

JrNYLC
CLOSING KEYNOTE SPEAKER ADDRESS
by EMILY SHANAHAN
OCTOBER 5, 2005
“THE FACES OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP”

ICE BREAKER: As I am being placed on stage, the “Numa, Numa” video can be playing on screen. (<http://www.albinoblacksheep.com/flash/numa.php>) The easel is already off to the side of the stage with puzzle pieces at the base of the easel titled: “JrNYLC Mount Rushmore”. (My goal is to create a fireside chat atmosphere-Does anyone have an old time radio for a stage prop?)

Good afternoon, my name is Emily Shanahan. I am a Junior at West Carrollton High School in West Carrollton, Ohio. I had the privilege of attending the National Young Leaders Conference this past summer of 2005 and had an experience of a lifetime. So, tell me how many of you have enjoyed your time in Washington, DC with JrNYLC these past 7 days? (Pause/Listen for response/Connect w/a nod or eye contact)

I am here to take you on a journey to meet several famous American leaders from our past, such as James Madison, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Robert E. Lee, Martin Luther King, Jr and George Washington. Each of these men possessed one the following character qualities which I consider to be essential to leadership: Having a positive attitude, creating positive change, seeing people as your greatest asset, implementing a vision and influencing others. My goal is that you will be able learn something from these great leaders in our nation and how you can take these lessons from American leaders of the past and apply them to your leadership roles in your school and in your community.

Now, everyone look under your chairs and six of you will find either a name of leader that I have already mentioned or a question mark. When I talk about that person, please come forward to the easel and place your puzzle piece on the easel. The person who has the question mark will come forward last and complete the puzzle. Okay, go ahead and take a look, do it!

Having a positive attitude can make all the difference, it will excel your goal and motivate others around you. If the attitude is a negative one, it can hinder the goal and drain those around you from of their motivation.

Our first leader, James Madison, had a great attitude despite a tendency to be sick, family tragedy on top of that he insisted on educating himself by reading all the books in his father's library. For example, James Madison was one of the youngest representatives that attended the Constitutional Convention in Independence Hall during 1776. Mr. Madison suffered personal family tragedy, he was very sick as a young boy. He would often spend hours of time in the family library reading books from esteemed authors and thinkers from his time period.

Just as James Madison was ill when he was young, I too experienced the challenge of being ill as a child, due to my Cerebral Palsy, at the age of 7 I had a hip surgery that had me in a body cast for 8 weeks during my recovery period. The body cast covered the length of my body from just above my waist to down to the tips of my toes. I was not prepared for the mental and emotional challenge that the body cast brought with it. However, three weeks into my recovery, having memorized the patterns of the paint swirls on my living room ceiling, I had become very discouraged and downcast.

Then on one cold, wintry day in January, the phone rang and everything changed including my attitude! To make a long story short, my mom had received a call from Gloria Gaither's assistant offering me the young female lead in their second children's video to be filmed in Estes Park, Colorado in August of that same year. Gloria Gaither and her husband, Bill are accomplished singer, songwriter and speakers; best known for their "Homecoming Friends" concert series. Soon, I had the script in hand to begin memorization and a goal for recovery.

As you can imagine this became my focus and I recovered quickly and with new and improved attitude. So much so, that once back at school, I ran for my first student representative position to represent my second grade class at Schnell Elementary school and I won! (Display on the screen: Homecoming Kids Go West DVD Cover)

Even though you may not have a surgery to recovery from, each one of you will face a circumstance that will challenge your normal everyday attitude. When this happens, I encourage you to find something that you can focus on to help you get through that tough time.

The ultimate test of leadership is introducing change. Contrary to popular belief, however, change can be also positive. Growth equals change and resistance to change is constantly everywhere. Franklin Delano Roosevelt demonstrated creating positive change by implementing all sorts of public works projects and other agencies to help American citizens support themselves and keep their dignity during the depression. An example, would be the Hoover Dam project.

When I was in 5th grade, I ran into major resistance to change while trying to do something positive so that a situation could be improved for the better. Since the situation was complex and not black and white, I asked for help from one of my mentors, namely, Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni, as most call her, in the summer of 1967, experienced a diving accident, which left her a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, unable to use her hands. Today, Joni, is an accomplished artist, author, speaker and founder of Joni and Friends, in Agoura Hills, California. Though the situation did not change, Joni watched how I handled the adverse situation which eventually brought about an opportunity to co-author a chapter in one her books, Ordinary People, Extraordinary Faith. (Display the book cover on screen) So you see, good can come out of any bad situation.

People are your greatest asset and resource. Never underestimate the value of the people with whom you work. If you see a person who has a talent, let them use that talent to advance the common goal, whether it be an idea or organization.. Do not let that opportunity slip pass you.

Robert E. Lee is an example of a leader who was great at appealing to people on personal level rather than seeing them as pawns to get a job done. For instance, Robert E. Lee never expected his men to do something that he himself would not do. He, personally, talked to the soldiers and tried to learn their names. View people as partners in your dream or mission because they are not simply assets they are actual real people who have something to contribute to your real cause.

During the summer of 2004, I was at Spring Hill Camp in Freetown, Indiana. That summer they had a new high ropes course and I was determined to try it out for myself. However, there was one small problem; because of my physical limitations there was no

way I could complete the high ropes course on my own. As a result of teamwork, I enlisted the help of two staff members who were trained on how to navigate the high ropes course and a third staff member on the ground who offered verbal guidance while also doubling as a spotter. On my descent of the high ropes course, I sort of turned into a human “yo-yo” which gave me awarded me a trip to the hospital complete with an x-rays and pain medicine! Fortunately the only injury I incurred where several pulled muscles in my back.

As a result of this accident, a meeting was called by Spring Hill staff to communicate and discuss changes that needed to be made so that the high ropes course would be safer for people with disabilities. I had an active voice in the communication and problem solving process. It took several people to make my high ropes course experience possible. (On screen, display the High Ropes course photo) This applies to your life because many of you are most likely in leadership position in your schools’ clubs. It is great to have a vision for the club, however, please do not put your own plan above the other club members. If someone else in your club has an idea, listen, discuss, and apply their appropriate ideas.

Vision is having an idea which no one else but you may see and running with it, while taking others along with you to accomplish the vision. The key is to share your vision with others around you and have them believe in it and for its implementation. Martin Luther King, Jr. is an example of victorious American leader who had a vision that was implemented even after his death. Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted to achieve equality for African Americans, and he developed a specific plan of how to achieve that

goal through peaceful protests and marches. This vision and passion for his goal was demonstrated in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

In the spring of my 8th grade year, I ran for president of my freshman class and lost the election by one vote. While I was disappointed about the loss and the inability to represent by freshman classmates, I did not know that this particular loss was going to lead something better than student council. In my school district, there is an organization called the Student Advisory Board. The Student Advisory Board meets with the Superintendent, School Board officials and other important school administrators who are interested in our input, as students, regarding issues affecting the school district, vision casting and implementing a 5 year plan for the whole school district versus my freshman class. What I wanted to do as president of my freshman class was limited in scope compared to what I was able to accomplish by being a voice on the Student Advisory Board for the 2004-2005 school year.

Vision is also important in your own lives. Never be afraid to grow your vision from its original idea or goal. Dream big, set goals, and do not be afraid to use your creativity to see your vision become a reality.

Influence is changing someone’s view point in a situation or increasing someone’s self esteem to create a better environment and promote teamwork. George Washington was a person of influence because he helped shape what the presidency looks like today because of his example. The title Mr. President was a precedent set by George Washington that no president has deviated from.

On September 11, 2001 at 9am I had scoliosis, or back surgery, at Columbus Children’s hospital. Previous to this surgery, I had been awarded a Special Wish trip and

I had not yet decided on what I wanted to do with my wish. During my hospital stay, I saw a news clip on FoxNews where President Bush, stood amongst the rubble, of the World Trade Center and declared that America would become stronger because of this horrible tragedy. It was at that point after September 11th, I knew that I wanted to go to Washington, D.C. to meet and pray with President Bush and take in the historical sights that Washington had to offer. The Special Wish trip became my determination to persevere and recover from my surgery so I could travel. I did incur several set backs and re-hospitalizations along the way but it was worth it! To make a long story short, my wish was eventually granted and I met President Bush on April 2, 2004 at the White House in the Diplomatic receiving room. When I met President Bush, I asked him why he chose to meet me because I knew that he had a list of 30 people he could have chosen to meet that day. He told me that he chose to meet me because he admired that fact that I never let obstacles get in the way of pursuing my dreams.

You can make a difference tomorrow by becoming a better leader today. Will you have a positive or negative influence on others and the situation around you...the choice is yours! You may think that just because you are 6th and 7th graders, there is no way could have influence on others around you. However, I am here to tell you that you do have influence because you are a leader! After all, someone must have thought you were are a leader, because you are after all at this conference?

Daily, I make use of my personal digital assistant or PDA which helps me to keep appointments, commitments, break down big responsibilities into small doable daily tasks. I have to utilize my time and talents properly so that I can be an effective leader back home at school and in my local community.

Every time you make a choice, you are building your leadership legacy. Make sure that choice will build on the legacy that you would be proud to be remembered by. I know peer pressure is a very powerful, yet an unspoken issue that you will face each day once you go back home. Peer pressure does not go away as you get older, it just changes. I want to you leave with a line from one of my favorite songs entitled hero by the group Superchick. “Every time you make the right choice, a hero is made.”

(End with video clip of the ABC Extreme Makeover: Home Edition portion of my audition tape of Phil Collin’s song to family photos of Emily’s life)