

Wisdom From The Edge

How Do You Want To Show Up . . . And Be Remembered?

KEYNOTE SPEECH

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I'm going to call this keynote "Wisdom From The Edge", but I have to tell you I do not have that much wisdom to share. I do, however, have a few noteworthy experiences, and more importantly, a sampling of lessons that I have come to learn over the years.

Okay, so lesson no. 1.

Acknowledgement Counts.

And for this reason, I'd like to express gratitude to everyone who is here today, for making this great event both possible and successful.

I can't comfortably proceed without acknowledging those of you who are here today as a client. It takes great courage to want something new, something better. And more importantly, I think it's fair to say that we all admire each of you for being open to what others may have to offer. It's truly awesome. There was a day not that long ago that women didn't want to help one another to succeed in the workplace. Times are changing.

And to the many volunteers and sponsors, I am certain this day could not be possible without your terrific effort and commitment. And of course, to the directors and founder, for taking action and making a dream a reality.

I first met the founder earlier this year, at an event for women. I was so impressed when I learned about Suit Yourself that I had to ask her "how I might get involved?"

I had the privilege of working with two clients last week, in a suiting event here at St. Basil School. I was so impressed by each of these ladies. And more

importantly, I was able to experience first hand the value of Suit Yourself, and the incredible work that has been undertaken over these past years. I am truly excited to be a part of the Suit Yourself team—it is incredibly meaningful work!

I'd like to ask a question. How do you want to show up and be remembered?

No need to answer just yet.

I'd like you to really consider some of the questions that I will pose to you today. And if you are compelled, perhaps you will make note of your response.

Okay then, let's get back to the edge, and that wisdom thing I was referring to earlier. I've learned a lot of lessons, some pretty big ones, and some not so easily. And like most everyone else who's ever learned a lesson the hard way, it can be hard to share. So here it goes, "just a few of life's big lessons".

But first, I have a disclaimer. "The number of things I know nothing about is growing at an alarming rate."

I'd love to say that quote's mine, but it was a share from earlier this week, when someone kindly sent it my way. I would acknowledge the author if I could, but this one's from an anonymous source.

Oh, and I'll be borrowing a little today.

Now then, lesson no. 2.

Mistakes Happen.

There's no question that we all make mistakes, heck, I find myself making them often; everyday it seems.

For example, last month I gave my girlfriend a pilates and yoga DVD, in the original box of course, so she could get it going on at home. Boy did I feel like a fool when I discovered the DVD was still in my computer this week.

So there it was, a note to self moment. "I think I'm getting too busy again—it's time to slow down and pay more attention."

Add to that my recent error in judgement while behind the wheel of my car this week. I drive a small kind of compact car you see. And for whatever reason it has giant blind spots. I managed to cut someone right off while in transit. How embarrassing, when you look up into the rear view mirror and realize that you just did a complete no-no, that had every potential to cause an accident. Worse yet, I was on my cell phone.

There's a new old saying. When you don't learn the lessons they keep repeating themselves. Can you see the theme here. Yup, it's time to slow down and pay more attention. Leave the phone alone, or at least make use of Bluetooth.

Now these are the fairly routine kind of bloopers that we all make and are pretty good at both correcting and forgiving ourselves for, not too mention securing a little forgiveness from others. We all know, however, that are much bigger one's out there. And with those big mistakes comes much greater opportunity for learning.

I've made serious mistakes—and I know that it is not necessary to share those with you today. I'll simply continue to reconcile those ones on my own.

Here's a question or two for you.

- Is there a recent mistake that you were a part of, that you might learn from?
- How did you respond the last time someone else made a mistake?
- How will you respond the next time?

Okay then, another lesson.

Always Endeavor To Tell The Truth.

So, how about that time when you had the mortifying experience of arriving home at the end of the day, only to discover a seriously noticeable remnant of lunch in your front teeth. I'm not asking how many of you this happened to cause I know it's happened to every one of us. Oh yeh, and then you wonder just how many minutes or hours you spent in this particular state over the course of your day.

The lesson here—if you see someone you know with parsley in their teeth, or perhaps some other embarrassing faux pas such as a button on a shirt that popped—let them know. The small amount of embarrassment you both will share is nothing compared to the mortifying experience of discovering it at the end of the day, and wondering just how long you many minutes or hours you spent in this state.

Add to that, when you're out shopping and your girlfriend tries something hideous on, let her know. "Honey, you're beautiful, but that just doesn't work on you." In my tribe it's our pledge to one another. So, don't let her go out there into the world looking bad.

These are small truths, but the big ones are at least equally, if not more so, important. It's in our best interest to be honest and tell the truth, especially when it's awkward or difficult. That said, when we are unable to tell the truth, it usually fear of consequence or outcome that prevents us from doing so. Perhaps forgiveness is also a part of the lesson.

And for those of you who are clients, here's a commitment to you. The volunteers at Suit Yourself are not going to let you head out there looking less than your very best, and in a wardrobe that works for you!

Okay, question time.

- Is there something that you need to be more honest about? Or someone you need to be honest with presently?
- What action can you take, without delay, to change this?

So on to lesson no. 4

No Fear—No Courage.

My motto: "Feel the fear, and then do it anyway."

I once read somewhere that we should do something that scares us—every day. If I recall correctly these might be

the words of Oprah Winfrey, or her coach, Dr. Martha Beck. Yes. Oprah has a coach, a few actually. Consider Bob Green and Dr. Phil amongst the better known. I heard a quote from Donald Curtis recently, that you might appreciate. "We are what and where we are because we have first imagined it."

My fear twenty-two years ago. Leaving my home and family (and that includes the dog) in rural Alberta, to pursue an education, and a career so that I might have choices for my life.

My fear three years ago. Starting a business, not knowing for sure if I would succeed.

My fear today—standing here, speaking in front of you.

I'm feeling the fear, and I'm doing it anyway.

I'll bet you can recall a moment when you felt scared, and yet you found what it took to move forward. We all do—because we have to. It's just part of the journey.

We are no different than the stories we read of the romance heroines who are survivors with heart—it is courage, honour, and determination that helps us to achieve our goals.

Similar to Donald's words, the famous French poet Victor Hugo once said "There is nothing like a dream to create the future."

- What is it that you fear, and more importantly, what day this week will you step into it?
- What is it that you imagine today—that could be your reality one day soon?
- What is it that you dream of?

So then, let's move toward the next lesson, no. 5

Miracles don't happen over night; sometimes they take an entire weekend.

I really do believe that miracles happen every day. We are, however, not always present or perhaps aware enough to recognize them, embrace them, and receive them.

Two weeks ago I was thinking of an old friend I used to ski with. I don't think we had seen one another in well

over a decade. I decided to track him down, since I knew that he was a brilliant artist, and I wanted to know if he might help me on a project. I made a few calls to other friends and only managed to get voice mail. I didn't leave any messages.

Well, last Sunday I'm buying a coffee at Second Cup and who do I see? My friend James and his lovely wife Patti and their two beautiful children. I was so excited I had to share my story with him. I had set the intention to reconnect and there it was, not one week later. A miracle.

Similarly, and this goes back to a really big mistake I recently made, was this week's fumble and pick up with a new acquaintance. I met this very interesting individual at a recent event here in Edmonton. We agreed following the event that we would connect and have lunch. Well, four weeks passed and I had yet to return the phone call to respond to the invitation.

Worse yet, I had carelessly lost the contact information for this person. So, I made a note in my day timer to find contact info, call, and apologize.

The next day, while I was at the checkout counter at Safeway, another little miracle. I received a call from this very person, wondering if we might try to connect. I felt so bad. Of course I did the big reveal and shared with her how I had misplaced her info, and had set the intention to locate her. And, I extended huge thanks for her effort and action to once again call. As you all know, that doesn't always happen in today's fast-paced world.

The miracles are there. Sometimes we see them and sometimes we miss them.

- Can you recall a recent event that may actually be a miracle?
- What might you do to be more open to seeing the miracles in your life?

Alright then, moving on to lesson no. 6

Like a VISA. The Value of a Good Joke can be Priceless.

I've never been much of a jokester, or a story teller for that matter. But you have to admit, when someone is able to lighten the mood of a room, aren't you just a little envious like me? It's such a valuable trait. So here goes my attempt:

A couple had been married for 50 years.

They were sitting at the breakfast table one morning when the wife says, "Just think, fifty years ago we were sitting here at this breakfast table together."

"I know," the old man said. "We were probably sitting here naked as a jaybird fifty years ago."

"Well," Granny snickered. "Let's relive some old times."

Where upon, the two stripped to the buff and sat down at the table.

"You know, honey," the little old lady breathlessly replied, "My nipples are as hot for you today as they were fifty years ago."

"I wouldn't be surprised," replied Gramps.

"One's in your coffee and the other is in your oatmeal."

Yup. You never know when a good little joke might come in handy.

Perhaps I am simply bending your ear at this point, but I see tremendous value in humour.

- How might you show up and put a smile on someone's face, or bring ease to a moment?

Lesson no. 7

Pay It Forward—or Back.

As you all may know, the premise of "Pay It Forward" is one that any person can implement in his or her own life, at any time. It begins with doing a favour for another person—without any expectation of being paid back. Indeed one would request that the recipient of that favour do the same for someone else: ideally for three other people. The unconditional favours can be large or small. It doesn't have to be a big thing. It can just seem that way, depending on whom you do it for.

I see the Suit Yourself organization very much this way. My hope for the end of this day is that we will reflect upon the ways in which we can Pay It Forward, or pay it back.

Perhaps you know of another individual who may be of benefit to, or benefit from, the services offered by Suit Yourself—and you will share your story, whether you are a client, a volunteer, a fundraiser, a sponsor, or one who is able to make a financial contribution.

- What might you do to Pay It Forward? Or Back?

So then, lesson no. 8

You Make A Difference.

Your presence makes a difference!

On my first day of college, my English professor stood before our class and said, "Today, everyone is present. Look around you. You are like actors in a play. If one of you is absent, no one else can fill your role exactly as you play it. Your presence makes a difference."

We listened because we could tell that it really mattered to him that we had shown up.

He was also realistic. He knew that we would miss some classes, but he insisted that if most of us were present most of the time, everyone would benefit.

He was right. I loved that class—it was one of my best. And those wise words of my professor have returned to me often.

Just the other day, I was having lunch with a former colleague. We have not worked together in several years. We recently became reacquainted through somewhat random circumstances which lead to our lunch outing. Over the course of our meal, she shared with me that her most profound memory during the time in which we worked together was in fact that I was able to reaffirm for her that she did make a difference. I was unaware that she was going through the dissolution of her marriage, and loss of her home. It was a very difficult and painful time in her life.

And so you see, that classroom is everywhere. It's at the office, at home, and in the community. And I am mindful of the role I play.

- Can you acknowledge or imagine, for just one moment, a role in which your presence makes a difference?

Everyone matters. We each make a difference. Your presence makes a difference!

Okay, last lesson.

Gratitude.

I was laying in bed reflecting last evening, on my experiences with Suit Yourself to date. And in that moment a memory returned to me, and I was filled with deep gratitude.

In the late 80s I had graduated from my studies in pharmacy, and managed to secure an interview with Alberta Health and the University of Alberta Hospitals. I had a supporter—a wonderful woman who believed in me. She took me shopping one day, for an “interview suit”, while encouraging me to really prepare for the opportunity to meet with the Director who would interview me.

At the end of the day, I had an off white career jacket and skirt, an emerald green blouse, and some nice black shoes, complimented by a stylish but simple black purse. And it made all the difference—in that suit I felt like a million bucks, like the world was my oyster. And this is no small feat for a girl fresh off the farm.

So there I went, off to my interview the following week. And it was fabulous.

And then something happened. I got a call the following week to let me know I was not successful and that an offer had been made to another individual. I was devastated. And so I accepted an opportunity to work with my family in a business they owned here in Edmonton. It was a humble beginning, but doing so would allow me to relocate and really focus my job search efforts. And I was grateful to my family.

And then something else happened. I got a call not four weeks later asking if I might be available to start work the following Monday. I could hardly believe it, and of course I accepted. And that began my ten years of

employment with Alberta Health and the U of A Hospitals.

Oddly, several years later, the Director left to pursue a Ph.D. At that time she left for me the documents contained in her personal office files. And there it was, on the top right hand corner. The words “excellent candidate”. Having so much respect for her, I was in that moment deeply touched. I had made a real impression on her during my interview—and I have to say that suit made a big difference.

I am filled with gratitude, and I have been reminded of that wonderful person who took me by the hand, and encouraged me and gave me the gift of a good suit.

And so, I am going to pay it forward—and back. I am planning to send a card and gift of acknowledgement to that wonderful person, for the difference she made in my life more than two decades ago. And I think I'll include a copy of this keynote; it might entertain her.

It's a full circle moment. Acknowledgement. Gratitude. A bit of a miracle. And the opportunity to remember someone who made a real difference.

- Is there something or someone that you are feeling gratitude for at this time?
- Would it be prudent to share?

Now then. With all this in mind I'd like to take you back to the first question.

- How do you want to show up?
- How do you want to be remembered?

THE END
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About The Speaker

Lara Masse, MBA, CEC, ACC is the founder of Higher Ground Executive Coaching, Inc., a professional coaching, leadership development, and assessment consultancy. With more than 20 years in frontline, senior management, and leadership roles, Lara's mission includes helping others to “aim high” and “discover new heights”, both personally and professionally. She is a credentialed member of the International Coach Federation and International Association of Business Communicators. Email feedback or questions to info@highergroundcoaching.ca.