



P A R K U N I V E R S I T Y
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

***It's the Journey, Not
the Destination!***



Erik Bergrud
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About the Author

Erik Bergrud, Director of Park University's International Center for Civic Engagement (ICCE) delivered this address on May 8, 2009 at a Park University Hauptmann School for Public Affairs graduation dinner.

Bergrud is a 1994 graduate of Park University (MPA – Government/Business Relations). He serves currently as national Vice President of the American Society for Public Administration, the nation's most respected society representing all forums in the public service arena, and 1st Vice President of the International Relations Council, the Greater Kansas City region's leading organization for world affairs programming for all ages. Bergrud will elevate to IRC President in 2010 and ASPA President in 2011.

He is also an associate member of the National Academy of Public Administration's Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance and Africa Working Group.

Bergrud will graduate from the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's Centurions Leadership Program in June 2009, the first Park University representative ever to complete the program as a current employee.



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Let me begin by thanking Dean DiPadova-Stocks and Drs. Fontaine and Stuteville for offering me this wonderful opportunity to address the May 2009 Hauptmann School graduates. I must also thank Alumni Director Julie McCollum for her continued support of these and other HSPA alumni events. Seeing Dr. John Jumara here reminds me for some reason of the *Last of the Mohicans*. Few of us remain from the early days of the School, and I wonder whether he or I will outlast each other!

I had originally selected the title “What I Learned after My HSPA Graduation” for my address this evening, and I will revisit that topic in a few minutes, sharing three key principles I have learned.

My new title, “It’s the journey, not the destination,” is inscribed on this bracelet, designed by Rockville, IL artist Deb Karash.

That phrase also holds significance for each of the graduates for two key reasons. First, Park University, like other institutions of higher education, titles its graduation ceremony “Commencement.” This means that your work has not ended but has merely begun.

Second, each of us embarks upon multiple journeys, both personal and professional, in our lives. Please allow me to share with you one of my journeys, which explains my appearance here this evening.

In my first full-time position after graduating from college, I worked as a high school recruiter for Maple Woods Community College. One afternoon, I set up a table at a college fair at Truman High School in Independence. It just so happens that I was one of the first two recruiters to arrive – the other was a

representative from Park. We struck up a conversation, and she described to me Park’s MPA program. I handed her my business card and shortly thereafter I received an information packet. That fall, I enrolled in Dr. Hauptmann’s “book of the week” class – PA 501. The next semester, I heard that the School’s Administrator position was vacant. I applied, and Dr. Hauptmann hired me.

During my first month on the job, he asked me to join ASPA – the American Society for Public Administration – the leading professional organization in the field. Later, he encouraged me to take on various ASPA leadership assignments, first locally, then nationally. In 1998, ASPA offered me a full-time position on their national staff, and I resigned from my position at Park. Shortly thereafter, I met a professor at an ASPA regional conference in Salt Lake City by the name of Laurie DiPadova. Six years later, I served as an alumni representative on the search committee which recommended Laurie to be hired as this School’s Dean. In 2005, Laurie chaired the search committee which recommended my hiring as Director of the new International Center for Civic Engagement and Special Assistant to the President at Park.

On January 23, 2008, I rode with Dr. Hauptmann to an ASPA Greater Kansas City Chapter luncheon. Six days later, he unexpectedly passed away. Shortly after Dr. Hauptmann’s death, I became a candidate for ASPA national office and will be ASPA’s national President two years from now.

In sharing this story with you, it might sound like I am channeling Pangloss, the optimistic philosopher in Voltaire’s *Candide*, who believes that “everything happens for a reason” even when the world is crashing all around him.

I contend that my journey illustrates two fundamental principles which can guide this School and each of you through these unusual times. First, although we would like to believe that our experiences occur in a linear fashion, we must acknowledge that life is both complex and chaotic. I never would have guessed, for instance, that a chance meeting with Laurie eleven years ago would have resulted in a working relationship at the academic institution from which I had recently resigned. I also doubt that I would have run for ASPA Vice President had Dr. Hauptmann remained alive.

Second, we cannot accurately predict who we will be and where we will work X number of years from now. My story seems implausible – a Park employee who becomes an ASPA leader who resigns from Park to become an ASPA employee who returns to Park and later becomes an ASPA national officer. I know that many of you have your own journeys which include stops in the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

I return now to the theme of “What I Learned after My HSPA Graduation,” with full acknowledgment that I still have a lot to learn about organizations and human behavior, and I graduated with my MPA degree 15 years ago!

Every meaningful speech should have one or more “takeaways” for the audience. In the spirit of Dr. Hauptmann who generally offered his audiences three points due to “theological considerations,” I will share with you three principles that guide me in my personal and professional lives. Perhaps they will resonate with you too.

Principle #1 – No matter how high you advance in your career or how famous you become, never believe you are too important

to “do the dirty work.” The Walt Disney Company instills this principle as part of its employee orientation program, Disney Traditions. New recruits learn that “*Everyone* picks up trash!” Visit a Disney theme park on any given day, and you will see executives strolling the grounds carrying trash-grabbing devices. When you visit other places of employment on any given day, you will likely encounter executives walking past trash lying on the ground, probably assuming that the cleaning crew will take care of its disposal.

Last week, I witnessed an example of a Park University executive practicing this principle. Laurie McCormack, our Vice President for University Advancement – and an HSPA student – made calls from home encouraging graduating students to attend a special reception last Friday. She could have deferred to her staff to make all the calls but determined that she should not ask her staff to do something she was unwilling to do herself – a vital leadership trait!

Principle #2 – Before making any major decision, try to anticipate unintended consequences. Here are a few examples of how well-intentioned plans can generate unexpected problems. When I worked at ASPA, we devised a proposal to cut in half the size of our national governing board. Imagine trying to conduct organizational business with a group of 42 decision makers! In order to shrink the size of the National Council, we had to decrease our number of electoral districts from ten to five and double the number of chapters with which each representative needed to liaise. Fast forward ten years – ASPA’s chapters feel less connected to the national organization, and the number of its regional conferences has dropped precipitously. A historical footnote – Dr. Hauptmann predicted this would occur.



Here's another example – my son's school decided to address a perceived problem of congested after-school hallways by encouraging parents not to come inside the school but rather to pick up their kids in a designated drive-up zone. As a result of this new procedure, hallway congestion decreased. School officials did not anticipate that some parents began to feel less aware of their children's progress, because they lost a key opportunity to dialogue with teachers by no longer walking into their children's classrooms. Now, the school must find a way to balance traffic concerns with the concerns of parents who want to remain engaged in their children's education.

Principle #3 – Practice love and forgiveness every day.

Love your work. If you love to paint houses, paint houses. Love your life. Begin each day with a sense of anticipation rather than dread. Enjoy the people who surround you – at home and at work – while they are still present. I will always treasure the last time I saw Dr. Hauptmann before he died. I was invited to speak about the value of mentoring at a local ASPA luncheon, and this gave me the opportunity to thank him publicly for all that he meant to me as my mentor.

Some of you might be thinking, "Love is relatively easy compared to forgiveness."

Nelson Mandela survived being incarcerated most of his adult life and possessed the strength to seek reconciliation upon his release. Dr. Hauptmann experienced the harsh brutality of a Nazi POW camp. He not only forgave his captors but actually spent a year teaching in Germany (at Speyer University) and developed many life-long personal and professional relationships with Germans.

If Nelson Mandela and Dr. Hauptmann could

forgive their former captors, surely each of us can forgive a demanding boss or an unsympathetic co-worker or even that person in the accounting office who seems to delay our check requests.

I know that each of the HSPA graduates present this evening learned the importance of properly citing sources – a critical foundation for academic scholarship. So perhaps you'll find some irony in my closing with a quote which has often been misattributed to Nelson Mandela and his 1994 inaugural address. Author Marianne Williamson actually coined the following phrase, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

Or, in the words of Artie, the reluctant king-in-waiting in the cinematic classic *Shrek the Third*, "The thing that matters most is what you think of yourself. If there's something you really want to be, then the only person standing in your way is you."

Congratulations to each of the 2009 HSPA graduates! May you embark on your next journey with the understanding that **you are intelligent, you are powerful and you are prepared for service to humanity.**

Thank you!