



Mac Van Wielingen

Junior Achievement Hall of Fame Speech

October 13, 2016

Note: This speech was prepared as an award acceptance speech prior to October 13th, 2016. The actual speech delivered on October 13th, 2016 was inspired by the preceding messages, but not delivered in full or verbatim.

Acknowledgements and thanks to JA, my current and past partners at ARC Financial and ARC Resources, my work associates in our family office, Viewpoint, my friends present here this evening, and all my family members. Special acknowledgement and deep thanks to my wife, Susan.

I am honoured and grateful to receive this recognition.

I want, though, to do something a bit different this evening.

I want to dedicate this award I am receiving – this recognition – to my parents. And, to all those who overcome extreme adversity and hardship in their lives.

I have often felt that the highest value of the brave and the stalwart, of those who prevail in the face of seemingly impossible odds, is the inspiration they create for others.

It is this inspiration that I wish to speak to tonight.

Each of my parents directly experienced the atrocities and the inhumanities of the Second World War.

At 14 years of age, my mother, along with all Dutch people in Indonesia, was interned in a concentration camp where she spent 3 ½ years of her life. It is reported that about 25% of the prisoners in those camps died.

My father lost a number of family members in the war camps in Europe, and he bore numerous physical scars related to his participation in the Dutch resistance. His scars were also, I believe, scars of conscience for what he had to do to survive.

They both were persecuted.

They both lived in a constant fear for their safety.

Their families were both blown asunder and never re-formed.

They lost all their possessions and their freedom, and their dreams were shattered.

They came to Canada as immigrants, carrying the angst and trauma of their war experiences, and they had nothing.

Not only did they have no possessions, they also did not have family or any social relations in Canada when they arrived.

Nor did they have access to the same resources and support that we have today for people who are experiencing deep loss and hardship.

Janice Joplin's famous line, "Freedom is just another word for having nothing left to lose," always resonated for me.

She was pointing to what might be described as the "ground zero" of freedom and needless to say, it is a brutally harsh place to be.

What can we learn from those who have lost everything and who have faced the worst adversities imaginable?

1. One direct learning for me was about resiliency and persistence.

My father was an irrepressible entrepreneur. He could be slowed down or even knocked down, but he would rise up with renewed determination to find solutions and new opportunities.

He carried within his military identification papers a copy of the poem, *Invictus*, which is Latin for "unconquered." The poem is about courage in the face of death.

Our mother taught me about day-to-day persistence. She would commonly say, "One foot in front of the other. Tomorrow will be a better day."

These simple affirmations carried implicit optimism and hope – inspiration to keep moving forward.

Each in their own way had a unique strong survival mindset, which inspired me in the face of challenge and adversity.

2. The second major learning was the importance of attitude.

We can't control the conditions that arise in life, but we have a choice as to how we face these conditions.

Viktor Frankl, holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, who wrote the famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, offers a perspective that became foundational for all his teachings and has been a source of inspiration for me:

“Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of human freedoms – [this is] to choose one's set of attitudes in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

We always have a certain freedom – a choice – as to how we interpret and respond to challenge and adversity.

3. The third major learning is about self-awareness and culture.

All of us have gaps in our self-awareness, or blind spots – what we push away and don't want to see about ourselves.

And it is well known in psychology that what you deny or repress will become your shadow; it is part of you but not necessarily visible, and it will show up as reactive defensiveness, denial, and dysfunction.

This is a force that can drive a lot of our behaviours.

Carl Jung, one of the greatest psychologists of all time, emphasized, “If you do not meet your shadow, it becomes your fate.”

He also said, “The only way that humanity can survive is if enough people do their shadow work.”

Defensiveness against feeling unworthy or inadequate will often arise as aggression that is dehumanizing, or other behaviours that negate or diminish others.

Sadly, the experience of my parents and many others have born witness to the extremes of this reality.

In the here and now, what I am talking about is how we show up in our relationships – how we treat each other at work, in our families, and in our communities.

Some of you have heard me talk about bosses who are rude, intimidating, threatening, arrogant, etc., and I have referred to those bosses as “boss holes,” which kind of sums up these leaders.

The cultures they create, if not dehumanizing, are at least sub-optimal in terms of human development and in supporting human performance.

There is now vast empirical evidence that “strength of culture” – GREAT CULTURE – links over time with GREAT PERFORMANCE.

Creating a healthy performance focused culture involves living certain commitments.

One is that people are affirmed and treated well – the hallmark of which is strong relationships – which, in a sense, is evidence of strong culture.

It is a great source of satisfaction for me that my relationships with many of my business partners go back 20 to 30 years.

There is a quality within great culture that I wish to emphasize.

It is INSPIRATION.

Woven into the fabric of great relationships and great culture is positivity, support, encouragement, and inspiration.

- To support and inspire each other, when we stumble and fall, to rise up, gather ourselves and to move forward.
- To inspire each other in the most difficult times to just move forward one step at a time.
- To support the freedom of choice that is always present in facing any challenge.
- To model for each other a commitment to self-awareness and objective understanding.
- To treat each other with respect, and to honour the inherent value and worth of each person.
- To inspire the highest standards, including a vision that embraces great relationships and great culture.

Again, I am dedicating this honour this evening to my parents who endured great hardship, much of which they could not comprehend. And, to all who have come before us and all others today around the world who are confronted by extreme hardship and adversity.

Thank you again to JA and to all of you for your attendance.