

Future Vision  
March 13, 2003  
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I have struggled a little with what to say this morning. This was supposed to be a counterpoint to Julia's presentation, but you can't counter point mother and apple pie. I talked to Ann a few weeks back and we discussed the idea of having me discuss how the five fundamental values guide my decision making here at the college. I was moving along on that track when we had the Board of Regent's meeting. The same weekend of the Board meeting was the regent's scholarship competition.

During that weekend I had the privilege of listening to Pastor Paul's message. He titled it as "Want to, Have to, and Someday Get to." He went on to describe it as:

What is it that:

- You want to say?
- You have to say?
- You will someday get to say?

Having just spent a weekend discussing rising healthcare costs, declining markets, and other financial challenges I could sure relate.

As the CFO for the college I want to say:

- The budget is balanced
- Enrollment looks good
- Endowment is strong
- Next year we will be able to give significant raises and won't have to increase tuition costs or costs

But, as the CFO for the college what I have to say is:

- We haven't had a balanced budget in 12 years and next year's has to be
- We have no reserves available to fund a deficit budget
- Our endowment has less money in it today than it had six years ago
- Either reductions, or shifts of expenses to staff and/or students will have to take place

Pastor Paul in his sermon on March 2 said other things that really resonated. First he said, "At Augustana it is understood that there are valleys." There will be valleys. I have heard others, over the years, say similar things. It just finally struck me that that is probably the case. We have a college that is in a relatively poor, sparsely populated state. We are the most expensive educational product in the state. We get little or no state support. So, we have to expect that there will be valleys. Pastor Paul also said the way to the bottom of these valleys is much faster than the way up. So, we cannot expect our fixes to be quick ones; we must be patient. But, as Julia said we must keep hope.

I have been VP for Finance for just 18 months. Believe me, it seems a lot longer for me – and I am sure it does for many of you. During this entire 18 months I have been in the “have to say” mode. It’s not a lot of fun. I tend to drop into some periods of self pity.

It’s not that unusual for me to be sitting in my living room feeling sorry for myself wanting to know why I have it so tough and wondering if I should simply find something else to do that doesn’t have so many challenges – so many valleys. I think about the giants that John Clementson named in his presentation and think of all that they have done, and continue to do for Augustana College. These are wonderful people – people that we should all model ourselves after.

But I have another giant that really helps me put things in perspective – particularly when I am having one of my pity parties. Invariably when I am at my deepest point of self-pity my daughter will wheel in, in her wheelchair. For those of you who aren’t familiar with my daughter she has cerebral palsy and a mental capacity that tops out at 18 months. Her only fine motor skills are in her left arm/hand. Anyway, she will wheel into the living room and see a doll or something laying on the couch that she wants to have. She will try to get her chair close enough so that she can reach it. She will pull up to the couch and it will be on her right side, so there is no way she can reach it, because not only does she not have control of her right arm, she also is strapped into her chair so she cannot reach across with her left. So she will try a position at the end of the couch. Then she will try another position. It’s obvious to me that she will never be able to reach that doll, so I will ask her if she wants some help – and she will say “no” and continue on with her “work.” I’ll ask her from time-to-time while she is working if she wants help, and the answer is always “no.” I have seen her work for hours at a task that simply is not possible for her, but she won’t give up. She doesn’t know it’s not possible and she appears to love the challenge.

We may be working on things here at the college that aren’t possible. Maybe it is not possible to have a financially sound private liberal arts college with a strong academic reputation in South Dakota. Maybe it’s not possible to compete head-to-head with the public institutions in South Dakota. But, you know what – I am just as stubborn as my daughter. I am not willing to admit it is not possible. I am not ignorant enough to think it is going to be easy, but I am confident enough to think that if we all work together, we can do it. But, I have to go back to an old Ralphism – “when you circle the wagons, don’t shoot inward.” Let’s work together to make this happen.

So, what is it as CFO I hope that I will some day get to say:

- There will continue to be valleys at Augustana College
- Thanks to years of planning, preparation, and hard work we are able to limit the depth of these valleys and slow the speed of the descent into these valleys
- Complete elimination of the valleys is not a goal

I did some reading in Exodus as I prepared for this presentation. God told Moses he would lead his people to the promised land. He did not promise that the journey would be an easy one. I don’t think we’ve been promised that our life would be easy and

challenges would be simple. I think we've been told that the challenges we will be given will not be more than we can handle.

I think the future of Augustana will always be filled with challenges. I think we will need to continue to make sacrifices. This will probably never be a place to work for someone who is looking for easy work or high pay. I honestly believe we will survive and I hope that we will thrive because I think we offer something very special to the students who attend here and the faculty and staff who work here.