

Colleges Leaning Into Change

GrowSmart Summit

October 19, 2016

1. Introduction

- a. Good afternoon!
- b. And Welcome to Thomas College
- c. We love to have guests on our beautiful campus and hope that you'll feel welcome to come visit us anytime

It is my honor today to talk with you about how Colleges are Leaning Into Change.

When I first arrived at Thomas, I actually gave a talk on this very topic – and I called it

*“Being Bold in the Wild World of Higher Education:
I’m Just Naïve Enough to Think This Might Work!”*

- d. Today, I hope to cover the following:
 - i. First I'll first give some insights into the Wild World of Higher Education
 - ii. Then share with you some of what we are doing to boldly address these challenges head-on
 - iii. And finally, I'll talk about the leadership challenges that I have faced making the transition into
 - 1. a new job,
 - 2. a new sector and
 - 3. a whole new culture and

4. why I chose the title “I’m just naïve enough to think this might work”

2. The Wild World of Higher Education

- a. Challenges to Higher Ed have never been greater
- b. The competition in Higher Ed has never been fiercer
- c. Pace of change is accelerating
- d. YIKES! We must truly live by our wits.

- e. Demographics
 - i. Nationally – the number of H.S. graduates peaked in 2008 – and is now in a protracted period of slow decline (Maine is the oldest state in the nation)
 - ii. Nationally, from 2012 – 2020, the number of caucasian graduates will fall 7% while the number of graduates of color will increase 19% (Maine is the whitest state in the nation)
 - iii. Most students travel less than 100 miles to go to college (Maine is one of the most rural states in the nation – heck a lot of people commute 100 miles to go to work!)
 - iv. Every trend will hit Maine harder and earlier

- f. Economics (not just the demographics)
 - i. When I began as President of Thomas 4 years ago – the Economy was in an extended period of malaise – a very slow recovery from the Great Recession
 - ii. Unemployment rates were fairly high

- iii. From 2000 – 2010, real median income for families with children declined 11%
- iv. From 2007 – 2009, the median value of homes owned by couples with children fell 18% and hadn't recovered very much
- v. Meanwhile – college costs continued to rise

This caused some major issues:

- g. Issue #1 - Affordability:
 - i. While real incomes had fallen and home equity had dropped, the costs of college had risen steadily
- h. Issue #2 - Student Debt:
 - i. Student debt in the US passed \$1 trillion and surpassed home equity loans, auto and credit card debt
- i. Issue #3 – Underemployment -with sluggish job markets – 37% of recent graduates were underemployed with another hefty percentage unemployed
 - i. The result? Americans were disillusioned and fearful and the American Dream was, for many, feeling out of reach
 - 1. Challenging Liberal Arts
 - 2. Challenging the value of a College degree
 - ii. In addition – there has been significant disruptive innovation – with technology and the advent of online learning models, the traditional residential model is being challenged

- iii. This perfect storm has led the pundits to predict that within the next 10 years, 20%-25% of existing higher ed institutions will disappear

So my goal is really pretty simple - NOT to be in the 20%-25%!

3. Background on Thomas College - Relevant Facts

Perhaps one of the most important things I can share with you about Thomas College is our mission.

Our Mission is:

To prepare students for success in their personal and professional lives, and for leadership and service in their communities.

Now for some facts about us:

- a. 850 FTE Undergrad and about 200 graduate students
- b. 50% business majors
- c. 50% practical liberal arts –
 - i. criminal justice,
 - ii. education,
 - iii. psychology
 - iv. CS and cybersecurity
- d. 70% first generation
- e. Tuition: \$24,000, Room and Board \$10,000
- f. About 2/3s of our students live on campus
- g. 75%-80% come from Maine
- h. 85% graduates stay in Maine

- i. Faculty: 37 FT, Non-tenured, non-unionized
 - j. Endowment \$10 million
 - k. Deferred maintenance – minimal
- I. SUMMARY: Thomas College is:
- i. Very small in scale of operations (1,250 benchmark for sustainability)
 - ii. Very small endowment (3 times operating revenue vs. 1/2 - little room for error)
 - iii. Have very practical offerings that are relevant in the job market
 - iv. No deferred maintenance and no building surplus capacity – which gives us a competitive advantage
 - v. Very strong balance sheet, 27 consecutive years of surpluses
 - vi. Perhaps most importantly – we are nimble, dynamic and growing
 - vii. There’s a certain mojo or buzz on campus and in our extended community

4. Being Bold - Current Innovations

So the headlines suggest:

- Evolve or Atrophy
- Innovate or Die
- Go Big or Go Home

This is where the need to be bold comes in because the status quo is not an option – we have had NO option but to “Lean In”

I've been blessed with a very forward-looking, action-oriented board AND a faculty and staff that have been nimble.

We are an enrollment-driven college serving a contracting market during one of the most tumultuous times in the history of Higher Educations – and yet we have achieved record enrollment and retention in each of the past 4 years.

Here's some of the things we've been doing that I feel are pretty bold:

- b. Created a long-term, integrated Strategic Plan, Comprehensive Energy Plan and Campus Master Plan – with a clear vision, goals, timelines and measurable outcomes – and we live by it.
- c. We have clearly articulated our values as being
 - i. Personal
 - ii. Relevant
 - iii. Affordable and
 - iv. Guaranteed – and we live fully into these values each day
- d. Attraction
 - i. Suite of Guarantees
 - 1. Guaranteed Job Program – 1st in country, one of the only in US
 - 2. Guaranteed Tuition – keep grades up/never see tuition rise
 - 3. Guaranteed to Graduate in 4

4. Guaranteed Golf
5. Guaranteed Career Services for Life

- ii. New programs of study –
 1. cybersecurity,
 2. project management,
 3. MBA-Health Care Management,
 4. MS - Educational Leadership
 5. ALL Thomas students are required to have a Personal Finance course

- iii. Thomas College Intensives – one week intensive classes in the summer
 1. Graduate
 2. Undergraduate
 3. HighSchool

e. Retention

- i. EDGE Program – 10-day intensive, highly successful retention program
- ii. Maymester – Intensive programming to retain federal aid eligibility
- iii. Certified Peer Mentoring and Peer Tutoring
- iv. 1st Private College in Maine to receive a TRIO Student Success Services Grant
- v. 1st College in nation to have a JMG Specialist on campus – Only college to have a JMG club
- vi. Athletic Coaches – training
- vii. Glass doors throughout the college

f. Affordability

- i. Accelerated MBA (10 months)
- ii. Fast Track (Honors) CPA
- iii. Accelerated 3-year business degree and adding 3-year arts and sciences degree
- iv. Dual Enrollment – 20+ HSs, 700+ students
- v. Preregistered for Jr./Sr. classes
- vi. 2 consecutive years of tuition freeze
- vii. 1st in New England to have a Pathways Program with Maranacook

g. We are investing for growth

- i. New academic center and library
- ii. New residence hall
- iii. New Center for Innovation in Education
- iv. New faculty
- v. New programs

h. Our actions are guided by a belief in:

- i. Innovation
- ii. Collaboration
- iii. Sound business principles

i. Because of that, we:

- i. Formed partnerships with Unity College, Colby and KVCC
- ii. Formed a number of partnerships with employers and industry

- iii. Energy Plan – invested in Solar, Geo-thermal and NG conversion
- iv. Merged Career Services and Alumni Relations and focused on internships and networks
- v. Formed an Employer Outreach Team
- vi. Formed an Innovation Team

5. Now to the topic of Leadership

Start with a couple of questions:

- a. How do you lead through tumultuous change – especially when many people in the organization don't fully realize the extent of the tumult?
- b. What's expected of you when you are leading in a culture or a sector – where everyone knows the rules of engagement better than you?
- c. As a brand new college president who has never worked in academia and is facing the most traumatic period of change that Higher Ed has ever been through, here are some of the things I've learned about the leadership characteristics that are helpful:
 - i. Be laser-focused on mission:
 - 1. Know yourself and your customer (online)
 - 2. Don't try to be something you are not
 - 3. Be brutally honest about your strengths and weaknesses

- ii. Set the vision that is clear and compelling
 - 1. As the leader – live the vision 24/7 – Living Logo
 - 2. Let every single person in the organization know every day how important they are to achieving that vision
 - 3. Thank every single person for the role they play daily in moving the organization towards the vision
- iii. Be fully aware of your own short-comings and build a team that complements your weaknesses
 - 1. Invest in assessment (DISC)
 - 2. Invest in team-building
 - 3. Invest in leadership and professional development
 - 4. Apologize when you screw-up
- iv. Constantly learn and grow
 - 1. Read books and articles that inspire big ideas
 - Thrive
 - Lean In
 - The Art of Possibility
 - The Innovative University
 - How Will You Measure Your Life
 - Outliers
 - How full is Your Bucket
 - 2. Listen to experts and great leaders and take notes
 - 3. Have conversations with other leaders and take notes
 - Clayton Christensen
 - Other Presidents

- Chronicle of Higher Ed Reporter
- Gallop executive
- Gates Foundation

4. Remember to regularly get outside your comfort zone

- That's where the learning takes place
- That's where the best ideas will emerge
- That's where you'll find the courage to take bold action

v. Pump Sunshine 24/7

1. As the leader in difficult times – you have to

- believe in your people
- believe in your mission
- believe in your strategic plan
- believe in yourself
- laugh at yourself
- celebrate
- be fully present to every individual every moment of every day
- smile

6. Conclusion

I've been studying leadership for a very long time and I can honestly say that Leadership Maine was a transformational experience for me. Ever since Leadership Maine, I have been collecting quotes – to inspire me as I learn and grow and struggle and try again.

I want to leave you with two quotes that I think best describe the Leadership Journey I am on right now.

The first is on being a servant leader:

“Leadership is not about love...it is love. It’s loving your mission, it’s loving your customers, it’s loving your people, and it’s loving yourself enough to get out of the way so other people can be magnificent”

- Margie Blanchard

So here’s the skinny: I am naïve enough to believe that if I sincerely love our mission, our customers, and our staff – and I truly empower my people to do what they do best – we will succeed.

Further – I try to daily live into this idea:

“Set a goal so big that you can’t achieve it until you grow into the person who can.”

Well – my dreams for Thomas College are certainly so big that it will take me some time to grow into the person who can lead our college forward. But the blessing is – I am surrounded by the treasures of Board, Faculty and Staff, and students who inspire me every step of the way – and I remain happily naïve enough to belief that together all things are possible.

Thank you.

Growing Thomas

I'd like to end my piece with a statement about what I believe.

I Believe . . .

- when you dare to dream big
- when you surround yourself with talented, passionate people
- when you arm yourself with information and data
- when you are truly open to feedback – good and bad
- when you can find something to smile about through setbacks
- when you care passionately about the mission
- when the team fully buys into the vision
- when you love and respect the people you serve and serve with...

All things are Possible!

- Thanks to each and every one of you for all you do for Thomas College
- Welcome to our new colleagues and friends
- It's going to be a great year!