



**Hubert H. Humphrey
Institute of Public Affairs**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Hubert H. Humphrey 2006 Leadership Awards
May 30, 2006**

**Remarks of Kathleen Blatz
Recipient of the Public Leadership Award**

Thank you, Keith. Thank you for your remarks and thank you for your leadership here at the Humphrey Institute and for your role and for the role of many people in this room for recognizing me this evening, for selecting me. I am so touched by it because we all know, and I just have to look out here, to know that there are so many worthy recipients, and I'm really humbled to be honored with the likes of George Mitchell and Jeri Joseph and Gary Cunningham and Wing-hei, and of course, Sean Kershaw. They are such gifted people and I am really honored by your words, so thank you very much.

This is a special setting for me because I have such deep respect for the Humphrey Institute and the work you do, and I really applaud the students who seek out this institute, to be inspired and to be educated about leadership, so that you can be our future leaders working for and advancing the common good. This is such a worthy endeavor, but it is no simple task. I don't think I would rain on anybody's parade here when I say that it is very, very difficult.

There are many reasons, and I think we could have a symposium here about why it's difficult, but from my experience in public service, and I've been in public service for 27 years; from my experience, I think the reason that leadership is so difficult is because change is so difficult. This point was driven home for me last fall when we had a national summit that was hosted by Minnesota of chief justices across this country and other prominent leaders from every state, and they came to Minnesota to talk about protecting vulnerable, abused and neglected children. It was such a worthy goal, one that is hardly debated, to get children back to their families of origin or into a new home, a permanent family. Nobody debates the goal, but I can assure you that it is very difficult to bring about the change to achieve a goal that people don't even debate.

So we prepared ourselves for this because we knew people would be very inspired when they came to Minnesota, worked on action plans for their states, and they went back to their court systems to implement it. And they would face, as we all know, the proverbial wall. So we brought in a national speaker, Lou Tice. He is fabulous; I recommend him to you. He is from Seattle, Washington, and he speaks all over this country about the challenge of change. What he titles his speech is "Creating a New Normal."

What he taught us, and what I believe, is his belief that change is difficult because we as human beings are programmed for the status quo. We like the status quo even when we don't like the status quo. In his words, we default to what we think is normal. He said change, even when it is needed, is difficult because we as human beings filter out new information all the time. Part of it is survival; we can't possibly take in everything around us. We would be overwhelmed. But we



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filter out what we see, we filter out what we hear, and we filter out what we know is factual. We just filter it out. And then we don't filter it out, and we believe that we need to change, the next thing that we have a tendency to do is we take a new great idea and then try to make it fit into the status quo, which, of course, means that we don't have any change. And he had a lot of techniques to drive this home.

He said change obviously does occur. We all know that it does, but when it occurs, it happens because we feel enough discomfort with our status quo, and we finally have a vision of something greater, stronger, more dominant that can move it out of the status quo, and he ways of showing us this. I just want to share one with you.

He showed us a movie. It was a movie of six people in basketball uniforms in a circle, one circle, six people. Three wore white uniforms and three wore dark brown uniforms. He said they are going to pass two basketballs between themselves. The white team will pass their basketball and the dark team will pass their basketball. Your job, audience (and it an audience this big), is to count how many times the people in the white uniforms pass the basketball to each other. He said he will show you this movie once. So he showed the movie. We all sat back, big screen, and watched it---one, two, three—and counted. Then he stopped the movie and said how many saw thirteen passes with the white team? There were a couple of hands. How many saw fourteen...fifteen? Almost everybody raised his hand...sixteen, and fewer hands.

Then he stopped, and then he asked us 'how many of you saw the gorilla?' I sat in the back, at the back table, three of four raised their hand. He said I'm going to show you the movie again. I have used this movie in a speech and I can tell you it is the real movie, the same movie. He showed the movie: a gorilla walks on, front and center, six feet tall, beats his chest, waves and then exits. So of three or four hundred people there, three or four people saw the gorilla.

I have to say: why did people not see this gorilla? Not to embarrass my husband, but I have to tell you, even after he said there was a gorilla, two people at the table I was sitting at did not see it the second time. He was so intent to make sure it was fifteen passes between those three people. And why don't we see it? Why did we not see this gorilla? I can tell you, he was not a costar; he was the main attraction if you saw this movie. It's because we saw exactly what we were looking for. We did not see what was before our eyes. And Lou Tice taught us that seeing is not believing—believing is seeing. And that is why we need desperately leaders, who can help us see the gorillas before us., who have a vision and stick with it until we, too, are ready to change. And we need leaders who are not just concerned with being someone but doing something, who are less concerned with keeping their title, but in making a difference.

It is for all these reasons that I applaud the Humphrey Institute that has at its very core the mission of developing leaders and teaching us about leadership. I applaud all of you here who contribute so much to make this such a great institution and I thank you for this wonderful award. Keep up the good work.