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**2009 David M. Darrin '40 Counseling Award Winner**  
**Delivered at the Spring 2009 Phalanx Honor Society Tapping Ceremony**  
**April 11, 2010**

First, I want to thank the students of Phalanx for the opportunity to address this special group of leaders today. It gives me great comfort to know that I am not working in a vacuum and that my dreams and aspirations are shared by others.

I will confess that I had a hard time deciding on what my message and language should be today. I wanted to leave you with thoughts that will be useful in your journey as leaders and in life.

To your relief, I decided to go with using straight talk, which has served me well so far and has been quite useful in my engineering training. To my relief, most of you come from science and engineering backgrounds so I expect you will appreciate my approach.

Let me now share some wisdom on **how to survive as a leader and be effective in that role**. Yes, I used the term “survive” for depending on your environment, being a leader may be a positive or a negative thing.

First, we need to have an **internal moral compass**. Some people may call it a “conscience” or a set of ethics. This is probably the single most important thing we need to survive as leaders and to achieve a life of significance and accomplishments. We will need it time and again and it differentiates us from those who lack one. In fact, we may have to use it, at times, to guide others to do the right thing.

Second, we must have a **vision** that we hopefully share with others (sometimes a few people, sometimes billions of them). That vision or calling, if you may, should be at the core of who we are and what we stand for. If this vision is clear in our mind and soul, we will always be able to go back to it. This vision may be nothing more than a list of accomplishments we want to have by the time we are 40, 60 or when we die. We set the time frame... That vision will also give us a way to be connected to a community and to be part of a larger purpose. For some of us, that is crucial. I recommend you spend some time developing or clarifying your **vision**.

Next, we need to determine what **strengths** we already have such that we can leverage them in pursuit of our vision. Here, we need to be not only honest with ourselves but also be practical. The strengths that each one of us possesses are variable and always valuable; however, we must exercise discretion on when to use them. There are simple ways to determine what they are: we can, for example, just think about experiences where we found a solution to a problem with minimum effort (what did we do? What skill or approach did we use?). Basically, this only requires that we actually know ourselves.

Seriously, knowing ourselves is incredibly important and we must spend some time learning about ourselves. Do we like ourselves? Where do we “draw the line” on certain issues? What are we willing and not willing to accept or do? We don’t have to have all the answers and they don’t have to be set in stone. We are dynamic beings and we should revisit these thoughts often

enough so that we don't lose touch with ourselves. This is an especially big challenge now since we have so many demands on our attention and time. Spending time learning about ourselves is not easy to do or may not be high in our priorities. We must make it a priority. By the way, if the answer is that we don't like ourselves, then the healthy thing to do is to change such that we can like ourselves again. I have also a simple rule of thumb. When in doubt, I ask: Would my grandmother be proud of me right now? If the answer is "no", I know I have work to do.

Lastly, we need a **plan** of action. This part is probably the most challenging and also the most dynamic. Since each one of us has presumably a different **vision** and a different set of **strengths**, our **plans** should inevitably be different. And guess what? We must be comfortable with this plan having steady and unsteady-state periods. If it is always in steady state, then we are probably not evolving as humans and if it is always in unsteady state, then we may never accomplish long-range goals. The secret is in the balance. Let me just say that a leader with a balanced life and approach to problem-solving is more attractive to those who intend to following his/her footsteps. This is particularly true for this generation.

Let me now close with a couple of thoughts:

We are living in incredibly exciting times in history. In spite of the bad news we hear almost daily, there is much to be excited about right now. The global challenges we face with regard to health, environmental degradation, energy security and social and economic equality are serious. Therefore, we need serious, smart leaders to meet those challenges.

Frankly, I am counting on you to break molds, stereotypes and expectations so that you can successfully meet those challenges. Following the beaten path will not get us there. Your generation must mark the shift from the old and ineffective to the new and smart. Yours is also the challenge to shift away from distractions and focus on what is truly important. No generation before has had so many challenges, obstacles and promise at the same time.

Oh... How I wish I were your age!

Thank you all.