

MORAINE PARK TECHNICAL COLLEGE
Dr. Sheila Ruhland, President
Convocation Speech August 18, 2014

The Year Ahead – Innovation 2020

I would like to officially welcome all of you to Moraine Park's 1st convocation. For those of you just starting at Moraine Park, we previously referred to this annual August gathering as an "in-service."

I came to know convocations as a gathering before the beginning of the academic year during which positive thinking is accentuated and priorities are addressed. We have reason to do both this morning.

Although I have to tell you I found it amusing that one definition of convocation I came across referred to it as a "group gathered in response to a summons." I hope our time this morning didn't feel like a summons but rather time to look ahead and spend time with others.

It's taken me a few years into my role at Moraine Park Technical College, but I finally had the epiphany that it would be great if we all heard the same message at the same time. Thus, a convocation. I hope it will find a permanent place among Moraine Park's traditions that date back more than 100 years to 1912.

I think it's quite remarkable that the essence of our mission remains so strong even as we passed that centennial mark...and that mission is to be an innovative leader in education and a respected community partner. The college started out with class offerings in cooking, auto mechanics, machine shop, shorthand, bookkeeping, barbering and business education. Today, it's Nursing, Medical Assistant, Accounting, Business Management/Supervision, Criminal Justice and Early Childhood Education all with the highest program enrollments as we begin this fall.

You see, even over the decades, Moraine Park has always worked to align programs with labor market needs, equip students with skills for in-demand occupations, collaborate with other post-secondary institutions and employers to improve the quality of our programs, and maintain accountability for how students perform.

Those before us did their part to help students achieve their dreams...now it's time for us to do our part, which is precisely what I'd like to talk about this morning: the future, and being part of something bigger than ourselves. Here's what I pledge not to do: rely on clichés, acronyms, and academic gobbledygook to make my points.

A Forbes online post chronicled the most annoying business jargon, so I've scrubbed my remarks of the following:

- **Empower:** This word suggests you can do a little bit of something outside your job description but someone is still watching over you.
- **Think outside the box:** Let's forget the box and just think.
- **Take it to the next level:** In theory it means to do something better; in practice it means nothing if you don't know what the next level should look like.
- **Buy-in:** This suggests agreement on a course of action of the most disingenuous kind. If there was a thought bubble to this one it would read: I have an idea. I didn't involve you because I didn't value you enough to discuss it with you. I want you to embrace it as if you were in on it from the beginning, because that would make me feel really good.
- **Giving 110%:** The thing about effort, in terms of measuring it, is that the most you can give is everything, and everything equals 100 percent. You can't give more than that, unless you can make two or more of yourself on the spot, in which case you have a very interesting talent that we could use. To tell someone to give more than 100 percent is to also tell them that you failed second-grade math.

I'm also going to steer clear of nouns that have morphed into wanna-be verbs, like leverage and impact. When I talk about values, it will be about the values **we all share** as co-workers, not values from on high.

And when it comes to process, I'm hopeful you'll see it's not "process for process sake." Rather it's process to guide us through this year, and the next, and the next. In fact, our plan is called "**Innovation 2020.**" While there are short-term fixes included, there is great emphasis on planning for the long-term too so that we don't find ourselves in a position where we're perceived as lacking innovation. That perception, by the way, came from employees, which I really take to heart.

Innovation 2020 was built on a straightforward line of questioning posed to lots of people connected to Moraine Park, including MPTC District board, employees, students and community partners. It read: "*Imagine it is August 2020. What do you hope the college has accomplished since 2013? What are students doing? What are instructors and staff doing? What looks different? What has changed since 2013?*"

There were listening sessions, one-on-one interviews, a Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats analysis and focus groups, augmented with our current college plan that will take us up to fall 2015. So you see, Innovation 2020 is a strategic plan that absolutely pertains to all of us.

So let me start at the beginning...the idea of being part of something bigger than ourselves. Some of you may know the name Joseph Campbell, he was a writer and lecturer on the human experience whose philosophy was often summed up in the three-word phrase, "Follow your bliss." I love how Campbell described a hero. He wrote: A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself." I would also use that hero definition interchangeably with the definition of a leader...someone who steps up and makes themselves a valuable asset.

The reward is two-fold: You get to make a lasting difference in the lives of others, like students and co-workers and business partners. And it also brings a positive light into your life too. I think you might be astounded at how great a difference you can make when you adopt this outlook. And I believe people naturally want to be part of something bigger than themselves and to do the kind of work that is tangible in how it helps others and influences people's lives in very profound ways.

Like the student who was told all his life that he wasn't college material and just needed someone to see his potential.

Or the single mom determined to get her GED and make a better life for her family who needed someone to cheer her on.

Or the newly unemployed struggling to make ends meet who would have been forced to drop out had it not been for Moraine Park's Foundation and the scholarships awarded.

Or the student who learns best by doing and longs for a business internship to prove herself.

Or the graduate going on to a four-year institution who feels prepared in a way that was best for him.

For each of those students it took the kind of dig-deep motivation that demands our motivation too.

So, I pose the question to every one of you: Do you want to be part of something bigger than yourself?

Which takes us right back to that definition of a hero.

We have a tag line we've been using for about two years now – **Driven to Do.** It's catchy, describes the positive mindset of our students, and appeals to employers and community members. What you may not know is that, when we went through the process of coming up with this brand voice for Moraine Park Technical College, we looked at personality types, sometimes called standards, to determine our inner motivations. Were we a "Rebel" brand, like Harley-Davidson? No. How about a "Caregiver" brand like Johnson & Johnson? Not exactly. Maybe the "Magician" brand like Oil of Olay? Well, perhaps sometimes.

In the fullest sense, Moraine Park's brand is about supporting and inspiring others to do great things. And that's the "Hero" brand. The Hero wants to make the world a better place. The Hero is focused, disciplined, decisive and determined. Some Heroes seek out challenges. Others are the more reluctant Heroes who recognize an injustice and rise to the occasion to remedy it. Heroes are also team players who listen, avoid digging in their heels when there's a better idea than their own, and who are willing to make tough choices. There are aspects of the Hero in all of you, I know it. How can I be so certain? You wouldn't be here today. More importantly, you wouldn't have pursued the career path you have. The college logo apparel that many of you are sporting may not look like a cape to you, but it does to me.

Now, I'm asking all of you heroes to authentically embrace Innovation 2020 in your work for Moraine Park and that mission is to "prepare students for success in a diverse and globally connected world."

And I'm asking you to begin contributing immediately to Innovation 2020's vision - which is to be the college of choice for students and a strategic partner for business and industry - even as we transition from the remaining year in our current strategic plan called One Vision, a plan that already calls for innovative education for an ever-changing workforce.

While I know that may all sound a bit confusing, please be assured our sights are set squarely on defining the future so we're not left playing catch-up.

Now remember how I referenced major priorities that need attention? Well, here they are, four of them in no particular order, as laid out in our Innovation 2020 strategic plan. And we all need to work together to tackle these. So let's get started.

First up: **Innovation in programming, delivery and student services to support student success.** We must continue to offer new approaches to learning, with online learning at the top of that list. It's what our diverse student population needs, it's what employers are demanding, and it helps all of us in this room to stay competitive. We always need to be on the lookout to add new programs based on workforce supply and demand and new facilities, like the new Jackson Regional Center. Innovation in programming also includes our beyond-the-classroom service learning.

Now, as for that part about "services to support student success"...I'd like to call out the Dreamkeepers grants from the college's Foundation. Many of you know one of the top reasons students drop out is because of financial setbacks, so this is a lifeline to keep them afloat.

The Foundation also launched something called FACT – Forming Alliances to Cultivate Talent – that supports students enrolling in manufacturing related programs with scholarship aid, direct contact with area businesses, and a seamless transition to the workforce with internships. In turn, businesses gain access to a pool of highly skilled manufacturing students and graduates.

Next: **Strengthen K through 16 and community connections.** We do two things at MPTC – we prepare students for careers, that's one, and we prepare many for the next level of higher education, that's two. So we must maintain a hotline to school districts, another hotline to businesses, and a third hotline to four-year universities. It's why we offer dual credit and why we launched boot camps. It's why we partner with UW-Fond du Lac, UW-Washington County, Marian University and Ripon College. Not to get bogged down in statistics, but it's gratifying to know that 56% of our graduates are employed right in the Moraine Park District, another 40% in the state, with only 4% working outside Wisconsin. And fully three-quarters are employed in positions related to their career field. Talk about contributing to quality of the workforce and quality of life.

Third: **Efficient and effective technology.** Quite simply, we need newer, more reliable, more compatible technology to support your work and to help students learn. Think everything from online registration to mobile apps. We're going to take a college-wide approach with this, identifying the areas of greatest need for tech improvements and training. We plan to look at what is and isn't being used – a tech gap analysis, if you will. We'll

be establishing very clear criteria for making purchases and then evaluating those purchases. There's also an underlying goal of reducing the time and process steps required for better technology.

Finally: **Supportive culture and climate makes us an employer of choice.** Did I save the toughest one for last? That's probably a fair assessment. I am not going to sugarcoat this one. The technical college reality is one of Act 10, retirements, budget decreases, state vs. local systems, a need for more FTEs, and a demand for new programming. There must certainly be some trepidation among you for this new school year.

I understand and with your help we can tackle and address this priority. In fact, we've already begun with the welcome of new employees this morning. On a side note, I also want to make the point that I don't view stability as a bad word. Stability can be about strength and steadiness and I'm all for that. We're done with "the flavor of the day." Case in point - a Moraine Park Employee handbook that now gives us a shot at greater success.

Another tactic we put into play to help make us an employer of choice was to define our "employment brand" much like we defined our marketing brand, **Driven to Do**. This was a joint effort between the Human Resources and Marketing Departments, with employee focus groups doing the work of unearthing the true picture of our overall culture here and spelling out the skills that would make for an ideal Moraine Park employee. Now that we have a good feel for the types of candidates who will find success here, we can start seeding those insights in our employment marketing messages. This is particularly important as we look to intensive recruitment due to retirements. It should come as no surprise that student-focused, willingness to help and continuously learning, all made the list of attributes.

In addition, Moraine Park identified a new Academic Quality Improvement Project. This project is looking to identify a college-wide council whose charge is to transform our culture and seek college-wide input into planning, recommendations, and guidance. This project team is led by Dr. Caron Daugherty, Dean of General Education and Accreditation Liaison, and updates will be provided throughout the year on the progress. Our work aligns with the College's strategic priorities and monthly updates will be provided. We encourage you to connect with any of the members and look forward to presenting the Council in August 2015.

It's time to trust your intuitions, inspirations and ideas. Because great ideas will be more than listened to, they will be supported. In the same breath, I'd also ask that we not fall into the trap of disliking an idea because we've never done it before, or because it involves change. If you remember only one thing from this convocation, I hope it will be this.

The 2014-2015 academic year can be as happy and exciting a time for Moraine Park as we make it. Let's set aside classifications, let's banish empty process, let's release any lingering fear of change, let's pledge to be flexible so we can respond quickly to student and workforce needs. Let's accept that progress is not always even or smooth. Let's also accept that there will be unknowns. Yet, with shared values we can take on anything that lands in our path. Let's nurture optimism. Let's make sure it's always a dialogue and not a monologue. I want to hear from you and I encourage you to attend the monthly college updates.

Let's remind ourselves that if we're asking our students to be driven - many of whom are facing financial hardships, family crises, and a poverty of self-esteem - then we must be driven too.

It's time to be part of something bigger than ourselves. It's time to be a hero and celebrate the 4,500+ degree students enrolled to start this fall.

Thank you for coming to work today, and thank you for all you do.