



*Remarks provided at the ACPA Business Meeting and Presidential Address by  
Dr. Tom Jackson, Jr. as the 2009-10 ACPA President, March 31, 2009.*

## **Acknowledgements**

### Charlie Fey

Oh, Charlie. What can I say? I am humbled by your words and appreciative of our deep friendship.

Allow me to share with you a short story about Charlie – I have worked for Charlie twice. There was a time some wondered why I hung around him as much as I did. The simple answer was we were more than colleagues. We were friends. Are friends. In my world, friends stay together. There is no position or opportunity that was ever worth more than my friendship with Charlie. I know he is proud – very proud to not only see me standing here, but also to have supervised Patty. This says a lot about his character and his passion for mentoring and guiding others – to have supervised and guided two ACPA Presidents. No amount of thanks can cover the debt I have to you. But let me add one more so you can credit it today – thanks.

### Patty Perillo

Allow me to also acknowledge, once again, Dr. Patty Perillo. Most of my career I only knew of Patty through someone else important in her life – Donna Bourassa. In my year serving with Patty, I must tell all of you, I have never seen a more passionate, committed, skillful practitioner. Patty is brilliant. She is kind. She has a huge heart. And, she loves ACPA. I learned a lot from Patty and ACPA is the much better for her having served as our President. Patty, thank you for all that you do.

Let's give Patty one more showing of what she has meant to us as President.

### Mike Segawa

There is one other person I would like to acknowledge as I begin my remarks. As many of you know, I have been a NASPA member a whopping six months longer than ACPA. Like my NASPA counterpart, I have given nearly as much to NASPA as Mike Segawa has given to ACPA. It was 1995 when Mike and I sat on a panel together discussing "dual career" couples at a NASPA Conference. Who would have thought at that time sat two of our two largest association's future presidents. Mike, I value your friendship and look forward to a wonderful year working beside you. Thanks for being here.

## **Presidential Initiatives**

What has been passed out to each of you as you entered today is a summary of some of my presidential initiatives. Many of these are items we have been addressing the past year but some, as you will see, are new efforts intended to not only advance our association, but more importantly, our profession. I do not intend to specifically talk about all of these, only to highlight a few themes in our remaining time today. *(1-2-3 exercise)*

## **International Association and Global Profession *(Rabbits)***

My late Grandmother used to say that one could learn a lot from a story. She was an amazing story teller, and sitting and listening to her I learned many things about life and work. In my comments today I am going to share with you a few stories that I hope illustrate why we have a wonderful opportunity to evolve as an association and profession.

A long time ago a little boy, who was about 10 years old at the time, went to his mother after he had found a rabbit in his back yard. The little boy, named Stephen Lukefer, said, “Mama, look at what I found. Can I keep him?”

Stop for just a moment and imagine all the different responses your parents, or you might have if this were the question. Do you say yes? Or, “get that rabbit out of here!” Or, some other variation of a response.

Well, his mother took a chance and said yes, but you have to take care of that rabbit, feed it, and clean it. For many days Stephen did just that and his mother began to believe him.

A few more weeks go by and Stephen returns to his mother after playing outside for several hours. He says, “Look Mama, I have found another rabbit. Can I keep him?!”

Now, we have all had the birds and bees talk I hope and generally know what “could” happen when we put two rabbits together. I am sure these thoughts were passing through his mothers mind. What happens if they are different genders? Will Stephen take care of another rabbit? After moments of analyzing thousands of potentially reasons to NOT allow Stephen to keep this new rabbit, she pauses, looks into her son’s eyes, and says, YES. That simple answer initiated a life changing experience for thousands of people across the globe. Those simple words saved thousands of lives – and she had no knowledge of what she unleashed.

As years progressed, Stephen had acquired 36 cages of rabbits. He had named each one, studied each one, feed and cared for each one. His care for rabbits lead him to a degree in animal science. He used this degree in the Peace Corp to help others when he began to wonder, “I am working in a famine country. There is no water and no soil, yet we are trying to teach people to farm.” He thought about this problem and then thought to

himself, rabbits reproduce rapidly. They are easy to farm. And, they are an excellent source of protein. If we taught the people of this country how to farm rabbits they could live forever.

Imagine the intellect, the raw thought process that just went into that conclusion. “If we can introduce rabbit farming to the people of this country they could live for a lifetime!”

Stephen completed his doctoral degree in genetics and promptly began work on creating a “hairless” rabbit that could live and survive in a famine country. Several years later he perfected it and through his efforts he has changed the lives of a famine country and thousands of people. Amazing and very true.

On our campuses there are many other Stephen Lukefars. You just do not know it. Certainly not all of us can be so ingenious to genetically create an animal to breed in a famine country. But let's explore his success. Many people contributed to it. His teachers. His friends. His faculty. His colleagues. His parents. Many contributed. So while we may not be that person, Stephen Lukefar, we may have contributed to helping him become all that he has become through our work on our campuses. In this room, right now, many of you are working with or advising future Stephen Lukefar's. You just do not know it yet. In this room, a few of your students (or their children) will discover the cure for AIDS, cancer, or develop a new energy.

My point, we are so interconnected in our work. ACPA historically has looked inward in attempts to create a better association. This has worked and we are a very strong association today. I believe we are now at a point where we must look outward and help guide our global profession. We have nothing on some countries – residence halls and processes are also very evolved in many foreign countries. We could learn a great deal from looking at what some other countries are doing in higher education. We could also benefit others through our strength – research.

Our work is no longer just about what occurs in one university in the United States. We have a duty, an obligation, to lead our global profession. Many of my initiatives speak to efforts to strategically partner with our sister associations to improve our global profession and work beyond our borders.

### **Veterans and Perspective** (*Katrina*)

My second point has to do with veterans. To many, we are those people that simply take orders and shoot people. It really isn't that way. A veteran is the most patriotic and committed person you will ever meet. They are a person that stands for something often greater than themselves – service, patriotism, loyalty, honor, integrity, and intelligence.

They are a person who would give their life for their buddy AND a country. I know. I am one.

A couple of years ago Hurricane Katrina and Rita hit the Louisiana and Texas coasts. It was devastating to those communities. As an officer in the Guard, who was also a sitting Vice President at Texas A&M-Kingsville, I was deployed to help provide security for the shelters. These shelters, if you recall, were often sports complexes or churches where evacuees could come and live until the aftermath. These people were just like you and me. One day they had homes, cars, and some cash. The next day all that they owned either sat in a trunk of a car they used to escape or underneath a 3 foot by 6 foot cot in Wal-Mart bags. Whether they had \$1.00 or \$10,000 in the bank, they couldn't access it because the systems were down. They only had their life.

While deployed I used this time to walk around and talk to people. Seeing the uniform brought a sense of safety to people. They knew it wouldn't be great, but they would be taken care of. They were safe. One gentleman told me a story that I will never forget. He talked about the day he was enjoying his family in their home and how they carefully secured their home and braced for the hurricane. He talked about how he was relieved the day after -- only to be shocked when the levy breached.

Water was pouring into his home. He talked about how he and his wife raced to gather their two children because there was now no way to escape. He prayed and hoped the water would stop rising. It didn't.

He moved his family to the attic to get above the water. It kept rising. He kicked out the vents to climb to the roof to get above the water. The water kept coming.

He and his family were doing all they could to stay in the water, holding onto the house, so the water wouldn't take them away. He was grabbing the gutter with one arm and holding his spouse and children with the other. Using all the strength God would give him, he held on. But the water would not stop. He was trying to survive -- trying desperately to survive. Nobody in the family could swim, and it probably wouldn't have mattered given how fast the water was moving.

As the water kept pushing he and his wife realized he no longer had the strength to save all his family. He had to let go of someone. His wife floated away. As her arms flared in all attempts to swim and live, he clutched his children with his remaining strength, praying for life. The water eventually slowed and he found the strength to hold on. He later was saved by the Coast Guard.

You know, I make a lot of decisions every day, just like each of you. What to fund. Who to hire. What strategies to use. What to eat. We worry about a number of things, too. Do we have hotdogs for a convention carnival, who gets what award, or the cost of convention food?

Truth is, these decisions seem to pale in comparison -- today nobody in this room had to decide who lived, or whether a spouse or a child lived.

To those individuals in Katrina, many were saved by people willing to put the individual's life ahead of their own. There is a saying that you can learn a lot about a person in how they care for an aging pet. Some would say that how you care for that aging pet is an indication for how one might care for an aging person. Well, I think we can learn a lot about how our societies, or our campuses, ON HOW THEY show their care for a veteran. Those actions say a great deal about us and our values.

I am a very proud veteran of the United States Coast Guard Reserve and Army National Guard. I believe strongly that we should do all we can for those individuals that are seeking an education after serving their country. There may be others in this room that have proudly served in our armed forces. If you ever have served, or have a close family member that has served, please stand (if able) to be recognized.

Combat veterans are a special people. They are very much in sync with the environment around them, have spent hours upon hours in training and in a classroom learning a skill, leadership, and teamwork. They bring to the classroom a focus and a commitment. All they seek is acknowledgement and a chance. In a way it is no different than other at-risk student groups. Get the veteran past the first semester and they will likely succeed.

I ask ACPA to lead the way in championing best practices that would improve the campus environment for our veterans. I also believe we have a golden opportunity to learn from this era – with research. Why ACPA? If not our profession, then who will champion these efforts across our campuses? This is our time.

### **Special People**

Let me begin to wrap up my remarks with some words about some special people. ACPA is an amazing institution. It is a place where people come together and where people can truly make a difference in others lives. We all entered this field after having other aspirations. Some of us aspired to be firemen. Some - ballerinas. Some wanted to be newscasters. Others - teachers. Either way, we are here. I have been fortunate to have held the coat tails of many fantastic, giving, and caring people. I carry with me, everyday, a piece from everyone of them. That is that gift they have given to me.

#### Charlie Fey

I already mentioned Charlie. Charlie, as my friend has taught me the importance of loyalty and friendship. No words can describe my indebtedness to you. Thanks.

#### Debbie Hebert

Debbie Hebert. Debbie is my big sister. She has guided me and kept me out of countless potholes. Debbie is unable to be here this year. That is really tough for her. ACPA is her home and she has given so much of her career to this association. She is one of the smartest people on this planet. Her intelligence is balanced by “Debbie just being Debbie.” Only a few of us can get beyond “Debbie being Debbie.” Once past that, you

will find a person with a huge compassionate soul. She would give you her home if you could simply spell A-C-P-A. She is also that person that all of us need in a room. You know -- that person that will ask the question we all are afraid to ask. Debbie has taught me the value of intellect and compassion.

### Tom Walter

Tom Walter. Tom was unable to be here because of the travel restrictions in Georgia. When he told me I immediately called him and shared with him what I am about to say to you. It was a moving conversation.

Tom is a very special person. I first met Tom in the Commission for Administrative Leadership and he was this big name to me at the time. As a newer professional I admired him. At a future NASPA conference, one where I had my first pre-conference program accepted, Tom was the chair for pre-conference programs that year. At this conference NASPA offered a reception for all pre-conference presenters. I was amazed that Tom remembered me and encouraged me to attend. He then did something I would never, ever forget. It was really a simple thing, but it meant and said a lot about him. He talked to me. That is it. He simply talked to me. That meant a lot to me. Later he helped me become the chair for Commission One and he also invited me to assist him and others with a mid-management initiative – which has evolved into MMI today. Tom taught me the power of words and the importance of giving one time. That a simple thank you, or nice job can mean a career to a person.

There are many others I would like to share stories about but also am cognizant of our time. Over this coming year many of my remarks will speak to the lessons learned by many of the names that have touched me.

Each of these people trusted me to help them, guide them, and inspire them in some way – only hoping that I would be a simple contributor to our association and profession. I am forever indebted to them and I carry your aspirations for a better profession on my shoulders.

### **Closing**

Let me close with one final short story. Not long ago when I was flying from Louisville to Minneapolis to attend the MCPA, Minnesota College Personnel Association. We were all boarding the plane and a nice little girl, about six years old and her father also sat in the plane. As we waited for the plane to taxi we were all doing what we do, aimlessly staring out the window or reading. This time many of us were struck by the wonderful conversation the little girl and her father were having. He was listening and she was just telling him things.

As we taxied to the runway this continued. However, the moment the pilot pushed in the power and the plane began to accelerate the little girl changed. She started yelling – “Weeeeeee. Weeeeeee. Daddy this is fun. Weeeeeee.” Then, as the plane lifted off the

ground the little girl changed in a way you might not think. She said, “Look, Daddy. What’s that? Oh Daddy, look at that. Ohhhhh, Daddy, what’s that?” This continued what seemed like 10 minutes but it was actually only 2-3 minutes and Dad patiently responded to all her questions. He was a great Dad. We other passengers were loving it. This little girls enthusiasm was contagious. Clearly this was her first flight on Northwest Airlines.

The rest of us were buried on the TSA hassles, cramped seats, and baggage fees, having forgotten to simply enjoy the scenery.

This happens a lot to us on campus also. I may have flown thousands of times, but she reminded me of my first flight. I may have answered that question from this students 12,000 other times, but it was THAT student’s first time. I ask us, in our work with students, to never forget the “Weeeee Factor” – to always remember that while it may be our 500<sup>th</sup> time, it may be the students first talking to us and asking us a question. While this may be our 10<sup>th</sup> ACPA, for some it is their first.

It is an honor and I am humbled to be your ACPA President. Thank you for entrusting me with this position. I will do my absolute best to serve you, this association, and our global profession. Thank you.



*Dr. Tom Jackson, Jr. is the 2009-10 ACPA President. He also serves as the Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Louisville. Follow his presidency at [acpa-president.blogspot.com](http://acpa-president.blogspot.com) or on [twitter.com \(acpaprez\)](http://twitter.com/acpaprez). He may be contacted at [tom.jackson@louisville.edu](mailto:tom.jackson@louisville.edu).*