

**THE SIXTEENTH HUGH J. CLAUSEN
LECTURE IN LEADERSHIP¹**

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Thank you, General Miller, for your introduction. I'm grateful for this opportunity to speak to you during your conference. For those of you who have come from out of town, I hope you have enjoyed your week in Charlottesville.

*Teresa A. Sullivan is the eighth President of the University of Virginia. She was elected to the post on 11 January 2010 and assumed office on 1 August 2010. Prior to that, President Sullivan served as the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Michigan. She was also Professor of Sociology in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. From 2002 to 2006, President Sullivan served as Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for the University of Texas System. In that role, she was the Chief Academic Officer for the nine academic campuses within the University of Texas System. President Sullivan first joined the University of Texas at Austin in 1975 as an instructor and later became an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology. From 1977 to 1981, she was a faculty member at the University of Chicago. She returned to Texas in 1981 as a faculty member in Sociology and was named to the Law School faculty in 1986. President Sullivan also held several administrative positions at the University of Texas, including Vice President and Graduate Dean (1995–2002), Vice Provost (1994–1995), Chair of the Department of Sociology (1990–1992), and Director of Women's Studies (1985–1987).

President Sullivan's research focuses on labor force demography, with particular emphasis on economic marginality and consumer debt. The author or co-author of six books and more than fifty scholarly articles, her most recent work explores the question of who files for bankruptcy and why. President Sullivan has served as chair of the U.S. Census Advisory Committee and is a past secretary of the American Sociological Association and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. A graduate of James Madison College at Michigan State University, Ms. Sullivan received her doctoral degree in sociology from the University of Chicago.

¹ This is an edited transcript of a lecture delivered on 7 October 2010 by President Teresa A. Sullivan to attendees of the Judge Advocate General's Corps's World-Wide Continuing Legal Education conference, members of the staff and faculty of The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, their distinguished guests, and officers of the 59th Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course at The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, Charlottesville, Virginia. The Clausen Lecture is named in honor of Major General Hugh J. Clausen, who served as The Judge Advocate General (TJAG), U.S. Army, from 1981 to 1985 and spent over thirty years in the U.S. Army before retiring in 1985. His distinguished military career included assignments as the Executive Officer of The Judge Advocate General; Staff Judge Advocate, III Corps and Fort Hood, Texas; Commander, U.S. Army Legal Services Agency and Chief Judge, U.S. Army Court of Military Review; The Assistant Judge Advocate General; and, finally, TJAG. On his retirement from active duty, General Clausen served for a number of years as the Vice President for Administration and Secretary to the Board of Visitors at Clemson University.

I'd like to begin today by saying an emphatic thank-you to all of you for your service to our nation. You serve as attorneys, judges, judge advocates, and in other roles in the JAG Corps. You serve in various regions across the nation and all over the world. At least two officers in the audience today came to Charlottesville straight from assignments in Afghanistan and Iraq. I understand that most of you here today have served overseas in support of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the last eight years, or you will be leaving to serve there soon.

The common denominator for all of you is your decision to choose a career based on service. This decision exemplifies the deepest form of patriotism and personal commitment to defending democracy and freedom. All of us who enjoy the benefits of national security and the everyday freedoms that come with it are grateful to you.

I was asked to speak to you this morning on the topic of leadership. It seems a little ironic. I think most of you could probably teach me a thing or two about leadership. "Leadership" is a word that can mean different things in different contexts. It can mean different things to people who work in different jobs.

I work in higher education; you work in the U.S. military. I have leadership responsibilities as a university president; you have leadership responsibilities as high-ranking Army officers. But we have different internal structures and different constituents. We have different missions and day-to-day goals. So, does the word "leadership" mean the same thing to us?

I think it does, because the principles of effective leadership transcend the boundaries of various occupations or disciplines. They transcend the military/non-military divide. The principles of effective leadership remain true across national borders and diverse industries.

I've developed some ideas about leadership during thirty-five years of work in higher education. I began my career as a sociology instructor at the University of Texas in 1975. Later, I moved into administrative work, though I continued to teach and do research, taking on greater and greater levels of responsibility, and eventually becoming the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for the University of Texas System. Just before coming to UVA, I was Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Michigan where,

besides being Chief Academic Officer, I was also the Chief Budget Officer.

During those three-plus decades in higher education, I've learned a lot about human nature—the human nature of faculty members, in particular—and I've also learned some lessons about motivating and leading people. Along the way, I've come to understand and appreciate some of the fundamental concepts of strong leadership. Those are the concepts I'll talk about for the next several minutes.

The first concept: Know your mission. The word “mission” has special resonance in military circles, but it holds meaning for all of us in leadership roles. In order to lead effectively, we need to know what we're leading toward, or, in some cases, what we're leading away from.

Developing a clear sense of mission, and communicating it clearly to your colleagues, is the first step toward strong leadership. The next step is to live your mission, day in and day out. Let the mission guide your thinking. Let it inform every decision you make.

A strong mission statement can help guide your mission. As you know, just about every company, non-profit organization, church, and bowling league in America has a mission statement. The U.S. Army has a mission statement, of course. The mission statement posted on the Army website reads this way: “The Army's mission is to fight and win our Nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders.”²

Fight and win. Now that's a mission that everyone can understand.

The University of Virginia has a “statement of purpose,” which is just another name for a mission statement. It reads like this:

The central purpose of the University of Virginia is to enrich the mind by stimulating and sustaining a spirit of free inquiry directed to understanding the nature of the universe and the role of mankind in it. Activities designed to quicken, discipline, and enlarge the

² *Organization*, U.S. ARMY, <http://www.army.mil/info/organization> (last visited Nov. 18, 2010).

intellectual and creative capacities, as well as the aesthetic and ethical awareness, of the members of the University and to record, preserve, and disseminate the results of intellectual discovery and creative endeavor serve this purpose.³

That's not quite as concise as the Army's mission statement—you know, academics never like to use ten words when they can use 100—but the statement of purpose does give the members of our University community a declaration of mission in words we can all understand.

The University's Health System has a nice, simple mission statement. Its mission is "to provide excellence and innovation in the care of patients, the training of health professionals, and the creation and sharing of health knowledge."⁴ That statement gives everyone who works in our Health System a sense of individual purpose and also a shared ambition. A good mission statement is like a compass: it keeps everyone on your team pointed in the right direction.

A second step for effective leadership: Know your priorities. I'm sure all of you are familiar with the military concept of "commander's intent." The commander's intent is a concise written expression of the purpose of a military operation and the desired end state of the operation.

By nature, the commander's intent is more specific than a mission statement. It's less about a broad vision and more about a very specific, finite objective. Its purpose is to help soldiers in the field prioritize their decision-making so the results align with what the commander hopes to achieve.

The commander delivers the message of intent at the outset of the operation, and it doesn't change or fluctuate throughout the course of the engagement. Now, as all of you know much better than I do, it can be hard to lay out a strategy and stick with it throughout a military engagement. So many things can change: the enemy can surge forward or back off; reinforcements can arrive; the weather can shift; other variables can change.

³ UNIV. OF VA., STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND GOALS (1985), *available at* <http://www.virginia.edu/statementofpurpose/purpose.html>.

To allow for these fluctuations, the commander's intent is usually a fairly simple statement, with just enough vagueness to allow for interpretation—something like this: “Rapidly defeat remaining enemy forces and establish a covering force within 24 hours.”

A simple statement of the commander's intent allows individual officers in the field to make their own decisions about the best way to meet the commander's expectations. If identifying priorities is an important part of leadership, the commander's intent is a good example of how to identify and communicate priorities.

College and university presidents would probably be wise to issue something like the commander's intent each semester to rally the troops in the faculty. We may never go into combat, but a clear statement of our priorities and exactly what we hope to accomplish could benefit everyone in the university.

Since this is my first semester, I have made it a point to talk about my three top priorities with every audience in my speeches around Grounds this semester. It's not quite as concise as a commander's intent, but it does convey to members of the audience how I'm spending my time and why I think that's important.

A third concept: Know the difference between “urgent” and “important.” This is related to knowing your priorities, of course. Your priorities will always remain important. Urgent matters come and go as various crises come and go.

Every day we are forced to balance matters of urgency with matters of importance. We need to stay focused on important matters even as we are forced to contend with urgent matters that demand immediate attention. And we have to find a way to not let the important things suffer for the sake of resolving the urgent things.

Knowing the difference of what's urgent as compared to what's important can help you determine and balance your short- and long-term goals. Take care of urgent matters in the short term, but keep your eye fixed on the important things for the long-term.

As leaders, we have a tendency to want to keep urgent matters to ourselves until they're fully resolved. We have to learn to delegate urgent items to our capable colleagues so we can keep our eyes on

what's important. As President, I try to share urgent items with vice presidents and deans, when possible, so I can stay focused on long-term, important items. If you're surrounded by good people, let them help you with the urgent matters that come up.

From time to time, one or more of your long-term, important priorities may shift to urgent because of a sudden crisis that arises. Budgetary constraints or other financial crises can often force our priorities from the "important" category temporarily into the "urgent" category. But we should never abandon what's important for the sake of what's urgent. Keeping tabs on what's important is akin to knowing your mission. We call this "sticking to our guns."

Another leadership concept: Be aware of your blind spots. In other words, you need to know what you don't know, accept that you can't possibly know everything about your organization, and encourage your colleagues to help you fill in the gaps.

As a brand-new university president—I'm new to being President, new to UVA, new to the Commonwealth of Virginia—I know there's still a lot that I don't know about Virginia, this University, and its people, culture, and traditions. I've asked my colleagues in the administration for help. I've asked my vice presidents, deans, and staff to help me watch out for landmines and to steer me in a different direction if I'm about to step on one. In exchange for this favor, I have promised them this: I'll never shoot the messenger who brings bad news.

It can be hard to share bad news, especially if you're sharing it with someone who's higher in the chain of command than you are, but the peril of not sharing bad news can be catastrophic. Let me tell you a story that illustrates this point. It's a story I told to my staff at one of my first meetings with them. As you know, I spent many years at the University of Texas at Austin where there's an excellent group in social psychology who, for many years, have studied the black box tapes that are retrieved when an aircraft crashes. One of the things they're looking for is the extent to which the interactions among the crew may have contributed to the eventual crash.

They told me about one particularly grim incident that occurred on an Asian airline, with a Japanese pilot and a Japanese crew. Everybody in the crew, except the pilot, knew that they were going to miss the runway and end up in Tokyo Bay, but because of the norms of the

culture, it was not appropriate to directly confront the captain with this news. So, instead they tried to find more indirect ways to suggest to him that it was a good time to review the instruments, and they began with a series of suggestions. “Honorable Captain, please consult the altimeter,” and so on. These conversations got increasingly urgent, but the captain never got the message. The crew and all the passengers died in the crash. So what I said to my staff was just come in my office and say “Captain”—and I’ll know what you mean. By the way, this same team of researchers found that if there had been just one American on the crew, this reluctance to speak up would not have happened because our culture says that we expect to shout out when we see something bad on the way.

However, it is true that in a bureaucracy, sometimes that engrained cultural habit we have of speaking up gets muted because we’re afraid of what will happen to us if we speak up. So, you need to keep your subordinates well aware that bringing you bad news is a good thing to do and not something that you’ll be punitive about.

We need to create cultures so that colleagues at every level are willing to share bad news, as hard as it may be to do that. It is a maxim of organizational studies that good news travels quickly, and bad news has a hard time traveling up. The deference to superiors in the military chain of command may create a culture of reticence. That can be dangerous. We all know that bad news can turn into worse news if it doesn’t get reported promptly.

Managing change is another facet of effective leadership. As Army officers, you know plenty about change. You are regularly reassigned and moved around; you may rarely stay settled in one place for more than two years or so. The Army itself is in a period of transition and organizational change.

I’ve experienced a lot of change since January, when I was elected UVA’s eighth President. My husband Doug and I have moved from Ann Arbor to Charlottesville, settled into the President’s house at Carr’s Hill, and taken up our respective duties—mine in the President’s office and Doug’s in the Law School, where his teaching and research focuses on religious liberty law and remedies.

It’s natural to want to hit the ground running when you start a new job, but I think there’s a reason God gave us two ears and one mouth. It

was an indication we should listen twice as much as we talk. It's important to open your ears before you open your mouth. Do a lot of listening, and educate yourself aggressively.

I started as President on 1 August. Since then, I've participated in a lot of meetings—with students; with faculty members; with foundation boards; with deans and vice presidents; with our athletics department; with our colleagues at the University of Virginia's College at Wise which is located in southwest Virginia; with alumni here in Virginia and on the West Coast; with the Governor, the Secretary of Education, and all state agency heads; and with Virginia's legislators in their home offices all over the Commonwealth and also in Washington, D.C. The end result is that I still don't know everything about UVA and Virginia, but I know a lot more than I did two months ago. I also know more about what I don't know—those blind spots I mentioned earlier—and I understand where I need help filling in gaps in my own knowledge.

Our Board of Visitors, as part of my annual evaluation plan, has asked me to build a set of developmental objectives for those areas that are blind spots or areas I don't know so much about, so that I can lay out a consistent plan for attacking those blind spots and learning more about them. In the mean time, what I need to do is be aware that those are areas where I don't know enough and may make a mistake if I move too quickly or without enough consultation.

For those of us who aren't in the military, part of managing change is figuring out how to motivate colleagues when you have no real penal authority or discipline power over them. Faculty members who have tenure are sometimes resistant to change. When they have tenure, why should they change? Well, if you don't have a stick, you have to use the carrot. You have to help your people understand how they will benefit from the changes you want to lead.

One of my early priorities as President is to reconfigure our internal budgeting. The University's internal budget functions are opaque to just about everyone. I want to create a new budget model for all of our schools that will bring more transparency and more predictability. But the current budget model has been in place for a long time, so I expect some natural resistance to changing it. The trick for me is to show why a new budget model will be better for everyone, even if, as all change does, it brings some consequences that people don't like.

Part of the challenge of effective leadership is establishing an institution-wide culture of leadership at every level. Most of you report to a commanding officer, and you have junior officers who report to you. I report to a Board of Visitors, and I have vice presidents and others who report to me. But those of us who sit in the command post or the executive office are often far removed from the institution's day-to-day activities.

The people on the front lines are much closer to the action, and they sometimes see things that their leaders may be missing. It's important to create a culture of leadership that permeates the entire organization so the front-line people are encouraged to speak up and empowered to act when that is appropriate. A good commanding officer will challenge junior officers to share their opinions. A good president does the same thing with vice presidents, deans, and staff. This encourages a kind of "trickle-up" leadership that includes everyone at every level. It builds a stronger organization from the ground up.

I'm also a firm believer in managing by walking around. I spend a lot of time showing up sometimes unexpectedly in places around Grounds just to see how things are working or maybe to see how they would be experienced from the student's point of view. That's also an important opportunity for me to catch our employees at their best and to congratulate them on doing a good job. I consider it not a very good day in the President's office if I've not been able to say to at least five people, "You're doing a good job at that." That's something that's important to say.

There's a line about leadership from a John F. Kennedy speech that was never delivered in public, because the line is from the speech that he was scheduled to deliver in Dallas on the day he was assassinated. Kennedy's motorcade was en route to the Dallas Trade Mart, where he was scheduled to speak to a gathering of the Dallas Citizens Council. The Graduate Research Center of the Southwest located at the University of Texas-Dallas co-sponsored the event. In his prepared remarks, Kennedy was planning to salute the Council and the Center for representing the best qualities of leadership and learning in the city. "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other,"⁵ were the words he planned to say.

⁵ President John F. Kennedy, Remarks Prepared for Delivery at the Trade Mart in Dallas (Nov. 22, 1963) (undelivered speech), *available at* JOHN F. KENNEDY PRES. LIBR. &

In spite of that sad association with President Kennedy's death, those of us in leadership positions can take a lesson from that line in the last speech he ever prepared. To lead effectively, we have to be willing to learn constantly, all our lives.

Thomas Jefferson, UVA's founder, described what he called "the important truths that knowledge is power, that knowledge is safety and that knowledge is happiness."⁶ Those words are still important, and still true, today.

Learning is the foundation of leadership. Life-long learning creates life-long leaders. This idea fits appropriately with the continuing legal education conference that has brought all of you together this week, so I'll close with that thought.

I appreciate being invited to speak to you today, and I hope the remainder of your conference is productive and enjoyable.

Thank you.

MUSEUM, <http://www.jfklibrary.org> (highlight "Research" and select "Ready Reference"; then select "Selected Speeches of John F. Kennedy"; then follow "Remarks Prepared for Delivery at the Trade Mart in Dallas, November 22, 1963" hyperlink) (last visited Nov. 18, 2010).

⁶ SAMUEL EAGLE FORMAN, *THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON* 200 (1900).