

Opening Day Speech
August 23, 2013

Good afternoon. It is an honor and privilege to welcome you to Opening Day and what I know will prove to be a star studded year at College of the Canyons.

It's so great to be here and to see you....the entire Cougar Family gathered in one place! It is the one day when we come together as an educational community. Classified Staff. Faculty. Administrators. Board of Trustees. Retirees. Even our Foundation Board is represented today. The enthusiasm and excitement that you all bring to what you do is contagious. I look forward to the year ahead with great anticipation because of what you bring to the college each day, because of your plans and dreams, and the impact your efforts have on what we can do for those we are here to serve.

Today signifies the start of a new year, and the end of vacation. No more hiking and paddling in the Sierras for me. And while I love vacations and summer in the mountains, the start of something new, is almost better than summer vacation!

I love this day. I love the excitement in the air. I love seeing people greet each other after an absence over the summer, sharing their excitement for new students, new opportunities and new projects.

I love having special people join us as we celebrate the start of another academic year. People like Doris Marie Zimmer, and other Foundation Board members and donors who have invested in our future. People like Al Adelini and our retirees whose contributions to College of the Canyons over the last four decades have touched this campus and helped us to be who we are today.

I love this day because, once again, I get to look in the eyes of the people who work here and connect; and when I do so I **realize that**, sitting here today in front of me, is incredible talent and potential represented in each one of you.

I love this day because I get to hear your plans for the year unleashed, new ideas shared and people gearing up to give it their very best to be part of this incredible college team.

I love this day because I get to see our student leaders , who are committed to help make the experience at College of the Canyons a memorable one for all of our students.

I love this day because it symbolizes the eve of a new academic year where our students will have the chance to work with some remarkable faculty and staff who create engaging, inspiring and challenging learning **environments**.

I love this day because it reminds me of **who we are as an institution**. And why College of the Canyons shines so brightly. Just as a night in the Sierras features a beautiful sky peppered with bright stars, there are stars everywhere in this COC team who work to fulfill our mission:

- We exist to transform things.
- We exist to help students dream big and think, and then do.
- We exist to prepare people and our businesses for the future and to give them tools that will allow them to be difference-makers.
- We exist to produce alumni, graduates and students who can go anywhere and be prepared to follow, to lead, to be part of a team, to influence, and to continue to make a difference.

What fuels it all, is our ability **to take risks, and to work** as a team.

As I mentioned in my Opening Day letter, I had a chance to do a lot of hiking, take a lot of pictures, kayak many different waters, and take a few risks on the trail. And, I even managed to get up the nerve to try a little paddle boarding. The good news is, I can do it. The bad news is, I sure look funny!

As much as I too fear new things, I also am exhilarated when I can do something new and master something I always dreamed of doing, but previously lacked the courage or made the time to try.

When I am in the out-of-doors, I stand in wonder at the opportunities that I see wherever I look.

The outdoors inspires me. It helps me get centered and remember that I am part of something very, very large, and that there is beauty and opportunity everywhere. And, no matter how many times I hike the same trail or paddle the same waters, it seems new to me the next time. There are so many directions to choose to explore out there. The same is true here. COC inspires me because of its unlimited potential and the personal courage evidenced in all of you. Our options are only limited by the boundaries we put on ourselves.

While I manage to get outdoors on vacation during the day, in the evening I enjoy watching the talent shows on television that I referenced in my letter. I'm not sure what my fascination is with those shows. Perhaps it's because I lack those talents. I can't sing. I can't dance. I can't act. I don't play any musical instruments. In fact, as a child, I was invited OUT of Glee Club, Church Choir, and Dance teams. Yet, throughout my life, I have not given up! I keep trying. And, I remember those moments when I made it to center stage. While I didn't win anything, and others cringed when I hit the stage, I felt a great sense of satisfaction in being able to muster up the courage to get out there and give it the best that I could over and over again.

I related to some of the performers on TV and the comments they made.

As I was watching the semi-final round of "The Voice" a few weeks ago, I again listened to what they had to say. I heard the same things that I heard at the beginning of the season.

- Most never thought they would get where they had.
- Most were grateful for the support and help of others.
- All acknowledged that they had not done it alone.

- For many, getting to Radio City Music Hall meant realizing the dream of a lifetime.
- And, because they had not given up, most of them had renewed self-confidence about what they could do because they had taken the risk, mustered up the courage, the creativity, the innovative spirit and the **resilience** to keep going despite a lack of previous success.

These contestants reminded me of our students, many of whom come to us with no self-confidence whatsoever, irrespective of their age and experiences. Their choices are unlimited. They have many, many opportunities. But at the same time, if they don't give themselves permission to move forward, their progress stops.

Having spoken with many faculty and staff members over the summer, particularly those who were involved in our Summer Rush event, they confirmed with me that it doesn't really matter what the person's background is, nor what their experience is, nor what their education is. When people start something new, it's just plain scary. Faced with change, we all have feelings of trepidation and nervousness. And we hear those whispers of doubt asking, "Am I really going to be able to do that?"

Even at College of the Canyons, where we have amazing leadership, and people who propose new and crazy things to help us become the best that we can be, we still have the same apprehensions as our students. Embracing the new, embracing the different, is **just not easy**. But **you** have an advantage where our students do not. You have a team:

- To inspire you.
- To serve as resources for one another.
- To help solve problems.
- To share the load of work.
- To bring together the pieces of the puzzle to make something happen that none of you could do on your own.

How do you do that? Teamwork. I love COC because here, **teams work**. And our team makes our dreams work.

COC is, no doubt, a talented, committed group of professionals. But what makes the real difference is that when we bring passion, expertise, commitment, uniqueness, creativity, compassion, and excellence, **magic happens. And team work makes dreams work in a magical way.**

There is a genius in teamwork. It is the rarest, most exhilarating, and most productive human activity possible. A team is not just a group of individuals who work in the same place, have the company logo on their business cards and t-shirts. A **real team** is made up of people who are different in experience, talent and education – but equal in their commitment to work together to achieve goals. It is a group of people who look at the bigger picture and commit to work together in new ways.

I love the team at COC because we build teams by building relationships.

- Team work can't be accomplished with control, manipulation, edicts or placing blame.
- It is done by respecting each person's contribution, showing genuine appreciation, treating each other as capable adults, respecting others and fostering group genius.

A team becomes “genius” when everyone works together and the results are phenomenal.

Just this week, I came across another great example of this. I was in the Art Gallery looking at the “Life Is Art” exhibit. This innovative project is a perfect example of teamwork. It did not happen by accident. It required:

- Vision
- Commitment and effort
- A willingness to accept the uniqueness and perspectives of others
- A willingness to risk and an appreciation of different opinions.

Yet it produced something that is innovative, one-of-a-kind, and which would not have resulted if the team had not come together. Teamwork made this dream work.

I love that our team shares a vision of why we are here.

At the center of every great team at COC is the belief that we have a common purpose – to serve as many students as possible with quality we are proud of and providing the support they need to succeed.

Doing so requires taking risks, listening to others, having the self-confidence and belief in ourselves to venture out and get involved, sharing our new and unproven ideas with others, and setting the standards a little higher.

Whether it is our Honors Program, Center for Applied Competitive Technology, the Forensics Team, Phi Theta Kappa, SHARP Program, Model UN, Alpha Gamma Sigma, Civil Rights Institute, or Small Business Development Center, to name a few, our uniqueness, our collective vision, and our commitment to delivery of excellence in everything we do make an enormous difference in connecting with students and meeting their needs in the long run.

Our “Summer Rush” efforts are a vivid example of doing so. Almost every office on campus was involved in adding this additional summer session, then creating an event that allowed people to visit campus and quickly register for classes. It was amazing to watch everyone work together, on short notice, to imagine something new, and then bring it to life overnight. The success of that teamwork was evident as barriers were removed and students were literally, invited in.

Because we are united by that vision of serving students and the community with excellence, teamwork changes lives at College of the Canyons. I think of Kristina Smolenski, one of our 2013 valedictorians and speakers at Commencement.

Between working to support her family, caring for her disabled veteran father, and trying to support her little sister, she could have easily been overwhelmed and given up on her dreams of higher education. But she demonstrated a resilience that few people could ever hope to match. Her persistence, her determination, and her desire to succeed regardless of the odds stacked against her caught the eye of Tom Bilbruck, our Financial Aid director. He nominated her for the Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship offered by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. It is the largest private scholarship for transfer students in the country, providing up to \$30,000 per year, for three years. Only 60 community college students annually are selected for this award. Kristina was one of them, and she is the first from College of the Canyons to ever receive it. Tom and her faculty helped make Kristina a STAR and she is shining big from Hawaii! That's what teamwork does.

Second, I admire and love that you work to establish TRUST

Team expert Fran Rees says that "Trust is the cornerstone of a successful team." Yet, in most places, giving trust is not easy. It is not something you can order to take place, wish to occur or give as a gift. It develops over time if team members are truthful, honest and fair.

Daily at COC, I see people exhibiting those behaviors that build trust.

And as I do, I marvel at what a giving group this is!

- You don't promise more than you can deliver.
- You don't ask for more than you need.
- You don't sugar-coat, tell half-truths or fail to get the facts.
- You do not throw each other under the bus.
- You stand together and take hits for the team.
- You pitch in when deadlines close in.
- You freely share your expectations.
- You share the limelight; instead of seeking to be in the spotlight alone. In the process, you make stars of others.

Without trust, the team never moves beyond being a collection of individuals. **Trust is the foundation for effective teamwork.** When trust exists, relationships thrive and they do so at COC. In ever so many ways, from all corners and points of our campus, **you** take the time to care about others. You relate.

- Whether it's getting to know people at campus events, investing time together outside of work, or working across departments to make innovative improvements, you are involved in the lives of those around you in a way that goes beyond being mere coworkers.

- You genuinely care for one another, and you demonstrate it regularly through so many acts of kindness. Birthday parties. Baby showers. Sympathy cards. Holiday get-togethers. These are all gestures that symbolize the enduring relationships that exist at COC, and make it such a special place to work.

Great relationships are rewarding. They bring joy. **I love this place** because it is clear to me that people here value relationships and that your relationships matter.

You can see it in your attitude.

The critique of Fred Astaire's first screen test read: "Can't act. Slightly bald. Can dance a little."

The world of entertainment, and all of us who grew up with Fred Astaire, are extremely glad he didn't pay attention to the people who wrote **that** critique! As I'm sure you know by now, I'm not a fan of negative critics. But our society, unfortunately, has a tendency to allow others to define limits and listen more to the negative comments than the positive ones. That's not the case at COC.

As I consider the team that is College of the Canyons, I see a group of people who have an amazing positive attitude and who believe they can do whatever they put their minds to. Our college is what it is because of that belief. Every day, we put the critics and their perspectives in the proper places and refuse to give them the same regard and credibility we give each other. As Steve Jobs said, **“Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice.”** We do a great job of recognizing when others try to define our limits. We move beyond them and ignore negativity.

That certainly is evident as we look back at the last four years and how our staff responded to strengthen our college and to move us forward despite the roller coaster we rode as the state budget went up and down , all the while, innovating and adding new courses and transfer degrees, the civil rights institute, SHARP, the Honors Program, a new library and TLC, the Chancellor's Caberet, opening the university center, completing the Mentry Hall expansion, adding Intelliresponse, designing a new website, developing our Incident Command system, starting an Upward Bound program, launching the Culinary Arts campaign, developing and award winning International Center for Trade and Development and breaking ground on the Culinary Arts institute. Nothing less than amazing!

I love how you care for your colleagues when you **accept their inabilities as well as their strengths.**

- **You value each new chapter at COC as a new chance.**
- **You value a balance between perfection and practicality.**
- **You value and know the importance of balancing personal freedom, authority and civility.**
- **You value and work to support others and help them be successful people.**

People are not born one way; they are made — self-made by consistent effort. And, as you invest in that ability to develop others, you do it with heart with each other.

Yesterday during my FLEX session, many people shared with me that they met several of their colleagues for the first time. I love that you are willing to reach out and establish new relationships. And, I encourage you to continue doing so.

Look to your left, look to your right, and get to know those people because they **will be here** next year. Our people stick around. And we are glad.

Fifty-two percent of our full-time faculty are former adjuncts. And 34 percent of all employees were students here. In fact, our newest adjunct faculty member in Earth Science is Jason Burgdorfer, who served as our ASG President in 2009.

COC is a strong team because you work to understand your colleagues and the key role they play for our college. Maybe you already know the people that are on the right and left of you. If so, keep looking down the row until you see somebody you don't know. Make a note of who that is and introduce yourself to them in the next few weeks. Take a risk

I love that we are willing to take risks – and even fail.

It's only by being willing to fail that you can really know who you are. Albert Einstein – a success by any measure – once said, "Anyone who's never made a mistake, has never tried anything." Right on, Albert!

Until you push the envelope you'll never see your full potential. When you try new things, you might just fail at one of them. That's ok. A little bit of failure goes a long way toward discovering how you can be successful.

Some failure, some day is inevitable. No one can be successful 100 percent of the time. Consider this: the very best batters in professional baseball successfully hit the ball and get on base only about a third of the time. That means they fail about 2 out of every 3 chances they get. And those are the All Stars! So even if you are doing something you are really good at, you'll fail sometimes. So get used to it.

If you don't strive to be perfect, you can make truly deep connections with your students, your friends, your mentors and those people who can most help you to learn, to grow, to dream and to do. Because if you accept the fact that some failure is inevitable in a life that strives for excellence, you can relax, you can be yourself, you can stretch yourself. You can take the chance that you might not succeed at first, but hey, nobody's perfect.

Look to your left, and look to your right. Those people you find on your left and right, all around College of the Canyons, your fellow colleagues, are our future.

I love this day because it gives me the opportunity to publicly say "Thank You" to so many deserving people. I love that I am so proud of

COC. Who wouldn't not be? I tell others that all the time. I thank you for what you have done:

- **I thank you for showing each other what it means to have passion for what you do and for seeing that passion inspire the same in others** that could change a student's life tomorrow.
- **I thank you for caring about those with whom you work.** As Maya Angelou said, "If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded."
- **I thank you for dedicating yourself to your profession** and your personal achievement because it ensures that our students have the best educations possible.
- **I thank you for taking an interest in the students** on our campus and encouraging them to be the best they can be and making them feel welcome and motivating them through your examples.
- **I thank you for embracing the journey of this college** and being proud of what we are to this community.

Because of your commitment and dedication to our students and your colleagues:

- You have made this a place that people want to be.
- You have created an environment that fosters opportunity and invites people in.
- You have opened the doors and paved the way for access.
- You have enabled students to dream big.
- In your service, you have set an example.

Each you is a star. And, as you know, I love stars!

- You shine brightly.
- You command attention.
- You light the way.
- And, just as stars form constellations, you come together with your co-workers and create something you cannot do alone.

Napoleon Hill said, "The starting point of all achievement is desire. Keep this constantly in mind. Weak desire brings weak results. But passion drives potential." I look forward to seeing the results that your passion will produce at College of the Canyons, and in our students, in the year to come. Keep shining. Keep lighting the way forward. And keep working together to make our dreams work!

Thank you.