

## Excellence and What It Has to Do With Career Choice

Being excellent is a habit. Sometimes we associate excellence with people who win Nobel Peace Prizes and gold medals at the Olympics. Nothing can be further from the truth. In the Middle Ages, monks in monasteries lived a simple life, sharing chores from copying manuscripts to cleaning out the cow stalls. Both tasks were considered honorable and worthy of doing as well as possible. As a result, monks created great works of art in the form of illuminated manuscripts that have survived to this day. In contrast, the work of the monks assigned to clean up after cattle did not last because cattle keep producing manure. Yet these monks worked at being *le creme de le creme* of stable cleaners. They consciously elevated even their simplest tasks as being worthy of their finest efforts. In this way, striving for excellence became a daily habit.

The following lines come from a speech given by Margaret Gratton, President of Orange Coast College, to celebrate the Faculty Member of the Year, 1997. After reading it, ask yourself whether you've allowed yourself to be your very best today. If you find your passion, the activities that make your energy levels rise, and set out to be excellent in those activities, your career choices will be successful. You can be extraordinary.

### **"Thoughts on Excellence"**

Every morning each of us gets up. We put on our shoes one at a time, we get in our cars, and we come here to work -- to this special place called Orange Coast College. And sometimes at the end of the day, we might ask ourselves, "Well, what was that all about? Because many days are so jam-packed, so frenetic, or maybe even so frustrating or routine that we lose our sense of purpose. Today's event is enormously important in the life of Orange Coast College -- in our lives together. Today's event is to honor excellence and outstanding achievement. It is important because we are "on purpose" carving out time to reflect on and to honor why we come to this campus each day, why we do the work we do, and to remind ourselves how we want that work to be. Today we remember that we want our work to be excellent, and today's event is important because it is about excellence.

We hear the word "excellence" often. We use it often at Orange Coast College,

because it is the hallmark of our heritage; it is a core value that we hold dear; it is our legacy to all the students whose precious lives we touch each day. And, something we don't think about as often, excellence is our legacy to each other as we work together.

As part of our ceremonies today, I want to say a few things about the nature of excellence - to bring the spotlight on to this beautiful word - give it a fuller meaning. This will help us focus on why we are honoring certain colleagues today.

First and foremost, excellence always is born out of generosity of spirit. There is no excellence born out of a petty heart. In every excellent performance, act, achievement- in all excellent work and relationships, there is a giving of self as gift and as instrument; there is insatiable love of the work, the discipline, and the results. Excellence is akin to being deeply in love.

Secondly, excellence invariably is born out of discipline. Often when we see a superb result, we say "how graceful," "how wonderful," "how great," "it looks so easy." We might even say, "I could do that," and we don't see the tough underpinnings, the training, the preparation, long hours, and the tedium of repetition of certain essential tasks or processes. We don't see the failure, the anxiety of risk; we don't see the pain, the constant exertion of self-control. There is a saying, "Eighty percent of success is showing up." Excellence must be the other 20 percent. Excellence is not luck. It is sweat and rigor and intelligent purposefulness. Excellence is not 20 percent; it is 150 percent.

Third, excellence is about choice making. Every moment of every day we are in a decision-making process, and whatever we are today is the sum total of our lifetime of choices. Excellence is not luck. Excellence is a choice-a deeply personal one and working and relating and then fully, unfailingly acting upon those values.

And lastly, professional excellence is solidly rooted in "vocation." Literally "vocation" means a calling -- a life calling fired by a voice within which drives us to love lavishly our work, to pour out our spirit, to embrace the tough discipline, and make the daily choices that result in that state we call excellence.

As we head towards the 50th anniversary of Orange Coast College, we say, "the excellence continues." It is our legacy. It is part of all of us. And today we honor some of our colleagues for exceptional excellence.

