

Abit Massey Lecture
Georgia Society of Association Executives
September 19, 2001

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be with you today to talk with you about some things that we have in common and the issues, challenges and opportunities associated with leading organizations.

I am always pleased to see my good friend Abit Massey, and especially happy to be with him somewhere other than a chicken house. I know, Abit, how important chickens are to the Georgia economy, and I'm proud of the research that has been done at UGA to assist that industry, but I don't ever want to set foot in another chicken house.

When I was named president of the University of Georgia a little more than four years ago, I was serving as president of Centre College in Kentucky, one of America's truly great liberal arts colleges. We had about 1,000 students, and immediately people began asking whether I could be effective as president of a place as large and complex as the University of Georgia. Surely, they said, he won't be able to handle it.

It didn't seem to matter that I had also served as a vice president of a much larger institution, Pepperdine, that I had managed the budget process for the governor of the state of Tennessee, and that I had served as chief of staff for a United States Senator. None of that seemed to matter as much as the perceived contrast between Centre and UGA.

In a world focused on size and bigness student enrollment numbers, \$250 million contracts for baseball players, 100 million votes for president of the United States I am increasingly convinced that in good management at any level and for any type of organization, while it is necessary to be strategic and to lay out a vision, what really matters is attention to the small things. Details matter.

I'd like to share with you now some principles that I try to apply as president of the University of Georgia. They are the same principles I applied as president of Centre College and as chief of staff, and, as long as I keep them in mind and apply them to my daily life, they work.

First, treat every employee exactly as you would want to be treated. The only way to manage effectively an organization of any complexity is to multiply your efforts through good people. If you replace everybody who leaves with somebody better, you can revolutionize an organization in three to five years.

We have done that at the University of Georgia. Virtually every vice president now serving has taken his or her position since I came here the one holdover has recently accepted a new vice presidency for us, so in essence, we have a new team, a new vision and a new energy.

Second, orient the organization to respond positively to volunteers. We often treat volunteers as if they were the least important part of an organization an annoyance or a distraction but for most associations, volunteers are, over time, the most important component of success.

It's volunteers who lobby on your behalf. It's volunteers who show up on a weekend to do the grunt work. It's volunteers who spread the word about your organization when your budget won't allow you to advertise.

At UGA, we have a program called the Arch Society, which is a student group that helps us stage campus events. We could not conduct commencement or convocation or a range of important campus events without them, and they are volunteers. They do it because they want to, they do it because they are living our mission of service, they do it because they love the University of Georgia. Don't overlook the value of volunteers.

Third, pay attention to appearance. If I'm walking across campus and see a scrap of paper on the sidewalk, I pick it up and toss it in the next trash can I see. I take pride in how our campus looks, and I think that pride is evident to visitors and those who are on campus daily.

We recently completed our decennial review for accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. As is always the case, the report of the visiting committee included both praise and recommendations. Among the praises

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was something I don't think I've seen in any other SACS review a commendation for the groundskeepers on the appearance of campus, especially North Campus, which is the oldest section of the UGA campus. They were right; our groundskeepers and landscape people do a terrific job. Their work makes UGA a pleasant place to work, and that pays off in morale and efficiency and pride.

Let people know that you care about how things look your office, your lobby, the entrance, the hallways. It inspires confidence and makes a subtle but lasting impression.

ABC News interviewed an orthopedic surgeon who, as a member of a local hospital trauma team, rushed to the scene of the attack on the World Trade Center to render assistance. During the interview, he pointed out that while there were hundreds of people like himself who were there in some official or professional capacity, he was struck by the number of ordinary people who were there offering assistance.

One of those was the doctor's auto mechanic, who was there with his tow truck, helping to haul vehicles out of the way of the rescue crews.

Another reporter interviewed a number of firefighters who had come from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Missouri and other states. When she asked them if they had been called in by the New York City Fire Department, they all said, "No, we just came."

The auto mechanic and the firefighters could have done things right. They could have waited until they got an official call from some authority to come to the city and lend assistance. And that would have been fine and it would have been proper.

But they decided to do the right thing, to offer aid without being asked, to apply their talents and skills and equipment to the monumental task at hand.

They have set a high standard for us, but it's a standard we should all try to meet.

Fourth, create a climate of doing the right thing, not just doing things right. Life is full of small ethical decisions, and people pay attention to how you handle them. Their observations about how you handle small decisions will impact their confidence in your ability to make the larger decisions and whether they want to follow you.

I want to be clear about this: There is nothing wrong with doing things right. But there is a higher standard, and that standard is to do the right thing. In the aftermath of last week's horrendous tragedies in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, I saw many examples of people doing the right thing.

Fifth, and finally, more is not always better. If you like bananas or chicken, Abit two or three a week is OK. If you had to eat bananas every day at every meal, you would quickly grow to dislike them.

Too many service organizations think that their mission is to change the world, when a better mission is to change a part of the world. If all of us change a part of the world for the better, together we will have changed the world.

It's better to find a little bit of good in each person than to dwell on the negative. Jefferson Davis was obviously on the wrong side of the slavery issue. But he was also the swing vote in the Senate that created the Smithsonian Institute, and in many other ways was a progressive member of the Senate.

Treat people as you would be treated. Respond positively to volunteers. Pay attention to appearances. Do the right things. More is not always better.

If you and I will follow those guidelines, our organizations will be a positive force in this world.

Thank you.