

Ron Claassen Commencement Address - Power, Process and Doing the Right Thing
Fresno Pacific University
May 8, 2010

It is an honor for me to speak with you this afternoon. I want to use the next few minutes to congratulate you and to recognize the increased leadership opportunities and power that come with your accomplishments.

You are to be congratulated for many reasons and I am going to mention three.

1. You have completed a rigorous course of studies. My emphasis is on completed. Many people start but not everyone completes such a rigorous course of studies. Completing it demands a lot of effort and sacrifice. It requires that you stay with it, even, and especially when the going gets tough. It takes a special kind of person who develops the ability to work through the hard times, even those times when it gets so tough that you seriously consider giving up. Congratulations for completing your course of study.

Congratulations also to your family and friends who encouraged you.

2. Another reason you are to be congratulated is because you have made a very wise financial investment.

My research indicates that those who have completed bachelor degrees will, on average, in today's dollars, earn almost a million dollars more when compared to those who have high school diplomas.

Those who have completed Masters degrees will, on average, in today's dollars, earn \$400,000 more when compared to a Bachelors degree.

You are wise financial investors. The return on your tuition investment is a return that we would all like to earn on all of our investments. Congratulations to you and again, congratulations to those who helped make it possible for you.

3. Another reason you are to be congratulated is because you have acquired significant information and knowledge. You are not granted these degrees just because you attended class. You had to read, study, reflect, write, research, critically analyze, reflect again, rethink, and re-write again and again. In that process, you have gained significant information, insights and knowledge. But what is even more valuable than the specific information, is that you have learned how to learn, how to think critically and how to persuade others with information and logical reasoning. The habits you have formed while completing your course of study have prepared you to be Community Leaders and lifelong learners. Congratulations!!!

And to the friends and family who helped these graduates succeed in their pursuit of all of this information and love of learning, I hope that your graduate has and will continue to share with you what they are learning and that it will enrich the lives of all of you.

Graduates, along with the congratulations, I would like to recognize with you that these three accomplishments: completing a degree, increasing your income, and mastering the ability to learn, write, and persuade others; these accomplishments will significantly increase your personal and professional power.

I want to spend the next few minutes looking at the responsibility that comes along with your increased power. As you well know, this university is not just about helping people complete degrees, increase their earning power, and master skills and knowledge to influence others. This university is a Christian university and you have been hearing in all of your classes, the importance of how you use these advantages not only to help yourself and your family but especially to use your power to empower those who need your help. You have been encouraged to always think not only about what you want, but what would God want - including what process should we use to make a decision, who should be included in making the decision, and what would be the right thing to do.

To help us look at process and the use of power, I would like to direct your attention to the yellow card. On the one side you will see x's and I's and lines and circles. This is a model that I developed. My bachelors degree major and my first masters degree were in Mathematics. In that course of study, I developed the firm belief that I did not understand a concept or system unless I could draw a fairly simple picture, diagram or flow chart to describe it. When I began reading and studying in this field of Conflict and Peacemaking, it was natural for me to continue this discipline. I read a book from the Harvard Negotiation Project with the title: *Getting Disputes Resolved: Designing Systems to Cut the Costs of Conflict* by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg. They suggested that while there are perhaps millions of ways to respond to conflict, especially when considering all of the variations in culture, that they can all be boiled down to three ways: Power, Rights, and Interests. That idea fascinated me.

The model on the yellow card is what I finally came up with in my attempt to describe power, rights, and interests.

I could spend a lot of time describing it since it was the subject of my dissertation. I won't do that but I will introduce it. The I's represent those in a conflict. So it looks like there are just two in each option but you can let each of them represent any number. The X's are outsiders, but who get involved in the conflict. The circles in #1 and #2 and the oval's in #3 and #4 indicate who has the ability to control the decision or outcome. So you can see that in each option, power is used but who control the power changes. In #1, the person in the circle has power over the other. The one outside the circle would feel like they don't have a choice. In #2 you will notice that the circle is around the X meaning that the X has the ability to make the decision. This is what happens in court. The judge or jury, in a court, make the decision, not the parties. Arbitration is also a #2 with the arbitrator being the X who makes the decision. In #4 and #3 the circle or oval is around the parties, meaning that there is no decision unless both, or all parties agree. If you were trying to use #4 and later in a safe setting, one of the I's said that they agreed only because they could see how it wasn't going. They said that they agreed but they really didn't. In that case, you didn't really do a #4. What was really done is a #1. #3 and #4 require that all parties voluntarily agree. The difference between them is that in #3 there is also an X, an

outside presence to help them. We often call this X in #3 a mediator and you can see that the role of the mediator is very different from an arbitrator who is the X in #2.

When Ury, Brett and Goldberg said there were just three ways, power, rights, and interests, they described Power as a #1, where one has power over the other. Rights was a #2 with an outside authority making the decision. And Interests was a particular strategy to increase the likelihood of being able to accomplish a #3 or #4. The model on the yellow card demonstrates that power is significant in each option and the difference is simply in who has power.

Graduates, because you have earned your degree, you will be given increasing leadership responsibilities and the power that goes with it. Your decisions will have significant impact on others. The challenge will not just be “what is the right thing to do” but also “how should decisions be made” and “who should be included in making the decision.”

You will be in positions that will give you the ability to use the #1 kind of power. That also means that you could use your power to invite others to join you in #4. For example, Roxanne, my wife, is an eighth grade teacher. She teaches her students about these four options and lets them know that when they have a conflict with her, her preference would be to use a #4 process to search together for the right thing to do. She reports that students, when given a choice almost always choose #4. It is important to note that in using #4 she is not giving her power away. To do that would be to stay in #1 but move out of the circle. As leaders, you could choose to invite others to join you in #4. A choice to use #4 means that you use your power and leadership ability to empower others to join you in a search for ways to do the right things.

Paul is a person in the Bible who we recognize as a respected leader with significant power and authority. In the letter we call Philemon, Paul says, Vs. 8, 9a: "...though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you..." Vs. 14: "...I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will." In the language of the Four Options Model, Paul said, I have the ability to do #1 but I prefer to do #4 with you.

As leaders in your profession or at home, you can invite others to join you in option #4 to search for the right thing to do. In rare occasions you will also find yourselves in situations when others will not be willing to join you in a #4 and you may need to make a #1 or #2 decision. This does not mean that you have to abandon your search for doing the right thing. One of the strategies you have learned is how to compare and contrast an idea or decision with some criteria. Whenever power is used, I think it is helpful to use these criteria: Four R's. Is it respectful? Is it reasonable? Is it intended to restore people or is it intended to hurt or punish? Is it going to re-integrate those people into the community or will it cause them to be ostracized.

I want to close by sharing with you a story about a small business owner/manager who wanted to do the right thing and chose to use his power to invite those who would be impacted by the

decision. He thought that a #4 would be difficult and so he asked Duane and I to help them use a #3 process to decide what should be done. We learned that this business had been successful for several years and then fell on hard times and had to close. At the beginning, to capitalize the business the owner/manager invited people to invest with him. Three people joined him and each, along with him invested \$100,000. Now as the business was closing and the assets were being sold, it appeared that they would generate approximately \$100,000, well short of the \$400,000 that had been invested. The owner/manager thought he should receive the \$100,000. He felt bad that the other investors would lose money but also thought that the investors knew there was some risk. He was pretty sure that if it was to be decided in court or by an arbitrator, a #2 option, he would be able to keep the full \$100,000. However, he also wanted to do the right thing and he thought it would be best if they could make the decision together. After listening to the outside investors in our preliminary meetings, we soon discovered that they disagreed with the owner. Each thought that the manager/owner had not done what he needed to do to make it a successful business and therefore should forfeit his right to any of the remaining money and the balance should be divided between the three outside investors.

In the opening of the mediation they all agreed to be constructive and to search for a good resolution together using a #3 process, a decision with all of them in the circle. Everyone had their doubts if this would be possible. After listening to each person's perspective on what had happened to get them to this point and clarifying their initial differing positions on how the money should be distributed, they were feeling stuck. The critical moment came when the owner suggested it might be helpful if each would address how losing some or all of the money would affect them. The manager/owner said that he had other businesses, that they were doing well, he could use the money in his other businesses and hated to lose any money but he would be fine. One of the investors described himself as property developer and that at that time things were going well. He also hated to ever lose money but he could accept some loss here. Another investor described himself as a speculator and that he had other investments that were doing well. He prided himself in making good investment decisions and wished he had passed on this one. Losing some of this money would hurt but he was fine. The last investor was hesitant to speak. When he did, he started by saying how stupid he felt. He described himself as a retired pastor. He and his wife had taken a mortgage on their home to be able to make this investment. They had hoped it would help their modest retirement. Instead, it added additional stress.

The group quickly decided that the full \$100,000 should be given to the pastor. They left, sad that they had lost money on this investment and full of joy that they had made this decision together and they had done the right thing.

My hope for you is that along with the fun of this wonderful commencement celebration and the parties that will follow, that your life journey will be filled with God's joy, because you are using #4 or #3 as much as possible, inviting those that are most affected by a decision into the decision-making circle, and searching together with them for the right thing to do.