Thank you for allowing me to join you this morning. I look forward to these occasions. Let’s start off with something light. It is, after all, Friday morning!

**Bad Days.** Anyone who knows me will tell you that I am an unabashed optimist—sometimes to a fault. And, while my life has been blessed from the start, there have been, nonetheless, those days that even I would consider “bad days.” We all have them, though I would guess that all in this room would claim that bad days for them are the exception—not the rule. But, on those days when you think the sky has fallen, the sun won’t be coming up, the rain will never stop, remember:

You know you’re having a bad day when:

- Your horn sticks on the freeway behind 32 Hell’s Angels.
- The worst player on the golf course wants to play you for money.
- You call suicide prevention and they put you on hold.
- You get to work and find a “60 Minutes” news team waiting in your office.
- Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.
- Your twin sister forgets your birthday.
- Your 4-year-old tells you that it’s almost impossible to flush a grapefruit down the toilet.
- You realize that you just sprayed spot remover under your arms instead of deodorant.
- It costs more to fill up your car than it did to buy it.
- Everyone avoids you the morning after the company office party.
- The bird singing outside your window is a vulture.
- You compliment the boss’ wife on her unusual perfume and she isn’t wearing any.
- You call your wife and tell her that you would like to eat out tonight and when you get home there is a sandwich on the front porch.
- The restaurant check has been on the table for ten minutes...and no one has touched it.
- Nothing you own is actually paid for.
- Airline food starts to taste good.
- Your doctor tells you that you are allergic to chocolate chip cookies.
- Everyone loves your driver’s license picture. Like I said, there are bad days and, then, there are really bad days!

**Managing Millennials.** I next want to focus on an aspect of our working lives that is somewhat off our radar screens, but something of real importance to us as we lead others, hire others, and so forth. Specifically, who are these young men and women who are beginning to come to work in our colleges and universities—these young people who have been labeled “millennials,” those who were born (roughly) between 1980 and 2000? A number of scholars have written about these folks, and many of my observations are taken from Claire Raines, a nationally recognized expert and speaker on these new workers in the American experience, from a piece she wrote in 2002.

**Who They Are?** Raines tells us that “they’re the hottest commodity on the job market since Rosie the Riveter. They’re sociable, optimistic, talented, well-educated, collaborative, open-minded, influential, and achievement-oriented. They’ve always felt sought after, needed, indispensable. They are arriving in the workplace with higher expectations than any generation before them—and they’re so well connected that, if an employer doesn’t match those expectations, they can tell thousands of their cohorts with one click of the mouse. They’re the Millennial Generation. Born between 1980 and 2000, they’re a generation nearly as large as the Baby Boom, and they’re charged with potential.”

**Shaped by Their Times.** They’re the first generation to grow up surrounded by digital media. They’re the ‘Babies on Board’ of the early Reagan years, the ‘Have You Hugged Your Child Today’ sixth graders of the early Clinton years, and the teens of Columbine,” say Neil Howe and William Strauss in *Millennials Rising* (Vintage Books, 2000).

- Focus on children and family
- Scheduled, structured lives
- Multiculturalism
- Terrorism
• Heroism
• Patriotism
• Parent advocacy
• Globalism

Compelling Messages
• Be smart—you are special
• Leave no one behind
• Connect 24/7
• Achieve now!
• Serve your community

Millennial Characteristics
• Confident
• Hopeful
• Goal- and achievement-oriented
• Civic-minded
• Inclusive

6 Principles of Millennial Management
1. You be the leader.
2. Challenge me.
3. Let me work with friends.
4. Let’s have fun.
5. Respect me.

Let me assure you that we could go on and on with this analysis of tomorrow’s workers, professors, citizen-leaders. Before we push on, let’s talk a bit about your experiences with this group of new professionals - skilled and otherwise.

Leadership Fingerprint. And, now, let me turn to the meat of my remarks - leadership. In addition to my job as president of Centre College, I am honored to be a teacher. My class, taught to both first-year students and upper-class students, is titled Rainmaking: The Study of and Preparation for Leadership. I have enjoyed teaching this class, though it is not without risk. My reputation is on the line. On our smaller campus, virtually all the students know me, and they know that leadership is a topic I think about, speak about, and write about. They have heard me speak openly about leaders I admire and critically about the ones who, in my opinion, have fallen short of the mark.

My first advice, to them and to you, is this: Burn all the cue cards, dump all the checklists, and if anyone tries to sell you his or her version of a “leadership cookbook,” politely walk away. The cue cards, the checklists, the cookbooks—each is an incomplete and sometimes misleading way to describe the phenomenon and prescribe the behaviors of men and women who lead.

So, ditch the cookbook. A tough first step, for all of us are tempted to think there is a leadership master plan and that, at heart, all great leaders are alike or at least nearly so. The paradoxical truth is that, by definition, every leader has a unique imprint—her or her “leadership fingerprint,” if you will. No two leaders—regardless of common factors of age, gender, race, or nationality—are like. Those who truly excel at leadership learn how to capitalize on their fingerprint. They systematically cultivate one-of-a-kind thinking based on the strengths, needs, and potential of their organization and the people who work alongside them.

Not withstanding the differences and individuality of leaders, there is common ground—principles, habits, attitudes, commitments—that characterize the men and women best equipped to provide leadership for the modern organization. These are not rules, or ingredients, but qualities of leaders who achieve greatness and goodness in their own unique way. Let’s call them qualities of person, as I think this language comes closest to describing what effective leaders tend to share in common. These qualities, then, help to provide a
backdrop against which a person can take personal inventory of the characteristics, skills, and experiences that would shape his or her fingerprint in a leadership role.

I have chosen seven qualities of person. Most are variations on the ideas of others who have thought deeply and written with some clarity about leadership. There are leadership scholars who have more to say about these and other elements of leadership, and I commend them to you. These seven qualities of person are placed in priority order—some things simply are more important. And, at the risk of appearing falsely humble, I suggest to you that what I have to share—in its entirety—is not rocket science.

**Telling the Truth.** Sounds simple, but the single biggest problem facing leaders today is the allure of the half-truth: the idea that you're only dishonest if you utter an outright lie. In other words, what is not said has nothing to do with honesty—a tempting shortcut? Yes, but it carries a hefty price. The truth has a way of coming to light in its entirety, casting an uncomfortable glare on the most inconvenient facts. In that glare, the cost of dishonesty is evident—strikingly so. If you get caught in a jam, even a real tough one, tell the truth. We Americans are very good at forgiving, and even forgetting, but we are very tough on leaders who disrespect us by not giving us the facts and diminish the role of leader by being disingenuous. This habit of not telling the truth makes it harder on all those called to leadership, as one dishonest leader can generate a creeping cynicism that makes leading all the more difficult for others. Truth telling is about personal courage—a willingness to do the right thing. It comes first in leadership. Without truth, there is no trust, and without trust, leadership is impossible.

I also have come to believe that the leaders in an organization hold the key to creating a culture of honesty, and this, I can assure you, is a critical aspect of leading a successful organization, whether it is a profit or not-for-profit, big or small, complex or otherwise. I often tell my students that they should make an effort to tell the truth lovingly whenever possible, but they must not let their fear of offending get in the way of truth telling. The price is way too high.

**Serving.** Oh my, here we go with the line about how the leader should or must always put the needs of others above his or hers at all times. I will stop short of this ideal. But, let me be clear that the leader who wishes to lead his or her organization for the longer pull must be prepared to put others above self. Men and women of faith have an edge in understanding the value of this quality, but being a person of faith does not guarantee this quality. The person who sees leadership as service tends to be a person with a humble spirit: a leader, who takes his or her work seriously, but is careful not to take himself or herself too seriously.

So much of this quality is about attitude. It was once explained to me by a wise person that to be humble is not to think less or poorly of oneself, but to not think of oneself at all. Now, that is a very high standard, one to which I can only aspire, but I like the notion of the leader, in his or her role as leader, not “thinking” of himself, not “thinking” of herself in fulfilling the leadership role.

Leaders who serve report that they work with others, not that their co-workers work for them. People who see leadership as an opportunity to serve are men and women who do not assume they are “deserving” of the perquisites—financial and otherwise—that often accompany leadership positions, particularly in formal organizations. And, while it is human nature to enjoy the good things that often come with being called leader, servant leaders never forget from whence they came. Servant leaders know that the privileges of being in charge are not to be abused. They understand that their most important role in the organization is to encourage, create opportunity, and inspire success among the men and women who serve alongside them. They never forget that leaders need followers, and the leader who serves strives to be the kind of leader he or she would want to follow.

**Communicating True North.** Good leaders are charged with staying focused on and communicating the organization's primary mission—“true north,” if you will. Establishing the organization’s mission is an administrative skill deserving of a separate article, but the best leaders, when faced with important decisions or opportunities to communicate, ask themselves: “Does my action serve or advance the organization’s mission?” And, being a good communicator has little to do with being an outstanding orator, though this is another leadership skill to be coveted. No, leaders who communicate well are committed to being sure that
their organization shares important and strategic information in an honest, timely way, thus allowing employees at all levels to be reminded of the organization's mission and know what is occurring in the life of the enterprise. And, as this occurs, a working environment is created in which the employees develop a sense of ownership and loyalty that will advance the organization's mission, whatever it might be.

Communication becomes the foundation for motivation within the organization. The leaders of larger, more complex organizations “communicate” by being certain the leaders working alongside them share this same commitment to communication. There is no magic to all this, and in the final analysis effective communication is not about newsletters and e-mails and staff meetings, though all of these efforts can assist in the effort and are almost always a part of the effort. Being an effective communicator of true north is, once again, about attitude, and motivation, about believing and trusting in the men and women who work in the organization. And, my experience tells me that all of us get sloppy in this area. We forget that new men and women join our organization and are unaware of our organization’s culture and peculiarities. This oversight is unintentional, but can, over time, create confusion summed up by the classic phrase, “Well, I thought everyone knew about that rule or policy or organizational habit.”

One final note on communicating true north: first-rate, comprehensive planning, used as a leadership tool, can do a great deal to help define or redefine organizational mission and create an environment where communication is timely, honest, and provides a context for the men and women who carry out the work of the organization.

**Giving Authority.** I often refer to this as one's ability to “hand-off,” tracing back to my days long ago as a football player and coach. Handing-off means giving authority to people. In football, when the quarterback hands it off, he really is giving it up to the runner and the nine other folks who will make something happen with that opportunity. This quality is really about trust and wisdom and believing in the worth of one's fellow workers—the other leaders in the organization. A great many leaders talk a lot about giving authority, but, when faced with the opportunity to do so, they just can't live it out. To be about the business of handing off, the leader must live with the reality that occasionally able people will do things differently from the way he or she would do them. You can get sideswiped and sometimes surprised, but if you hire good people, you must let them do the work. You'll never move forward without investing capable people with authority. Good leaders develop a capacity for and come to understand the wisdom of handing off.

This is a leadership strength for me, though I was never a quarterback. It has been my blessing to be surrounded by excellent people in almost every job I have held in these many years. My genius, if I have any, has been to let these men and women do their jobs. In short order I become their advisor, their counselor—asking questions, probing for data to support their decisions, handing out credit and recognition to them without a pause.

**Cultivating Informed Intuition.** Technology is a wonderful thing, in my view. The capacity we have to gather and analyze important data has never been greater. I am a leader who likes to have information—lots of it. But, even in this age of instantaneous data, a single decision may carry more weight than a million facts. My point: care about the research and know the latest trends, but know, ultimately, many important decisions (and almost all the really difficult ones) require some new and unknown synthesis that is neither guess nor fact. Good leaders learn to follow their informed intuition. Most of the leaders I know who have distinguished themselves in their company or field are ones who trust their instincts. They cultivate the practice of receiving and understanding data and reports and recommendations, but they also have learned to trust their sense of rightness, their informed intuition. You will want to exercise some care here. Never forget that some men and women (those who work with you and those you may work for) are determined to make everything data driven; that is, if there is no solid information to support a choice, then don’t make it. As a leader, you cannot discount this position. Rather, you must arm yourself with the best information available surrounding a choice that needs to be made, then - as leader - decide when it’s right to pull the trigger and accept the consequences.

**Building Pockets of Greatness.** You should know that I have adjusted my seven qualities of person by one,
replacing what had been #6, “Fixing Irritation,” with a new one titled, “Building Pockets of Greatness.” I have been persuaded in that last several months that this characteristic of leadership is more important—much more so at this moment in time—than fixing irritation, a quality that called for the leader to be “... alert to fix irritation [as] a way for the leader to stay grounded in reality, to be in touch with the men and women who may not have the best jobs in the organization, and to maintain a sense of humility about the total effort of the organization—believing that “no leader can fix irritation everywhere, but good leaders make a practice of finding flaws and making sure they are corrected.” Building pockets of greatness draws its inspiration from Jim Collins’ booklet, Good to Great and the Social Sectors, where he maintains that “It may take decades to change the systemic context, and you might be retired or dead by the time those changes come. In the meantime, what are you going to do now? This is where the Stockdale Paradox (an inspiring portion of the book, Good to Great) comes into play: You must retain faith that you can prevail to greatness in the end, while retaining the discipline to confront the brutal facts of your current reality. What can you do today to create a pocket of greatness, despite the brutal facts of your environment?”[1] Such is the charge to those of us who lead in American higher education. Unable to fix all of the problems associated with education at all levels, we must strive to create our pocket of greatness.

**Dreaming Big and Hitting Homeruns, on Occasion.** Freud had a lot to say about dreams that emerge from the unconscious, but leaders must embolden themselves for dreams of the conscious kind. One mark of a leader is the will to swing for the fence, aiming for the homerun. If a leader can inspire his or her organization to dream big, every individual becomes better for it. Finding a challenging task and executing it with confidence serves to raise the bar for the whole organization. And big dreams aren’t reserved only for big organizations. The organization I serve, Centre College, became the smallest college in the smallest town ever to host a General Election Debate in October of 2000. This Vice Presidential Debate between Messrs. Cheney and Lieberman set “the standard by which other national debates will be judged.” It was a dream articulated and flawlessly executed by an entire team of people at Centre, in Danville, and in Kentucky. A leader can have high aspirations, whether the setting is an elementary school PTA with 50 active members or a corporation with 5,000 employees. To be clear, I am not talking about ideas that completely outstrip the ability and capacity of the people manning the organization. That’s a quick way to ruin. Again, this quality of the good leader is mostly about attitude. Often the idea that becomes the homerun doesn’t even “belong” to the leader. The good leader understands how the big dream will transform his or her company, forever making the enterprise a player of greater potential and higher achievement. Good leaders understand that big challenge, successfully executed, creates an organization full of men and women who forever believe “they can”.

Now, before moving to your questions and our discussion, and in keeping with my ideas about each of us having a leadership fingerprint, let me invite you to think about your natural strength—the leadership attribute I have discussed that comes most natural to you. If you are one who is a good communicator, about true north and other matters, then look for ways to emphasize this leadership quality. If giving authority is something that is second nature for you, then be sure that the men and women who work alongside you know this and learn over time to anticipate your willingness to share the important work of your enterprise. You get the idea here, I am sure—capitalize on those leadership things you do well. All the while, you should begin working on those aspects of your leadership fingerprint that are less natural, aren’t second nature, don’t come easy. This, too, is a cross between common sense and being smart—evidence one last time that good and effective and even inspired leadership is not rocket science, but it can have the effect of rocket fuel in your organization.

**Making Yourself and Your Aspect of the Organization “Essential, Crucial, Irreplaceable”**. A number of years ago, I did some writing with one of your colleagues, Lou Moelchert, who was my best friend during my years at the University of Richmond. Lou and I co-authored one article and, then, he helped me on another titled “Creating the Illusion of Indispensability.” It was a good piece of work—not in the award-winning category, but a good piece of work nonetheless. Let me quote from it briefly, then try to share with you
some ideas about how the business office, in particular, can strengthen its influence and impact for good in the college or university you serve.

Clear back in ’84 I wrote, “All of us want to believe that we are important, really important. From birth on we seek to let others know that we “count”; that we have needs; that we are a very necessary part of the situation—any situation.” Then, I state the obvious, “Juxtaposed against our wanting to believe that we are indispensable in our individual sphere of influence is the cold and stark truth that we are not.” I go on to suggest three ways to make one indispensable—become a writer, become the one who is known for and counted on to present alternatives that solve problems, be the one in your organization who “volunteers” for assignments, even when those assignments fall outside of your areas of direct responsibility.