to passion is the result of lifetimes filled with submerging passion into the murky depths of our subconscious. Passion is one of humanity's gifts. We do not communicate about passion and shame ourselves about our most noble feelings. This is the year I'd like us to turn our attention to the positives and the passion implied in the description of success advanced by Emerson. Doing so will, I believe, make
our jobs much more satisfying and produce greater success in the traditional measures as well. I will take the next 27 minutes to paint a picture for you of how we can capitalize on our natural passions for the benefit of our students, the college, and each other.

I have represented pictorially here the concept of people who are initially pure good being imposed upon by external forces and pressures.

In response, we all develop protective shields which confuse both our friends and detractors as to who we really are.

They see not what we are but what we do. Our actions may very negatively affect our colleagues but that does not mean we are bad people. Passion is a double edged sword. When it springs from joy, the results are highly positive, tend to produce success, and be personally satisfying. When it springs from fear, it produces a negative, defensive chain reaction.

Egged on by these defensive instincts, we have inspired a national media which is not different than the Salem witch hunts, merely more sophisticated. It is the negative news which captures the headlines and, specifically, who was to blame. Which company should be punished for building the faulty part? Which officer should be fired for failing to do his duty? Which athlete made the crucial mistake that cost his team the championship? Who was the goat? We have seen brilliant careers shattered by a single instance of presumed laxity. Only the sensationally positive is worthy of our attention. The Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, Olympic gold (don't bother me with silver) and heaven forbid the U.S. should field only the seventh best athlete in the world, we would want to know what is wrong with our training programs.

If we wish to become a successful organization, we must take notice of even the moderately positive performance of our peers. It is the consistency of daily performance that is the life blood for organizational success.
I know there are some among you who disagree with my belief, stated several times last year and re-asserted now, that all people are good and that we all want to achieve good works. I don't ask that you subscribe to my beliefs but I insist that you understand that they are my beliefs. It is sufficiently important that you know the depth of my conviction that I am now going to engage in a digression and explain a bit of personal history which I have never before shared with a public audience.

I came from an extremely dysfunctional family with a severe inability to communicate. No other member from this Wright family completed high school. I watched three brothers go through this process. You would describe them, accurately, by pointing out their defensive reactions. One is a homeless alcoholic. One died in the commission of a crime. One, though currently free, has served two terms in prison. My guess is he'll serve another before he's
finished.

A recent research based book entitled "The Reliant Self" is authored by a husband and wife team of psychologists, Drs. Steven and Sybil Wolin. This team has concluded that the most prominent of the characteristics of survivors of dysfunctional families (which is how they would describe me) is that we are especially adept at finding the best in others. If I can see the good in my brothers, whose defense mechanisms were extreme and caused me much personal pain over the years, I can certainly envision the good in others marked by more modest afflictions.

I have been involved in conflict resolution recently, on no less than five occasions. In each case, serious and explicit expressions were made to me of mistrust among people whose job performance requires mutual cooperation. In each case, I was struck by the readiness of some to attribute fairly permanent character flaws to peers: to conclude that because they did bad things, they are bad people. I'm not buying. I have found the best in them. I will see the best in you. Would you do less for your colleagues? Accept that these are your teammates, find the best in them, expect their cooperation, and work with and support them even when, initially, things aren't working the way you hoped. Your expectations are self-fulfilling.

I care deeply about the members of our team who are struggling against enough obstacles in attempting to ease the path for our students who, in turn, are struggling with many of the same barriers we did. It pains me when I see people not appreciating another's best effort, not noticing another's pain, not supporting another's efforts, and in some cases, adding to the obstacles by their actions. The work we are engaged in demands better. Never forget, nor be ashamed to assert that we are joined in the most noble of callings.

These are your teammates and they are going to remain your teammates. The extent to which you, and we, are successful will be the extent to which we can resolve any disharmony among us.

"All ... are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny...I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Whenever I see or hear this passage from Dr. King, I am reminded of the organizational metaphor which has worked for me better than any of the others throughout my career. With apologies for the sports metaphors to those who think you hear too many, the metaphor is the sandlot athletic activity I engaged in as a teenager which captures the spirit that we should be after.
What I recall about those sandlot football games was that
1) Nobody was in charge, we were all peers 2) We had a commonly understood purpose, [mission] 3) We played varying roles. It was common to shift roles from time to time (determined by mutual consent) in the course of play, each role was taken seriously for the good of the team for as long as we held it, and our effort in each role was appreciated and respected by our teammates 4) We had disagreements. There was an unspoken understanding that we would interrupt play until disagreements were handled. There were no rules for the handling of them; we just knew we would work them out. In the event that individuals involved couldn’t resolve a particular dispute then the team or the whole group would resolve the matter by consensus 5) Everybody who so desired got to participate as an equal 6) We developed genuine caring for each other; injuries or emergencies drew spontaneous, immediate, and unanimous concern and reaction which promptly set aside group interest in continued activity in favor of attention to the needs of our least member. On more than one occasion, the entire day’s effort was discontinued in the middle of a game when an injury which appeared to be potentially serious required our attention. This happened because we cared. It could easily have been handled differently. There were often enough participants to continue after a few had left to tend the injury.

I acknowledge that we at TMCC are engaged in an activity that is more complicated by orders of magnitude than what I have just described and the stakes, both organizational and personal are considerably higher. I am convinced however, that the same principles can work. I have seen them work in other colleges where I have been a "player" and much of the current literature and research into organizational success concurs. We must ask what we can do to build mutual respect, affection, and trust. I am now going to address that question.

A friend of mine recently published an article entitled "The Consequences of Our Skepticism." This is an article that I have distributed to many of you. Joel Trachtenberg, who is the president of George Washington University, contends that the ills he describes are society-wide and caused by taking to excess what is actually a very good thing: an educated population using their best thinking tools to question ideas and activities. I would add that those defensive reactions I referred to earlier reinforce the tendency to criticize. In an assertion that is central to his theme, Trachtenberg says of the U. S., "What our culture is struggling with now is an inability to affirm rather than an inability to criticize." If we are to succeed, we must work on our ability to affirm.

TMCC needs an atmosphere more affirming and less critical.

According to Tom Peters, one of the authors of "In Search of Excellence," passion is what drives people and organizations to success. In a sequel, "Passion for Excellence," Peters noted that, "Workers committing creativity and passion (to an organizational goal) is an inherently voluntary act." We may be able to encourage our peers to be passionate about
their work but, we cannot succeed by ordering it. We will certainly not be passionate about our work if criticism is the result.

Without the passion, success of both the organization and the individual faces severe limitation.

There are many of your colleagues who are following their passion and, in doing so, are greatly improving TMCC as a place to work while also enhancing our effectiveness. I use the term champion to describe a person whose passion for a material change leads her/him to reach beyond the confines of a job description, to challenge obstacles, find solutions, be creative, and not take no for an answer. If you want my slogan for 1996-97, that's it: "Don't take no for an answer." The mirror image, when it relates to someone else's project is, "Find ways to say yes."

John Coles is engaged in a sabbatical project that has yielded some interesting thoughts on our organizational culture. Essentially, he is attempting to draw parallels between styles of organizational culture and the individual styles that some of you knew in the 4MAT training or the Myers-Briggs classification scheme and the Kearsey temperament sorter.

According to William Schneider in "The Re-engineering Alternative," which John is using, there are four types of organizational culture. They are oriented toward either: Cultivation, control, collaboration, or competence. It is not useful to spend time on all four but ours has been the type of culture that this author refers to as a control culture.

Among the advantages of a control culture (our current climate) are the following:
1. It is effective at planning.
2. It implements systems, policies, and procedures.
3. It spots problems in continuous processes and takes corrective action, particularly in routine and manufacturing processes.
4. It is very good in proprietary markets, technologies, and processes. It is orderly and predictable.
5. Expectations and roles are clear.

This works well when the work is repetitive and the primary concern is to prevent things from going wrong. What we need is an organizational culture that will create successes and produce positive growth. Rather than a negative focus on preventing bad things, we require a positive focus on creating good ones. I am quite convinced that the collaboration culture is the one that would be much more conducive to our goals and I am asking your aid in shifting toward a collaboration culture.

Consider the weaknesses of the control culture: When taken to excess, it spawns attempts to
dominate and control. When things are not going well, it leads to distrust and paranoia. It is prone excessively to compliance and produces distorted information as some are reluctant to pass along bad news to people in the hierarchy and others attempt to restrict valuable information in order to enhance their own perceived power. Authoritarian leaders stifle differing judgments about critical issues. The control culture often treats people in an arrogant and cavalier manner. It sends the message to insiders and outsiders alike that, "We can take you or leave you."

Most of you will agree that list sounds especially descriptive of some of what we have struggled against.

According to Schneider, and this is a quote, "...the collaboration culture is the one that is naturally suited to enterprises that have incremental relationships with their customers. ...The two parties come together in an ongoing, one-step-at-a-time, process. Enterprises that fit logically into the collaboration cultural framework are characterized by immediacy and by the necessity of co-involvement for things to work. Some examples of this are nursing, entertainment, and many personal service enterprises." I submit that the foregoing is an apt description of the nature of our enterprise.

The strengths of a collaboration culture: It is naturally effective at building and managing diversity and conflict. Dedication is high. Individuals easily develop a dedication to the success of the whole enterprise, a dedication that is returned by the organization to the individual. Communication is open, free, and direct. It is naturally effective at building, developing, and utilizing teams. People treat one another in a sensitive and caring manner. People help one another out and build on one another's skills and capabilities. Trust is prevalent. The organization is versatile and adaptive. It listens to people. Participative management thrives. Individual talent and generalist capabilities are fostered. Conflict and differences are typically well managed. Rewards are often very generous.

We must recognize that there are disadvantages to the collaboration culture: In excess, it leads to people getting caught up in being friends, failing to hold each other accountable, and performance slips. It is prone toward the short term. It can become over-compromising. If careless, it fails to recognize individual achievement and inadvertently fosters mediocrity. It de-emphasizes planning. It gravitates toward groupthink. People refrain from dissent for fear of group ostracism. In excess, it takes a long time with difficult decisions.

I submit that the advantages are singularly those we desire and the weaknesses are ones we are well positioned to overcome.

Two things are required of you if you wish to contribute to the establishment of our collaboration culture:
First, on the negative side, you must actively discourage the naysayers. When you hear excessively critical comments aimed at colleagues or new ideas, comments not (in your judgment) motivated to improving the process, it is incumbent upon you to say so. A simple, "That is not a constructive comment." will do; second, on the positive side, it is your opportunity and responsibility to exercise initiative in advancing the project or goal about which you feel passion. Become its champion.

There are four essential ingredients necessary for us to get to a collaboration culture. (1) We must develop compatible organizational mechanisms, (2) we must support participative decision making, (3) we must actively encourage team spirit, and (4) We must support our colleagues who take the initiative to pursue their passion. Find ways to say yes.

It may surprise you how many of your peers and colleagues are sufficiently passionate about something that they have already become champions. Let me provide you with only a partial list of what is currently happening at TMCC. I will comment about a few of them for the purpose of illustrating what is possible. I hope this inspires those of you who feel a passion for something to pursue that passion. You will also note some ideas have not yet found a champion.

I want you to know that I admire each and every person on this list for their initiative and for their obvious caring attitude about TMCC, about their peers, and about education. There is no particular order to the list except that it is to some extent chronological in the order that initiatives came to my attention.

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<tr>
<th>CHAMPION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Linda Stetter</td>
<td>Presidential Selection</td>
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<td>Bill Verbeck</td>
<td>IGT Applied Technology Bldg.</td>
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<td>Laura Williams</td>
<td>Student Focus Groups</td>
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<td>Mich Glazier</td>
<td>Enrollment Mgmt</td>
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<td>Betty Elliott</td>
<td>Team Building Processes</td>
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<td>Kurt Hall</td>
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<td>John Coles</td>
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<td>Ken Wright</td>
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<td>Dick Brand</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Degree</td>
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<td>Dan McClure</td>
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8. Comprehensive Career Center
9. John Chism  P-T Faculty Staff Dev
10. Steve Streeper  Building Harmony
11. Dave Eckes  Team Recognition Awards
12. Sandi Emerson  Paramedic Program
13. Marilyn Schenk  International Student Program
   Cheryl Woehr
14. Aurora Cortez  Summer Youth Academy
15. Cindee Davis  4MAT Training
16. Fred Lokken  Future Search Process
17. Elsie Doser  Environmental Scanning
18. Shanon Christiansen  Flatten Academic Organization
19. Jackie Kirkland  Expanding Diverse Horizons
20. Fred Lokken  Distance Learning
21. Ken Wright  Governance
22. Kathy Odynski  Outreach College
23. Kathy Odynski  Program for Seniors
   Pat Slavin
24.  Wellness Program Initiative
25. Ken Wright  State Funding for Summer School
26. Dick Brand  Expanded Child Care
27.  Upgraded Advisory Boards
When you consider these projects, you will note that they do not flow smoothly from one to another. This fact imposes upon us the requirement for a non-hierarchical, organic planning process. In other words, the planning will occur around individual projects as we ask ourselves the question, "How can we create a plan which will incorporate and support all of these things we want to do?" For those of you who just completed the intermediate 4MAT training, planning will be the creation of an umbrella for all of these projects and programs. And, of course, in a few instances, we will not be able to fit someone's project into any reasonable plan that fits our mission. In that case, we will come to a consensus that such a project will not be supported.

While it may not be obvious to you, I really care about our people. I care about the people some of you have tried to discredit in my eyes. I CARE ABOUT YOU. Education is for me a noble calling which stirs within me deep emotion as I see our students struggling with many of the problems my family encountered, many of which would have been avoided had there been a community college in my father's time. I'm sure you will understand why the community college mission is my passion. I was moved nearly to tears last Monday when I shared an audience with former Senator and Governor Paul Laxault and heard him say to our audience, "When you are talking about community college, you are talking about the work of the Lord." That is exactly how I feel.

TMCC is a great institution with the potential to be even greater. This will be the year that we achieve a much more harmonious, collaborative culture through each of us pursuing our
passion and supporting our peers. You won’t take no for an answer on your ideas and you will find ways to say yes to the ideas of others.

For those of you who feel I am unduly optimistic I offer the advice of the late Scott Reston of the New York Times, "Stick with the optimists. It’s going to be tough enough even if they’re right." It is going to be tough but passion works. It’s working here.

Kenneth E. Wright
August 1996