Keith Burton:

If I could have your attention please, if I can have your attention. My name is Keith Burton, and I’m chair of the Plank Center. I’m very pleased now, as we move into the awards ceremony. I want to mention to you something that we learned today – Ron, Bill and I learned – in looking at the dinner over the last nine years. Kevin Saghy put together some numbers for us that we were not aware of and during that time, in nine years, thanks to you – all of our sponsors, those who’ve been a part of this event – we have raised almost $900,000 around this dinner. Just a big congratulations.

And after our expenses, all of the proceeds from the dinner, as I think we’ve said in the past, go back to grants and scholarships for students. We put it back into programs for students and educators, and those who support the business – as Betsy certainly would want us to do.

In the program tonight, there’s a profile on Betsy Plank, and if you read it, you’ll see at the very tail end of that profile, there’s a paragraph that I want to read to you. It says, "Always quick to applaud the success of others, Betsy rarely acknowledged her own. She was described as being the champion of so many passions to improve our profession. Students, education, scholarships, ethics, and leadership, to name a few. She brought all of those passions together within the Plank Center's mission.

There was a year that I sat with Ron Culp at that table over there when we had lunch with her one day, and I was struck by her and her humility. And Bill Heyman has said often, in fact he said it again tonight, that one of the great things about our board of advisors, and all who are involved with the Plank Center, is that we are not political, that we have humility, and that we like working with each other. And I think people who work with us understand that that’s who Betsey Plank was.

I asked one of the educators who worked with her and knew her, if we were to ask her what she would say Betsy would say tonight, almost 10 years on with our dinner, she would say, "You're doing great work, but press on, do more. Be curious, don't be satisfied with where you are today." And I think that's very true of her.

Those of you who may know her, know that back in the 60’s, as a part of her work with PRSA in 1967, the Student Society was formed at that time. I've said in past dinners that in 2007, when I Chaired the international conference for PRSA out in Salt Lake City, I looked for Betsy, who was on my program chair when I went out there, to run that event. I couldn't find her, and so someone finally told me, "Well, you're not going to find her in the main hotel because she doesn't stay here." And I said, "Where does she stay?" And the person said, "She stays over with the students at PRSA, in the student hotel." That's Betsy Plank,
and what she does, and who she is. And I think it speaks volumes about her as a leader.

I want to mention another program for us that we did not talk about earlier. And by the way, we are streaming this live on Facebook, so I’m pleased that we're doing that for those who are joining us through Facebook tonight. This year, as our board, we decided to take on another important program, and that's the North American Communications Monitor. Some of you know this is a global program. Every two years, this survey is conducted in the United States. The topics that had been covered by this particular survey include fake news, how to handle fake news, how communicators provide insights in decision making, as well as leaders performance, job satisfaction, personal stress, and communications management. Something I think many of us around the room know as we do our work.

The research team that is leading that for us includes Dr. Bruce Berger and I'll ask him to stand here – Dr. Bruce Berger, from the University of Alabama. Bruce is here. I don't believe Dr. Juan Meng is with us tonight, I hope ... Oh, is she here? Oh, good – Juan Meng, who is with us from the University of Georgia. And by the way, for those of you who don't know, we added new board members this year and one of our most recent additions is Dr. Meng, and we're very pleased to have her on our board with us as she continues the work that she's done with Bruce, as well as Dr. Brian Reber, who I’ll ask to stand now, in the area of leadership – Dr. Reber.

If you haven’t met him, an incredible leader who I've met and have known through the years is Dr. Ansgar Zerfass from the University of Leipzig in Germany. He is a Plank Scholar, in addition to being a scholar in Germany and the work that he does around leadership, and he is an important part of this work. We will continue as a part of our work – in fact, we have over 35 studies, major studies that we've done in Plank with this Communications Monitor now – to build more research-based foundation work and knowledge in this area. There are over 35,000 men and women in communications who are part of this survey body for the Communications Monitor. So, it's a wonderful tool, and we're very pleased that we are a part of it.

I want to show you, as I do every year for those who are not with us joining by Facebook and those in the room, the actual award that we provide as a part of the honor tonight – it’s a compass. And the reason it's a compass is because Betsy Plank always said, "Know your true north." Know your true north as a leader and who you are, and we took that to heart, Dr. Karla Gower and our board as we built this award a few years ago, and that’s how we honor those who we will bring forth tonight.
We're going to start tonight with our first award, which is the legacy award. And we're very pleased. I'm going to introduce Rob Flaherty who will introduce our honoree – Rob.

Rob Flaherty:

Good evening everyone. How are you tonight? Great to be here with you. Thank you very much, Keith. Thank you, Ron.

I guess "It's an honor" is kind of a throw-away line, but I can't tell you how incredibly honored and happy I am to be able to come up here and honor someone who has played such a huge role in my life and the lives of so many people that I know. It's an honor to speak on behalf of the countless people, who over four decades, have benefited from Bob Feldman's mentoring and leadership.

Bob's had a brilliant career, as you probably can see by the bio in your program. Beginning at Burson-Marsteller, then he was a senior partner at Ketchum, then he was president and CEO of GCI, then he was the Head of Communications and Corporate marketing at DreamWorks SKG and of course, for the past decade, he's been the founder and partner of a very successful digital management consulting firm, PulsePoint Group.

On top of those all-consuming jobs, and you all know, you have jobs like that. They're 110% straight out. I think one of the big things that we're honoring tonight, and it is truly in the spirit of Betsy Plank, is that he made time to give back and mentor beyond his own workplace. By, among other things, teaching graduate-level courses at USC Annenberg, penning a regular advice column that many of you read in PR Week and serving on the board of a page society for many years, including most recently chairing their very, very successful annual meeting in Washington.

He's also led the development of the Page Learning Lab, which is an innovative online learning program, that's already attracted hundreds of people – will eventually reach thousands – about the newest things going on in our profession, and I think ultimately, that will be Bob's most enduring legacy as a mentor. In all of these roles, he coached, led, mentored and became lifelong friends with many of the most highly successful people in our field. And I'm very pleased many of you are here tonight, including Karen Strauss, Dale Bornstein, who's being honored tonight, Gary Grates, Anna Maria DeSalva, Aaron Kwittken, David Kyne, Grant Toups, and of course, his longtime business partner, Jeff Hunt, and Plank Board Member, Bill Heyman, among many others.

All of those folks know, as I do, that Bob brings out the best in you. I probably benefited from Bob's talent and generosity as much as anyone, and certainly for more years than anyone. This is a sentence I can't believe I'm about to say: I first met Bob 41 years ago in 1977 when he was a senior a Utica college in upstate New York and I was a freshman. He was the general manager of the radio...
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station. He was the news director of WPNR FM 90.7 on your dial. I was a reporter and the editorial cartoonist for the college paper.

That December – this stuff always happens when you go to a cold school – the college lost heat for a few days and the student union that housed the radio station was running at about 40 degrees inside, but Bob insisted on keeping the station open and continued broadcasting. In tribute to his fortitude and at the direction of my editor, I drew an editorial cartoon – again, back in 1977 – featuring a young Bob Feldman broadcasting the day’s news. He looked like this ... and the bubble was, "We have to take a break right now, if only because my teeth are frozen." I still have the cartoon.

Way back then, Bob was already as articulate a person as you're ever going to meet. Already a leader, best in his class, someone we looked up to, someone we tried to emulate. After college, Bob hired me at Burson and then hired me again at Ketchum, and we continue to work together on the Page Board.

I think everyone here knows that this field we have chosen, public relations and communications, is actually pretty intangible. What we deliver, what we sell is kind of hard to get your hands around. Kind of hard to explain to your parents or to anyone else. We ultimately deliver huge value, as you know, but it often takes to the very end of the process for you to be able to see the value and touch it, and be able to show it to someone. Consequently, my view is early on in our careers, we need role models to show us what we're here to do and how to explain it to other people – people who can teach us the lingua franca of the field that we're in, this very intangible field.

For many, many people, certainly for me, Bob was that person. He taught us the language. He showed us how to council clients, how to write a strategic program, how to pitch a new piece of business, how to conduct a staff meeting that's engaging in front of 150 people at Ketchum New York, how to deliver a speech in front of 350 people. "Oh, that's what it looks like when it's done really well." That was Bob for us.

In addition to being a role model, he's a world class mentor. And I think Bob does three things better than most. First, he expects a lot of you, but in a very certain way. You get the idea when you work with him that Bob thinks you're a winner, therefore, he treats you accordingly. As in, he expects your performance to be among the very best. I think a good coach is someone who occasionally says. "You could have done that better." Bob's a good coach, if you know what I mean.

Having said that, more than any other boss I ever had, I always walked away from a conversation with Bob, feeling better about my ability, more confident that I could do this business, and a compliment from him, never received all that frequently, meant all that much more when it was received.
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Second, and related, Bob sets a high standard for you and he sets a high standard for himself, which is why he's a sought-after counselor by senior management. He's smart, very smart, and he does his homework and expects you to do your homework. That extends right up until now when we're in Plank board meetings, where we all know Bob is going to show up and make important contributions, and he's also going to diplomatically challenge our thinking, especially if there are holes in it.

Third, he brings humor and humanity to everything he does. I'm not sure everyone gets to see this side of Bob, as I do, and I wish they did. Nobody cracks me up as much as Bob. He has a rapier wit, which is defined as a sharp intellect, making points so deadly, they're like a French rapier sword in fencing duels. There's nothing I enjoy more. Being able to laugh at situations and laugh at yourself is important, and good humor is part of good mentoring.

And then there's his humanity. Bob cares about you, as a person, not just as a colleague. I could tell you many, many stories of his kindness, warmth and generosity. The individuals he's helped, the organizations he's championed, that he has been a convener of so many communities, small and large. And of course, the pride he shows absolutely beaming, about his wife Susan and her latest entrepreneurial feats or his kids accomplishments or kvelling over his beautiful grandchildren – most recently, Nathaniel Brooklyn Feldman, born on August 30th.

Bob is a one-of-a-kind, class act, who's improved the lives of all of us fortunate enough to have known him. And I think nobody deserves the Plank Center Legacy Award more than my friend. Please join me in congratulating Bob Feldman.

Bob Feldman: Thank you, Rob. That was really, really touching, and I'm only sorry they limited you to four or five minutes. It also is, perhaps, the first time that somebody used the word kvelling in this room, much less a guy named Flaherty, so thank you.

I'm really, really flattered and honored. First, when I heard this, as you would imagine, I did a little bit of research and I looked at some of the past recipients of this award and people like Bill Neilson, – Bill is here today, who's been a role model of mine and somebody I've admired for many years – Pat Ford, Harold Burson. I started at Burson-Marsteller right out of college – I was there for 11 years.

When I was 20-something years old and moved to Westchester, I moved within a few blocks of Harold's house. The first person to come to my house when I moved there, was actually Harold and Betty. They came with a six pack of Coke and a bottle of champagne. I mean that says a lot – Harold Burson to some account supervisor Burson-Marsteller. So, really some remarkable people who I'm really honored have received this award. And then I'm almost doubly
flattered to be able to share the stage tonight with a couple of good friends, Bob Jimenez and Dale Bornstein. I just, again, hold these folks in remarkably high regard. I have deep admiration and affection for both of them, so it's particularly special to be here with them tonight.

I also kind of want to acknowledge, or kind of give a shout out to Bill Heyman. Bill is not only a good friend, Bill's been a friend of mine almost as long as Rob has, but Bill is the guy who kind of pushes me, at least, to always be better. And when it comes to mentoring and so forth, to have somebody who's a good friend but has always kind of encouraged you to bet better and do these kinds of things is inspiring, and it's fulfilling, and it's rewarding and it's great. So, Bill, thank you.

You know, I was thinking about what we all do for a living and, you know, we do whatever – PR or brand strategy, organization design, emanate, whatever it is. To me, the work – I mean I like the work, but honestly it kind of comes and goes, you get a client today, you lose a client tomorrow – but what's enduring are the relationships and the people you work with. And to me, what's inspiring about work, and at least how I view my career, is around talent management, because I think at the end of the day, every business – I don't care if it's a professional service firm, a manufacturing firm or any other kind of firm – it's all about talent management.

If you want to have success, if you want to have success at scale, it's about hiring and developing great people and giving them the little bit of help, but in some respects, as the cliché goes, get out of the way. That's what it's all about. That's where I get a tremendous source of pride. So, to see, for example, Rob come up here as the chairman of Ketchum and to see the remarkable success he had, is really very, very touching.

And I look at some of my friends who are here tonight, Anna Maria DeSalva, who as one of the most senior communications executives in our field, is also one of the only communications executives in our field who sits on the board of a public company.

Aaron Kwittken – Aaron and I have been friends for, again, a long time. I guess this is what happens when you get old, you just kind of get ... But I don't take the friendship aspect of the years for granted. Aaron and I worked together a long time, then he went off and started his own business and did remarkably well.

Grant Toups – I hired Grant out of USC to come into Pulse Point Group out of the grad program not that long ago, today he runs our company.

The ability to kind of see people like that do so well and succeed, that's where the kvelling comes in. And it's not even limited to the professional side – it's also
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on the personal side as well. I mean, to see my daughter Jackie's here tonight. She's done unbelievably well. She's in business school right now, getting her MBA. She's got a great job lined up next year in the investment banking group at Goldman Sachs.

My son couldn’t be here tonight, he's a lawyer. We’re going to see him in three weeks, Susan and I are going to see him. This is unbelievable – he's arguing a case in three weeks before the United States Supreme Court.

Yes, give it up for him.

Our daughter, Kimmy is in New York, has a very successful career in marketing. My contribution to all of these folks is pretty limited, but the ability to kind of just watch and see that kind of growth, to me, that's what a life well lived is all about. The work is work, but to kind of see people do so well and succeed, and to know maybe you just helped a little bit, is really remarkable.

So, for that, I thank the Plank Center for the award and I would just kind of encourage all of us to not only keep doing what we're doing, but as Bill does for me, we do for everyone else, and that is encourage others to do that as well. So, thank you very much.

Karen Strauss:  
Good evening everyone, I’m Karen Strauss, and I run strategy and creativity at Ketchum. I think I've done that for something like 1,000 years. To mentor is to affirm, and I can think of no one more affirming than Dale Bornstein, who I’m so very, very honored to affirm this evening. After Eva Berring, my effusive fourth grade creative writing teacher, nobody ever told me I was talented and creative more often or more sincerely than Dale did and continues to do. And with Dale's unique brand of heartfelt support and just-in-time tutelage, she made me and now so many hundreds of other protégés, many in the room tonight, appreciate themselves and believe in themselves. And that’s really one of Dale’s greatest gifts.

In a sometimes-Darwinian business, Dale doesn’t just create survivors, she creates strivers and thrivers for life. What's especially heartwarming to me about my professional relationship with Dale, is that I actually started out as her boss, hiring her into this profession – I’m not sure if I should apologize – and over time, as she actually got to be a big shot, she became my boss. And in both roles, first as my trainee, enduring what was then a rather aggressive red pen, as she always reminds me, and later, as my coach and, if I’m to be honest, occasional therapist, always reminding me to bring inventive solutions, not problems. She always made work fun, and funny, and collaborative and a thing of love.

And perhaps the idea of love in the workplace between two grown women seems unprofessional, but I really do love Dale, because she treats all people, in
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all kinds of circumstances, with compassion and empathy. She always provides constructive criticism with a very big heart and good intentions, always. And often times completes a directive or a suggestion, with "I love you." And in the rough and tumble environment of client expectations, staff right sizing, PNL management, a little love goes a very, very long way. And boy did we love our collaborations.

Regardless of who had the titular role of boss at the time, together, we slaved over, mark my words, Mat features about robotics and auto mechanics, for a vocational school. We sweet-talked the former Mets player Bobby Ojeda and singer Bobby Brown, to perform absolutely free of charge at a client charity event. We staged a headline-grabbing marriage between a hot dog and a model we dubbed the marriage of food and fashion to launch a themed restaurant. We’re proud of this, mind you. And we concocted the Chloe Trimeton allergy season index, which predicted, low and behold, year after year, it was the worst allergy season ever. What do you know. Legendary work.

I believe that excellent mentors inspire creativity, risk taking and being your best self, and working alongside Dale always guaranteed that trifecta. I was never so brave, so imaginative and so proud as when Dale was my everyday mentor and muse. Dale’s mentoring magic has lifted up many, many friends and colleagues, and their messages of gratitude mirror my own. And I don’t have time to share many of them, but I’d like to a few.

Linda Etherton, who’s in the room – wave Linda – who’s a brilliant food and nutrition counselor said, "Dale is the whisperer who kept me from losing my way from time to time. Her tender care and inspiration always kept me focused and fresh. Dale was far more than a mentor, she was an advocate. I wish everyone could take the Dale Bornstein leadership class – what a lovely world it would be."

And Kelley Skoloda, who was a masterful head of our brand marketing practice – Kelley, raise her hand. She said, "Dale was my woman-tor, championing a balance of career and family that let me progress in my career, while still spending time with my husband and children."

And Adriana Giuliani, who now goes by AG, a former Ketchumite, who’s now Dale’s creative director at M Booth said, "Dale is the Red Bull of mentors, she gives you wings. She will never necessarily give you the answer, but she is masterful at leading you to the questions you should be asking."

So, this evening, it is with absolutely deep admiration, and affection for honoree Bob Feldman and presenter Rob Flaherty, who were also my beloved bosses back in the day. But this evening I lift my red pen to Dale Bornstein, who has made an indelible mark on my life and on the lives of so many other people,
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who strive and thrive today thanks to her. Thank you, Dale, I will love you, always.

Dale Bornstein: Alright, wow, this is a really overwhelming and emotional evening and Karen, thank you. You, too, are the embodiment of what tonight is all about. You have nurtured me as friend and mentor for more than 30 years, and I don't know if there's any way I can really say thank you. So, thank you.

It is truly an honor to be here and among those recognized tonight by the Plank Center. And it's humbling, because I know how many great leaders and mentors there are in our industry. Many of them are here tonight, including those sitting at my table and those just here in the audience. And I do have to give shout outs. PBL, and Kelley, and Linda, and Linda, and Paul, Denise, and Margi, Bill and Lisa Ryan. Rob, Bob, I'll get to you guys. So many in this room, I feel very, very fortunate.

For what it's worth, I have found myself following in the footsteps of Feldman, Flaherty and Strauss, and they always take a lot of time ahead of me. I'm just being really, really honest, right? But, for most of my career, these three lifelong mentors, industry leaders and most importantly, really good friends have had a profound impact on my life. And it's not often that you get a public platform like this to just say thank you, so thank you. I also owe a big thank you to Margi Booth, and we'll get to that, too. If they were chapter one, she's chapter two. And I thank you Margi. And Bob, a huge congratulations on your well-deserved award. Tonight is really, really special.

Okay, so, Betsy Plank was certainly onto something and there's nothing more meaningful or inspiring, I think, than the generosity and reciprocity of mentorship. It is one of the most gratifying ways to give back, certainly for me, and when someone calls me a mentor, I consider that the ultimate compliment and privilege. My experience has been, that the best mentor/mentee relationships grow organically through trust and respect and mutual admiration. And they are fueled through inspiration, aspiration and real modeling. Yes, real modeling. That's a term I heard for the first time this year, and it was Shaq, of all people, who said it. Can you believe I'm quoting Shaq? Okay, so, he talked about being a real model, not a role model. His point was simply this – why should you play a role when it's so much more impactful to just be real. And that struck a deep chord for me.

If you know me, you know I've always believed in being true to yourself and your values, and helping to teach others to do the same. More than ever, our world needs real models. We should marry our actions with our words, lead authentically and take the time, really take the time, to mentor those who matter most in our lives.
Mark Twain once said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you figured out why." Well, years ago, Rob Flaherty said something to help me get closer to figuring out the why. He said, and I'm paraphrasing, so don't come and correct me, Rob. Alright? Okay. "As an agency leader, we aren't just in the business of client service. We are in the business of helping others be the best that they can be, build their careers, families and livelihoods.” And that really stuck with me.

Then, when I joined M Booth, Margi showed me the power of a culture where people pursue their passions. We encourage our folks to get out into the world, be curious, be adventurous, take some risks and check off that bucket list. Heck, we even fund grants for that. And why? Because that just makes them so much better. They're inspired, enriched with new experiences, new insights that they can then share with their colleagues and clients to help them be the best that they can be. And isn't that all what this is really all about?

So, as someone who has always prioritized people first, the opportunity to coach, inspire, to just make a difference, is really the reason I get out of bed in the morning. And from the day I started in this business to today, I have been the lucky beneficiary of the wisdom and friendship of certainly many folks in this room, who I'd call the best of the best. You have always been there to give me courage, confidence and perspective, and I am forever grateful.

And now as I watch my 13-year-old son grow up and navigate the complex world we live in, I hope that he too, will find great mentors. People who believe in him and encourage him to keep climbing. "Real Models," who lead with their heart as much as their head. So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you again Plank Center for this tremendous honor. It means the world to me. And let's all keep climbing.

Nadia Felder: So, I'm going to be a millennial and read my speech off my phone. You can tweet that with #PlankMentor.

Good evening, everyone. My name is Nadia Felder. Tonight, I have the pleasure of introducing the emerging leader award to a young man – Oh, I'm going to cry – to a young man who I have admired since my freshman year in college. But don't be fooled by my haircut, I graduated six months ago. Seriously. My dean is over there – wave dean. Thanks. Nonetheless, the two things that I learned ... I know, I put her on the spot. Nonetheless, the two things that I learned from college at Florida A&M University were one, drink lots of coffee before 8 a.m. and two, find a good mentor. So, I bought a Keurig for Christmas and I started on the search.

I quickly realized that having mentors is like having socks – you can never have too many. You could never have too many who admire you, who guide you and tell you what you shouldn't wear. So, I started asking everyone to be my mentor
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– every professor, almost every woman and anyone who was old enough to be my mom. Sorry, dean.

The crazy thing is Eric Winkfield didn't fit any of those categories. He was obviously a man, he was never my professor and he's probably old enough to be maybe be my brother, but Eric and I have a different relationship. Because of him, I learned there are two types of mentors. One, an intentional mentor – one who directly seeks to inspire someone and make them better. Then there's an unintentional mentor – one who inspires an individual without being conscious of it. To this day, here's a fun fact, I've never asked Eric Winkfield to be my mentor. "Why is she on the stage then?" Right? But I'm here because Eric is my unintentional mentor.

I did some researching last night – Google is obviously where I got my degree from – and I looked up what unintentional mentor in Africa meant. Google told me the African-Swahili phrase for unintentional mentor is unbuntu. Unbuntu, translated, means I am because you are. When I got to watch Eric graduate top PR student of his class, unbuntu. I am because you are. When I saw the strength it took him to finish grad school and be the first in his family to do so, unbuntu. I am because you are. When Eric told me he had to cancel his homecoming plans because his president at Pepco asked if he could stay in town to save a project, unbuntu. I am because you are. And tonight, as I witness Eric become the first HBCU award winner for the Emerging Leader award, presented by the Plank Center for Leadership and Public Relations, unbuntu. I am, literally, here because you are.

The bottom line is every single time you, Eric, break another barrier in life, in your career, I know I can wake up and do the same. Because I was able to watch you shine, I, too, was the first in my family to go to college, graduate with five internships, a 3.7 GPA and two job opportunities before I even graduated. That was a shameless plug. And oh, by the way, you didn't let me finish, but I also got the top PR student of my class, too.

So, Eric, thank you so much for just being humble. He always eats humble pie by the way, that's our joke. Literally, last night, someone asked him, "Why are you in Chicago?" He said, "Oh, I'm just here for the dinner." I said, "No ma'am, put his slice of humble pie down, he's here because he's getting awarded. Let me please assure you." But again, thank you for being humble, hard-working, God fearing, all of that, I see. And because of you, I'm able to shine and truly be myself, and the best version of myself every single day.

With that, before I ask you to come to the stage, will you please stand up. I'd like to ask you a question I've been wanting to ask since my freshman year. You ready? Will you officially be my mentor?

Eric, come on and get your award.
Eric Winkfield: Wow. Ladies and gentleman, you never know the impact that you have on people just being yourself. Thank you, Nadia, again, for the wonderful introduction.

Ladies and gentleman, I’m extremely proud of the young professional that she has become. I was just being myself. I was working hard. I was showing folks what to do along the way and she was just there, just grasping everything, listening and learning how to do what I did. And did not think that it would amount to the way she described me tonight, but again, you never know the impact you’re having on people’s lives just by being your full and authentic self.

So, I’m truly proud of the professional she is today, all that she’s accomplished and it is my privilege and honor to be somebody that she looks up to and admire. I truly believe that, it’s just as simple as being present, being dynamic in your own right, then watching the seed continue to grow. So, can you all please join me in giving Nadia a hand?

Before I go any further, I would like to give honor where honor is due. I am joined tonight by my beautiful mother, Yolanda Davis, who is over here to my right. She is also joined by my new stepfather of two months, Benny Davis, who’s here as well.

A little background about myself – growing up, my mother sacrificed a lot to provide me the opportunities and the ability to be here before you today. My mother, who has worked countless hours to raise me all on her own. We did have the support of our communities, my church, friends, neighbors and godparents, but when it came to providing the bread and the butter, paying for opportunities, paying for me to do things to really expand my mind, my mother sacrificed countless hours. And I am the man that I am today because of the sacrifices, the love and support that she is giving me day in and day out. So, can you just please join me in giving her a hand?

So, I’ll continue by saying this award is definitely a humbling experience for me. I don’t do what I do, I don’t reach back out to other folks just to get to be seen or for the accolades. I do so simply because it’s the right thing to do. So many people, countless mentors that I’ve had in my careers, through jobs, through folks who I’ve met at a PRSSA National Convention, through a National Black Public Relations Association Convention, just while I’ve been out in the community, out in our industry networking, have poured so much into me. And I think it’s robbery if somebody is invested in so much to keep that to yourself.

So, what I do is I make it my mission and my purpose, and every day I get up – I find out, I ask myself, how can I be that same light to someone else? And if you don’t take anything else from my message this evening, I want you to constantly ask yourself, how can you be that light, how can you be that trigger, how can you be that motivation for somebody, a young professional, an older
professional or anybody around you? We all have the power to do so. It's something that's so simple, it's just a matter of being intentional about it.

Everyone in this room has something to offer someone, whether you believe it or not. Sometimes, for young professionals, it's a matter of reaching back and saying hey, telling them they are doing a great job, it's going to be okay, you do not have to have all the answers right now, because guess what? Neither did you when you were in their shoes as well. So, just that reassuring word of encouragement can go a long way in a young professional’s life. It can be as simple as taking five minutes of your day to review a resume, and saying, "You should put this, you should talk about this a little bit more, you should really color this section of your resume in." Again, can go a long way in a young person’s life.

Something that resonates with them can make them get up and say they too can be because you were. There are people in your offices, communities or even your very own table that can gain something from your life's story or your career story. We must share, we must cultivate the spirit of transparent mentorship. Again, transparent mentorship. A lot of times, we're so excited to talk about things we've done well, but we're afraid to talk about the things that we failed at, of those serious lessons we needed to learn. And those very lessons and those very stories are what our next generation of communicators need to know so that they do not make the same mistakes.

I want to encourage you to be bold. Encourage bold thinking to be around you. They're going to be sometimes where some folks come to you bring ideas that you would think are totally crazy. I want you to try to embrace those and try to understand them, try to harness them. Increase access to opportunity.

So, Nadia said I'm the first one right here to receive this award from a Historically Black College or University, HBCU. HBCUs in our country are quality programs who have such rich and diverse talent. Understand what are some of the local community HBCU's in your own area, in your own back yard and understand where are those communication students and how can you engage them, and how can you open their mind up to different opportunities.

I bet you that when you go speak to those students, you'll be the first executive, the first person of your caliber who they will even meet. And the thing is, when they see you, when they see your role, when they hear your story, you make it real for them that they, too, can do what you do.

Educate and cultivate diverse talent. We love and we love and embrace the conversation of diversity, but do we do the same thing with the conversation of inclusion? I want to challenge you to continue to have those inclusive conversations with your teams, with your young mentees, with your younger peers in your offices, because the conversation of inclusion is what's really going
to make us and drive a much more diverse, a much broader and much more powerful industry.

Before I take my seat, I'd like to just give one piece of advice for young professionals in the room, as well. Be open and teachable at all times. It's amazing to have great ideas, innovative thoughts and new ways of doing things, but try to first understand the process that was already put in place to its fullest self. And understand that those folks who have been in their careers for 20, 30, 40, 50 years, they've been there and they're there for a reason. They've sustained a long career for a reason, so be able to listen to them and take those nuggets, so you can be able to do the same thing.

In the reverse for you all who do have those 20-, 30-, 40- or 50-year experiences, do not be afraid to share those authentic experiences with young people who are trying, who see you and who want to emulate what they see.

I would like to thank my support system who are here tonight. If all of my supporters, my old professors, my old colleagues, my mentors, can you all please stand with me for a real quick second? So, Chad, Dianna, I want to call you out. Clarissa, Cindy, Cindy, please stand. Gene and everybody who I've not been able to mention, Dr. Kimbro in the back, thank you all so much. I am, to my mentees point, because you are. You all have pushed me. You all have challenged me. Clarissa's laughing because she knows she worked me extremely hard. But it's because of your challenges and your push and motivation is the reason why I'm here today. You saw potential, and you harnessed that for greatness, and I will forever be in your debts because you all have just really changed my whole narrative.

So, I started out, before I went to FAMU, just a kid from Miami, who just wanted to do something in PR. I went to Florida A&M University, I met Dr. Kimbro. Dr. Kimbro asked me what did I want to do, I said I want to be a single level communication executive for a Fortune 500 company. She asked me, "How did you want to get there?" Well, the way I get there is I have to have an agency internship, I have to work in-house, I have to do X, Y and Z. She said, "Great, you have a plan, let me start connecting you with some folks who can help work your plan on that level."

She connected me with a FAMU alum who worked at Edelman who found the internship opportunity that got me in the door. From there, that made me attractive to other internship like NBC Universal, BowStern Marketing Communications and the Florida A&M University dean’s office of communication, as well, and from those opportunities, I then met my family from West Virginia University who saw me in my role with PRSSA – so those students, be involved in PSSA, I'm looking at you – involved so heavily to the
point that I was a national officer, the first one from my university to serve at that level.

From there, I met Ms. Tina, I met Chad, I met Dianna and then they saw me, they saw a talent there and they offered me an opportunity to study at the graduate level at West Virginia University, one of the greatest IMC programs in the country. I'm saying hey, we're good. Through that experience, it's opened up my mind, allowed me to understand strategy at a deeper level, that continue to make me ready for an entry-level job. To be able to have the opportunities by Ms. Clarissa Taylor, who saw my talent at a very young age, my sophomore year at college might I add, and just constantly talk to me, reply to the emails, reply to me saying, "Hey, this is what I'm working on, what are your thoughts on this?" and giving me candid feedback on my projects I was working on, really helped me and really made me qualified. We built a relationship and I was able to work for her on her team.

To be working for her for just one year, for the company to recognize the potential that I had, to promote me to a public affairs role, doing public policy, external affairs, community outreach, to being right here tonight with you all saying that I am the 2018 Emerging Leader for the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations.

So, with that, I want to thank the Plank Center for honoring me. Keith, thank you so much. Dr. Gower, thank you so much, because it is truly a life changing, a story changing, opportunity for me. And something that, again, folks who are looking at my story, who are looking at me back at Florida A&M University, at West Virginia University and other schools around, they'll say, "Because Eric did, I can too."

So, with that I want to thank you all again. Thank you so much for your time, and it's been a pleasure.

Cheryn Robles: Good evening, I'm here this evening to introduce Cathy Rogers, who is the 2018 recipient of the Bruce Berger Education award. Doctor Rogers serves as the Shawn M. Donnelley professor for non-profit communications at Loyola University in New Orleans. I met Dr. Rogers, I can't compare to some of the earlier speakers, but I met her more than 20 years ago, when I was working in a communication's department at Leola University in New Orleans. I was a work study student, and she was the Public Relations Sequence Chair.

Now at that time, when students started at Loyola, they had a couple years of introduction classes. So before you decided if you were going into broadcast, or journalism, or Public Relations, you had all the basic courses. I had grown up always wanting to be a writer, to be a journalist. But one day, we were sitting in the office, and we were talking and Dr. Rogers walked in, we were talking about what sequence we were going to choose because it was getting very close to
the time to choose what sequence. And she helped me realize that a good journalist will be very balanced, and present a story in an unbiased way, but that in public relations, you can be passionate. I have a tendency to get really riled up about things.

So whether it’s being passionate about where the best pizza place is in town, or whether it’s about the environment or women’s equality, she was the one that helped me realize that if I went into public relations, I could use that passion as an asset. So I would be able to use that to grow, and also, it was the beauty of having Dr. Rogers that in many times, you don't even realize you're learning a life lesson from her.

So whether it’s sitting in class, and I distinctly remember being in class and her teaching us how to have a good power point presentation, which still some people don't understand how to do. Or if it was something she didn't know it was necessarily a life lesson, but it was really valuable. Like in terms of group management and team work, I distinctly remember telling a story about how sometimes if your spouse may open the door in a really loud way, and that drives you crazy. So rather than wait to that point as a good leader, you can take the moment, and you can talk to the other people on your team. Those little lessons, she wasn't being obnoxious, or being whatever, it was super helpful to see this little thing and how it can make you a better leader.

So early in my career, I had a lot of conflict with a supervisor. So much so, that I was considering just getting out of the business entirely. So, I called her because she knows everyone in New Orleans who does public relations, to try to get a connection with someone, and instead of helping me just connect with someone, she actually talked to me, and counseled me on how to bring up to the senior management that there was an issue.

After the conversation, once I got up the courage, I did go to the senior management, and I was able to get the conflict resolved, and she had told me, one of the things that she had told me, is that having relationship with people who are really unpleasant, is going to be a really great asset in life. And I did not understand at the time, but now I work in politics, so it is so helpful to just understand and appreciate that working with difficult people, and trying to negotiate conflict and doing conflict resolution, and mediation is a really valuable life skill.

So Cathy lays the foundation for success in each and every student that she has, and once she’s been your professor, she’s the biggest cheerleader. She can make you feel like the most important person she’s ever taught, and it’s really easy to forget that she’s had student who were press secretaries at the White House. Not this administration, the other one. And also headed public relations firms at Atlantic Records, run marketing campaigns for FedEx, and she has numerous students who run their own public relations agencies that are award-
winning. She should probably start collecting endorsement fees for some of the
descriptions she gives for former students, but she also has an amazing
memory.

I was on the PRSA Bateman team in 2001, and tonight we’re talking about how
she remembers that we came in second, and if you were there earlier tonight, I
met ... Xavier University I can't remember your first name, sorry. But we met her
tonight, and she started talking, I’m looking at you right now, sorry. She started
talking about our public relations team, and it's just like ... She makes you feel ...
If you're spending time with her, she makes you feel like you're the most
important person, like you know so much, and I don't even want to speak
anymore, because I don't want anyone to change their opinion, because she just
gave me this great introduction. And she does it to all of her students too.

I was talking to some of my friends on my way before we came up here, and
everyone was like, “Oh, you should say this, and oh, you should say that.” And
I'm like, oh, you only have three minutes. And I know I'm going over, sorry.

There's a Maya Angelou quote, "At the end of the day people won't remember
what you said, or did, but they'll remember how you made them feel." And this
is one of the qualities that Dr. Rogers has that I really hope to emulate, and I
hope that you all will, too.

On a personal note ... Well, we live in New Orleans, I'm actually from California
originally, and you know how a significant milestone romantic relationship is
bringing over a spouse to meet your parents? I'm sorry, bringing a boyfriend or
girlfriend to meet your parents. Well since my parents don't live in New Orleans,
Dr. Rogers does that role for me. So it's only on very few occasions that I felt
comfortable to actually introduce someone to her. Every year she hosts the
PRSA Holiday party, and it's the place where, even if I don't see anyone for years
and years, it's at her house where everyone is happy to be there, and happy to
be together. And I always aspire to have someone that I like enough to bring
and introduce to her.

She treats us more like family, and we've actually even incorporated, tonight,
her husband Danny is with her tonight. He has just retired as a state trooper and
he has been enlisted as part of this mentorship program, because before we buy
houses, we have Danny go and check to make sure the neighborhood is safe.

So, I'm the accreditation chair for the New Orleans Chapter PRSA, and there's an
ebb and flow in public relations professionals, who are interested in getting
their accreditation. But when I became the accreditation chair for our chapter, I
made a decision that my goal was going to be to get every public relations
professor in New Orleans to become accredited. More specifically, I wanted the
best public relations professor in New Orleans to become accredited. So it was a
real treat last year when, after I had reminded her for a couple years and
emailed her and mentioned it at lunch. Then when I saw her at dinner and at
the grocery store, I encouraged her to start the process, which is very
rewarding.

So last year, at the PRSA banquet, I finally had the opportunity to present Dr.
Rogers, who had been my mentor for so long with her APR pin, and it was a real
treat.

So with that, please let me introduce you to Dr. Cathy Rogers.

Dr. Cathy Rogers:

Thank you Cheryn for that introduction and thank you to the Plank Center, and
to the board for selecting me. I'm especially grateful that you selected someone
from a small liberal arts college, whose work is focused on undergraduates.
Undergraduates, as you all know, show amazing promise, but they also face
incredible challenges and struggles, and anxieties about their career path and
lots of other things.

To be honest, the most satisfying part of my job, is mentoring students in and
out of the classroom, and after they graduate. When I first got the call from
John Devaney that I was being recognized, I was really overwhelmed. How
gratifying to be recognized for the very favorite part of your job, right? So thank
you again. But the first thing that came to mind, was my first mentor as an
undergraduate. So I invite all of you to think about mentors or advisors you had
when you were first an undergraduate. And I was a freshman in an English
Freshman composition class, and my English professor recognized my writing
ability, even though I was a dental hygiene major. Yes, believe it or not, and
encouraged me to write for the campus weekly newspaper.

Well, I did, and about a year later, Dr. Roseanne Osborne recruited me to be the
editor of the campus paper, and encouraged me to change my major, thank
goodness. From dental hygiene, to English and journalism. What a life changing
milestone and mentoring moment that was.

Dr. Osborne also encouraged me to pursue my Master's Degree, and my PhD.
You really never know how influential one conversation can be with a young
person.

I also want to thank my students. My students inspire me every day, in and out
of the classroom, and even after they graduate, even more after they graduate.
As Cheryn just said, after almost 30 years of teaching, she encouraged me to get
my APR. So, I want to say, I really believe in reverse mentoring. We've talked
about mentoring tonight, but I want to encourage all of you to think about and
go to reverse mentoring if you haven't already. And with that, I want to say
again to the Plank Center Board, and to all of you mentors out there, thank you
very much.

The Plank Center
For Leadership in Public Relations
Well, good evening everybody, it's a pleasure to be here, and I'm so honored that my good friend and former boss Bob Jimenez, has asked me to come here and speak for hopefully under three minutes. I'm going to do my best. I think I first met Bob, around 2004-2005, this would have been right before the first I quit Cox Communications, or Cox Enterprises. I think he had been named director, senior director, something like that at the CorpCom function at the parent company. Mind you, that was the head of the function, as the recruiters in this room know, they've never been guilty of title inflation at that company.

Today, Bob's the SVP of CorpCom, and many other things of the company. Overseeing travel, corporate giving, administrative services and so on. But I want to talk to you about Bob, just through my lens. I worked for him for about five years, and I've known him ever since then. There's something about a person like Bob Jimenez in the room, in your company. And sometimes...you see someone with his last name, his heritage, his fluency of Spanish, and his ability to navigate through a company that sends a signal. It sends a signal to other people in the company that, this place could be a very good place for me too. So that was the first signal I got from Bob when I worked with him, and for him.

So, I'll tell you about a couple of experiences, and quickly get him on stage.

So, it was in my early 30s when Bob actually hired me back into the Cox organization. Which was great, I had only been gone a year, this was my first, what I believed to be my first senior role, and I know this because my office had a lot of window panes. It was the big enough office that you could put a meeting desk... I'm sorry, a table in there. I thought I had done well for myself. I had been very aggressive in the cable division, I'd even done a stint in Hollywood, but very quickly I realized being at the holding company of a major successful company that I was a bit of a pit bull in a China Shop, right?

I realized very quickly, that as a team, if we were going to help Cox reach its growth goals, and its reputational goals, that I would have to find a balance. And I would need to understand that nuance of persuasion with diplomacy and being effective. And how to sell your ideas, one by one.

So I really did slow down, I really did listen to Bob, to model some of his behaviors, to learn patience, and I didn't even realize in the beginning that he was mentoring me by asking questions all the time. He wasn't one to give directives, and give recommendations. He really listened. And I think everyone in this room who knows, and I appreciate how Bob Feldman and others have brought up his name already. He's just very classy. I think everybody who knows him, knows that he's that kind of guy.

I remember my first week working for him, I was running around the building, keeping up with him to meet people, and he's the kind of guy that picks up a piece of trash right next to the elevator. That he knew every security guard's
name. Then after a while, I realized that there was so many people coming and going out of his office. Not just from Cox, but from other places. And I realized that over time, he was a mentor and a coach to many people besides me, besides members of my team. He really made himself available to a lot of people.

So it's interesting that, maybe by coincidence, just a few weeks ago in New York City, I was attending a diversity conference, it called NAMIC in the TV cable space. And I met a Cox executive, I'd never met her before. Very striking woman, big smile, she's African-American, her name is Joy Eva Philpot and when she was introduced to me, and knew what I did at Cox in a past life, she said, "Oh, do you know Bob?" I said, "I sure do, I work for him."

Her eyes lit up, and she volunteered right away how she had been to his office to get advice on how to navigate the culture, understand the business there, on many occasions. So I realized, really wasn't such a coincidence to run into her, and to talk about Bob, because his influence was really, truly far reaching and wide. And I realized that, not just from my experience, but I think from so many other stories I could tell you, and it's really been eight years, I think since I worked at Cox, he's still on my call list.

He's the person that I call for career advice. Should I restructure this way? Should I do it that way? Should I hire this guy? You name it. At the end of the day, we talk a lot about the people that we trust, and of course, I think the world of him, and I care about him, and I think it's just so important that you have, in this corporate life, people that you can just be yourself with, and really have those relationships that go long past the corporate world, and the reporting structure.

Without any further ado, I'm so excited as my colleague and friend to bring him up, Bob Jimenez, for the John "Jack" Koten Corporate Award.

Bob Jimenez: Wow. (Spanish)

No, that's not your wine speaking to you at the moment. It's a Spanish proverb actually, that means, tell me who you walk with. Tell me who you hang out with, and I'll tell you what kind of person you really are. And I've had the good fortune of being able to walk with some pretty amazing people in my life.

Andre Van Niekerk is one of those individuals. Upon learning that I had been denied admission to a graduate school of my choice, he picked up the phone, gave me a call, and he says, "This is how this is going to work." He said, "I've already made an appointment with the dean of admissions, I'm going to pick you up in five minutes, I'll tell you the rest on the way there." I say, who is this?
Later on, fast forward, we were sitting in the dean of admissions office, and there he was, talking about me. Really just chastising this poor dean of admissions about the terrible decision they had made, and why they needed to accept me into their program. And he proceeded to go on and say, "He needs to be accepted immediately, right now."

Well, that didn't happen, but it did happen the very next day. Carolyn Gosselin, she's another amazing person in my life. When I started in that graduate school, I was fortunate enough to be paired with Carolyn, who was running the local WNR PR firm in Orlando, which is where I went to grad school. She took me under her wing. She introduced me to this marvelous world of public relations. I credit her for that. And here I am, almost 30 years later, after just an amazingly rewarding career, and fulfilling career in this wonderful thing that we get to do.

Andre changed my life. Carolyn changed my life, and that's because mentoring changes lives. That's the bottom line.

I want to thank the Plank Center so much for this recognition, for those who nominated me, you know who you are. I think I know who you are. I'd like to thank my family, they weren't able to be here tonight. They're my foundation, but my kids are in final rehearsals for their school's production of The Lion King. My son is in the role of Scar, and my daughter's a dancing lioness, so they needed to be there tonight. But they truly are essential in my life. And there was a couple of people here, who really made an effort to be here as well. And I really want to recognize them as well.

The first one is absolutely the best friend that anyone could ever imagine having, and she is a PR pro in her own right. Leading communications for some amazing brands, like Auto Trader, and Kelley Blue Book, my dear friend Shirley Powell. Thank you for being here from Atlanta. And Bobby, my gosh, that introduction, it was too much. All I can say about you my friend, is I'm just too proud, SVP of communications of Univision, wow. Or Univision is the right way to say it. Just so impressive, and here's the thing about that, Bobby. The best is yet to come for you my friend.

Thank you all so very much, to my fellow honorees this evening, congratulations, and thank you so much again.

Bill Dawson: Hi everyone, I'm Bill Dawson with Tenneco, I'm excited to be here tonight. You may notice I'm not wearing my jacket, I left it on my back of my chair. Only problem with that, it's my chair in my office about an hour away. But I was excited to be here, I couldn't wait to get here.

I've had the pleasure of knowing Gregg Sherrill for more than 20 years. He and I met when he joined the management team at Johnson Controls, that was a product of a long time ago, if you read his bio in the book there, he left Ford
Motor company a long career with Ford, and came to a large supplier, and that wasn't something most people did in those days, but when he was there, that's when I first saw him as a mentor. He brought with him a lot of business knowledge and a lot of technical expertise. He mentored his staff and his colleagues there as well. He had a unique style, and I got to know that right away with Gregg, because I asked him, "What are you reading lately Gregg." Or, "Read any good books?", and he responded "Well, yes, Durant's 11 volume story of civilization, for the second time." And that's a true story.

Gregg has been a mentor throughout the time I have known him, he's mentored students at the university where he got his MBA at the Kelly School of business in Indianapolis. I would go there with him many times, and I watched him talk to the students, talk about the importance of leadership, talk about what it means to be a CEO and practicing great communications. He was everything you want in a mentor. He was generous, he was authentic. He was always willing to spend time with people who wanted to follow in his path, and at that school, that's who he had. He had an audience of people that he sat in that audience years ago, people that want to be a CEO, and they had one right there, and he was sharing his time, and sharing his stories, and his knowledge.

Over these years, I've also had the privilege to spend time with Gregg's family. His four daughters, his son, and as I've gotten to know them, I see once again, and probably the best example of all of his communication, his mentorship, his leadership. Because you just don't get a family like that without that. So Gregg, it's my honor now, to present the Plank Center Executive Mentor award for 2018. Someone I've been lucky enough to call my CEO, my boss, my friend, Gregg Sherrill.

Gregg Sherrill: Well, thank you Bill. It has been 20 years, I hate saying that, but, we've known each other a long time. I'm going to divide brief remarks into two sections tonight, mentoring and public relations. Even though they get intertwined. And I am standing here possibly as the only non-professional public relations person in the crowd, I think. So that may make you a little nervous if I'm going to talk about that, but ...

Mentoring first. For me, and I learned this from mentors, it's really an integral part of leadership in my view, done correctly. And it is more than a one way street. I know from my own experience, and I'm going back to my years as a young engineer at Ford Motor company. And assigned to work on, in the mid 1980's, programs with Mazda that Ford owned a certain percentage of, and we started doing some joint vehicle programs. And it was a strenuous time. It's a long trip to Hiroshima, Japan. You're tired all the time. I made 40 something trips in a three year period to Japan.

The culture clash, particularly in those days, was quite profound. There were corporate cultural differences between Ford and Mazda. There were certainly
Western/Japanese differences between the two, and at times it was exhausting and you felt like you were getting nowhere. I can still remember a simple thing that happened. Because the programs were exceedingly important, the senior management at both companies, Ford and Mazda. I was just a young engineering supervisor.

We had to make written reports after every meeting, which I did, but there was one executive Vice President at Ford, that always wanted a meeting. He did not want just a written report. Now an executive Vice President to me, you're talking about eight or ten levels different in the organization. I remember after a particularly tough set of meetings that we'd come back from Hiroshima, and he could see, I think, the frustration in myself, and we went on break, and we're out in the hall, and all of a sudden, this man's arm went around my shoulders. I looked down, it was him.

A little afraid I was about to get fired, but he said, "Have I ever told you about the time that I took on Toyota?" And he gave me an example of a frustration in his career, and that simple thing was like life lesson. I understand. And then other mentors I look back on, they almost always approached it with a question, "How would you deal with this, Gregg?" If you were presenting something, it's "Have you thought of this?" Which might mean, your idea might be stupid, have you thought of this?

But it was an interaction, and when I look back at that, and so many of them had not just professional influence, but life influence for me. I tried my best to integrate that in my own leadership style as I progressed up. And as CEO of a Fortune 500 global corporation, I don't know how many countries we operated in, over 20, I probably spent over half of my time outside of the United States for 10 years. I always did operational reviews out in the businesses, not back at the headquarters in Lake Forest. Mainly to get to see and know people at all levels of the organization. And no matter what country we were in, we would have all day long operational reviews. We would always go out to dinner at night, and that's where you got the one on one time with people. And could talk to them about what's going on, and how do you feel about the direction we're going?

I have to tell you, after 10 years of doing that, I could not tell you which of the two are the more important meetings. The all day long operational meeting, or the two or three hours of dinner at night with those same people. Getting to know them, and learning from them, and hopefully imparting some encouragement and that along the way.

Bill mentioned I have four daughters and a son. What he didn’t mention is, my four daughters are all between the ages of 36 and 42. My son is seven years old. He's probably the reason I retired when I did, because I thought in the natural scheme of things, he doesn't get his dad as long, as a lot of children do, but
what I can do is give him time now. That's my most important mentorship job in the world at this point. Is just to work and encourage him. My daughters have families of their own. My son has six nieces and nephews older than him, okay? One of them is ten years older than him. And he essentially has five mothers, okay. Which I have to apologize to him for someday, but our family works, and they're wonderful, and they, like others have said, are what ground me.

I was in a session a couple of years ago, and George Will was speaking, the conservative columnist for the New York times. That's almost like an oxymoron I think, but at any rate, you may have read some of this, because he wrote about it quite a bit back then, several years ago. About the difference in writing your resume, versus writing your obituary. Now that grabs your attention, sounds a little morbid at first, but then he explains it.

The things that you would write in your resume, which we spend so much of our lives worried about and doing, aren't always the important things. And just the other night, my wife said ... I've been a retired CEO now for a year and a half, a little over that. She said, "Do you miss it?" And I said, "You know what I miss?" I said I miss those dinners out in all those countries, including United States, and the people and talking to them, and learning about what was effecting them. Listening to what they're wanting to do to see Tenneco move forward and all of that." I said, "That I miss." And then that George Will thing kind of hit me. That's what I remember.

I didn't say I remember the quarterly results, the analyst meetings, all the things that I got to be careful because the shareholders do hold you accountable for, but it was more of the things you want in obituary, not resume, right? And that's something I think we all ought to think about, not in a morbid sense, obviously. Just in a values and quality sense.

Now, as the nonprofessional public relations person. I was blessed at Tenneco, with what I have said a hundred times at least, the finest public relations and communications department of a Fortune 500 company, and I mean that. Doesn't mean I know all 500 others, or 499, but I can't imagine them being any better. One of the things, as a CEO of a company, that you learn very, very quickly, is you're going to spend a huge percentage of your time communicating, internally, externally, all kinds of constituents, but you have to do it. You have to do it consistently. A lot of people are depending on you getting that right, in our case, 30,000 employees and their families, and you can't do it by yourself. And the respect I have, and they're here tonight. Some of them from the corporate headquarters are sitting at this table here. Of course globally they're not all here.

The leader during most of my time during that tenure, was Jane Ostrander and she cannot be here tonight. A former leader is here, Jim Spangler sitting back there. But the ability they had to help me stay consistent in messaging, creative
with the consistency, but still consistent. And keep internally, as much as it's possible, 30,000 people aligned on a single strategy, on a single goal. Which translates into externally, convincing investors, customers, banks, all of the constituencies out there, that you have a plan, you’re executing it, and the corporation is moving forward, in a very safe ... That is, immeasurably valuable. Your profession, is immeasurably valuable to many people. It’s a profession that I think everyone here can be very, very proud of.

I have the utmost respect for it. I, at times said my communications people were not just my right arm, but both arms, because I just had to spend so much time at it. Doesn't mean you don't spend time on other things, but that was so fundamental. I appreciate them, and tonight I thank them, because they probably ought to be standing up here with me, and I thank the Plank Center for this recognition and all tonight, but I truly want to leave with this group, one CEO’s feeling of the criticality, and how important to the success, not of me, but to an entire corporation. Our public relations and communications people, they were second to none. I thank them tonight, and I thank all of you, and I appreciate this very much.

Bridget Coffing:

Alright, good evening everyone, I’m Bridget Coffing, I’m vice chair of the Plank Center Board of Advisors, and it is my very, very distinct honor to introduce our final and very, very special award, as all of them are tonight, but the Betsy Plank Award. And I say special for two very important reasons.

First, because of the very unique, and very significant nature of the award in and of itself, and special because of the very great privilege that I have to introduce two people tonight to this stage. Our very highly distinguished 2018 award winner and honoree, Tom Burrell, founder of Burrell Communications, and Michelle Flowers, founder and CEO of Flowers Communications Group, who will bring Tom up and introduce him shortly. But I wanted to first just mention a couple important words about the significance of this award.

I think you would all know that it is named in honor of Betsy, clearly, and it really is intended to recognize, exemplary professionals who I can only say are in a class by themselves. Certainly everyone we’ve seen tonight, is just that as well. But this award is given only to those folks, who have demonstrated a lifetime commitment to mentoring. Who have had not only a profound impact on others, but in turn those others having nurtured relationships, and having fostered influences within their organizations, within their communities, within the profession as all.

I think it’s really important to note that is award, is not given out annually. And in point of fact, tonight is only the second time that this award has been bestowed. So it has only been conferred once, so tonight’s honoree, joins just one other in this category, and that was the noted Ralph Campagna, who was the founder and executive director of Chicago’s Off the Street club, and he was
awarded that in 2016. So a pretty rarefied group of two in this particular category.

Personally it is very, very meaningful for me to share the stage tonight with Tom and Michelle, because I personally intersected with both of them in my professional tenure at McDonald’s. I can only tell you that Tom's body of work is absolutely extraordinary. That his creative product has been nothing short of precedent setting and that his contributions, and I think this is important to the McDonald’s staff, and often from his own staff, were over time just incredibly gracious and very, very generous.

As it relates to Michelle, her pioneering work in the multi-cultural PR world, has been, I think a very distinguishing factor in her career. It’s absolutely true that when she started Flowers communications Group, agencies that worked in both the African-American, as well as the Hispanic communities, were unheard of at the time.

So I can only say that, along with Tom, she was banner carrier for such an important and significant effort that today is just so widely accepted. So, I would say that distinguished senior leader award of the Chicago PRSA Group, Michelle Flowers is the one to appropriately introduce and bring forth her friend, her mentor, and her colleague, Tom Burrell to share more about his story, and his journey as well. So, Michelle...

Michelle Flowers Welch: I had to bump tradition a little bit and enter on that side. Thank you Bridget for those very, very kind words.

Good evening. Tonight, I am honored to present the 2018 Betsy Plank Mentoring Award to Tom Burrell, whose mentorship played an important role in my career, and so many others who walked through the doors of Burrell Communications Group. I'm delighted to see Faith Ferguson here, McGhee Osee here, Leonard Jefferson here. We were all together and a part of one of Tom's classes, so I'm sure they can attest to the impact that he has had in their careers as well.

How appropriate that Tom is receiving the Betsy Plank Award, which, as Bridget stated is in a class by itself, just like Tom. Let me share a little bit more about our distinguished honoree.

Tom is the iconic visionary behind ground breaking, award-winning campaigns for such global brands as Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Crest, Tide, and many other brands. His pioneering philosophy that black people are not dark skinned white people. I will repeat that, black people are not dark skinned white people. Revolutionized the way advertisers marketed to African-Americans.
Milestones in Mentoring Gala Speeches  
Oct. 25, 2018 | Union League Club | Chicago, Ill.

Now, while Tom is typically known as an ad man, I've always professed that he's a trailblazer in Integrated Marketing Communications, or IMC. He recognized very early on, the symbiotic nature of advertising and public relations, and embraced, truly embraced whole-heartedly public relations as a part of the marketing mix.

Under Tom’s leadership, Burrell was among the first advertising agencies to from a public relations division, and later a promotion's division, giving them the powerful tools to create IMC campaigns. Fortunate for me, I was brought in as one of the chief architects for Burrell public relations, and worked directly with Tom to build the division.

Tom modeled what I wanted to become. A successful, principled entrepreneur, who nurtured great talent. Conversations with him were mentoring sessions, and he shared wisdom and insight, that shaped my professional development.

I remember one particular situation, when a client on the advertising side ... And Tom, I know you will remember this, because they dramatically cut their creative and media budgets, and the client was in danger of leaving the agency. Tom quickly turned that into a new business opportunity. He introduced his PR division to the client, and we developed an award-winning campaign that kept that client with the agency. His actions in that moment, taught me the power of resiliency, and resourcefulness, that are crucial to success as a business owner.

I can recall many other mentoring moments, conversations, and stories about Tom’s impact on my entrepreneurial journey. However, we've got a wonderful video clip developed by the talented folks at Burrell, that captures the essence of Toms pioneering vision, and the many, many live that he's touched.

Tom Burrell: I believe we're all imbued with creative juices. My whole objective in life, is to squeeze the juice. I don't want anything left behind. I don't want to be caught dead with un-squeezed juice.

As a matter of fact, I'm actually going to rescind that now. I think that you shouldn't even leave not even the pulp and the rind. Don't leave anything behind.

video: (singing)

Tom Burrell: My primary interest is not in advertising, my interest was in what I would call persuasive communications, and the psychology of it. In 1966, there was a march in Mississippi called the Meredith March. This was James Meredith, who had integrated the University of Mississippi. And in the midst of that March, there came a voice, and that voice said "Black Power".

video: We want black power.
Black power

video: We want black power.

Black power.

video: We want black power.

Black power.

Tom Burrell: Black power. Black is beautiful, all of the symbolism that went with that interestingly, spawned the concept of black business. The whole reason for starting an advertising agency that focused on the black consumer market, was the idea that we could be different.

Video: 60 nonstop minutes across the tracks-

Tom Burrell: Our mantra was, "Black people are not dark skinned white people." That was our message to perspective clients. Because we came here in a totally different way, that means that we have different marketplace behavior that needs to be attended to. One of the things I do is, I verse myself in music, music I find to be very therapeutic and all kinds of music inspires me.

video: (singing)

Tom Burrell: All we said was, "Let's show black people in a positive, realistic way." It was stunning, but it was absolutely revolutionary.

video: (singing)

Tom Burrell: Our mantra was "Black people are not dark skinned white people." That was our message.

Michelle Flowers Welch: Tom, it is with tremendous respect, and deep gratitude that I present you with the 2018 Betsy Plank Mentoring Award. Congratulations, and thank you for all you've meant to my career, and the hundreds of others who've had the privilege of working with you.

Tom Burrell: I am so, so honored by this recognition, but I have to say, that I am being honored for something that has come extremely naturally to me. I saw Michelle, I ran into Michelle at the Mariano Super Market, and I said, "Michelle, do these people know what they're doing? They want to give me an award for mentoring." Then she described to me how I had mentored to her, and once she described it, I said, "Oh, I've done that a lot."
So if it meant being receptive, being responsive, being a listener, being attentive, being empathetic, or some people say empathic, I don't know whatever you want to say. If it means caring, then I guess I deserve this award, because that's what I've been doing.

So there was that story, then there was a story about another Michelle that we may know something about. My wife just happened to be in the beauty salon after the election of Barack Obama, and ran into the First Lady, and she told her that she was married to me, and she says, "Oh, Tom, oh yeah. He mentored me." I didn't know that either.

Then, recently talking to McGee, oh, she considered me to be her mentor, oh. So I get it, I get it, I get it, I get it now. And I hope that that's the easiest thing that I ever have to do to get recognition, but it hasn't been true. I've done a lot of things I've had to exert a lot of effort to do, in order to be recognized, but mentoring is not one of those things. But thank you Betsy Plank Award for this recognition. For recognizing me for being myself. I appreciate it immensely.

After receiving the award and being told about mentoring and see what it's all about. So I looked it up in a book, and one of the things that I want to point out, is that there were two things that I picked up. That there are two actually prongs of mentoring.

One is the professional one, where you basically work with people on developing their career, and the other one is personal. And the thing that I want to say, is that in today's environment, where things are really kind of getting kind of twisted and messed up right now, that we really need to focus on that personal part. The part that has to do with the importance of integrity, moral courage, principals, compassion, and if we can take care of those things first, and leave the professional part as a secondary factor, I think we'll be way much better off.

I understand that I have tremendous power here. That I am the only thing between you, and that front door down there. So I am going to mercifully stop, and allow you to go home. I hope I have said enough to warrant my being up here to receive the award, but the beautiful thing about getting older, as I approach my 80th year on this planet, is ... One of the great, great gifts that all of the recipients, and all the people out here will hopefully realize one day, there's nothing greater than being in a position in life, where you no longer have to speak for yourself.

So thank you very much, Michelle, and all others who have spoken for me. Thank you, alright.

Bill Heyman: So now I'm the one. No actually, it's always great when we get to the halfway point so you can relax a little bit. There's no world series game tonight, relax.
First of all, it's always my honor to get to end this evening, so tonight's no different than the last nine years, it's really a privilege. I need to special thanks to Keith and Ron for all that they do to make this happen. I somehow get to be company-chair with them, but I'm not sure why. I also would like all of you to give a hand to Dr. Karla Gower, and Jessica White, they're the ones that run the Plank Center. And I also need to ask to recognize my colleague Virginia Noriega, who, all things Plank, that Heyman Associates, and Bill Heyman get credit for, she's actually responsible for, so thank you Virginia.

By the way, Ryan would kill me if I didn't tell you, we are ... Come on, do your social media thing.

Ron Culp: Nine years, I have wanted to come to an event, that trended number one all night, and we did tonight. Thank you.

Bill Heyman: And then there were seven reasons why we're here tonight, and we'd like to congratulate Bob Feldman, Bob Jimenez, Dale Bornstein, Dr. Cathy Rogers, Eric Winkfield, Gregg Sherrill, and Tom Burrell, you made for a wonderful evening. All your speeches were heartfelt and we thank you.

Just a couple of last minute housekeeping chores, then I'll get you out of here, but I think the real thing that ... I said this a couple years ago, and I haven't said in a couple years since then. For those young people in here, do not let anybody over the age of 40 get away from you without getting their name, getting their number, and understanding that they're here because they believe in this. They believe in the mentoring piece, they're leaders in our industry. The amount of horse power in our profession and just general leadership in this room, is uncanny. So for all if you young people, I really think it's really important for you to latch on to these folks before they hit that door.

And I will start with one young person that I met tonight who I was thrilled was here. Probably more than you all need to know, but I was thrilled to have the chance to meet Austin Cervone tonight, who is Tony Cervone's son, and he's just one of those young people that's here, and making a special contribution, and following in his dad footsteps in our profession.

Keith mentioned before that the kinds of things that we've done at the Plank Center with the educator fellows, this dinner tonight, and the Emerging Leaders Program. The Emerging leaders Program was one of many Plank Center initiative that started by Bruce Berger. It brings together 24 students from five or six colleges in different cities, and this year, the next one is going to be held on November 8th through 10th in New York, at Syracuse’s Lubin House. It’s being sponsored by Michael Sneed and the good people at Johnson and Johnson, Gary Grates and the good people at W2O, and the PRSA Foundation. So we’re thrilled about this, this is the third time we've run this program. It's focusing strictly on diversity and inclusion.
What happens is, these students get together for basically 48 hours. They learn from some of the best people in our business. They brainstorm on a project, and then that project is judged by our team. And I think that there's probably no one that would be proud of that than Betsy Plank herself.

So again, I want to thank you all for being here tonight. Please mark November 7th, 2019 on your calendar. That's our next night. But the most important thing I do when I come up here and end this, the most important thing by far, it's a budgetary thing, it got to be done. Please put your name tags on the table back there, so we can save them for next year. Thank you all and get home safe.

Oh yeah, I'm sorry. And also, I need all the award winners ... By the way, this is what's unbelievable about this dinner. You go to PR week awards, sorry Julia, the noise never stops, and people actually listen in Chicago, that's just amazing to me. Anyway, we need all the award winners over between the Plank ... What am I trying to say. That thing over there. The Plank Screen, thank you. Alright, good night and get home safely.