

Remember the Relationships

Good afternoon and Happy April Fool's Day. I'm pleased to see that you all decided to attend this conference instead of playing jokes on your friends and coworkers. It may be a day that some people devote to jokes and pranks, but you have chosen to follow, not foolish, but *wise* pursuits along the path of professional development.

As your conference title states, you've come here today to "find your place in a MySpace™ world." It's a different world, indeed, that some of us, or perhaps many of us, don't quite understand.

But we are not alone in our search for understanding. Humans have been puzzled by technology probably since time began, and particularly since the dawn of the computer era. None other than the chairman of IBM in the 1940s said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."¹ In the late 1970s, the founder of Digital Equipment Corp. believed, "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."² Even Bill Gates once thought that "640K ought to be enough for anybody."³

So, as one of your after lunch speakers, I decided to begin my remarks this afternoon with a pithy quote on technology, with just the right combination of sage wisdom and entertainment value. But to do that, *I used technology*. I did a quick Google search — and lo and behold, I came across countless quotes on various aspects of technology. I weeded through the list and settled upon this one:

"Technology does not run an enterprise; relationships do."⁴ I'm borrowing these words from Patricia Fripp⁵, a motivational speaker and author who has her own website, of course. This particular quote appealed to me because of one key word — *relationships*.

A number of speakers are talking about various aspects of technology today — so I thought I'd take a few moments to talk about people and the relationships we build with them in Extension. For those of you in the room who do not have Extension appointments, I ask that you bear with me. For whether or not we are in Extension, oftentimes we build relationships with our clients through technology.

¹ Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943, Humorous Quotations, <http://ei.cs.vt.edu/~history/humor.html>

² Ken Olson, president, chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corp., 1977, Humorous Quotations, <http://ei.cs.vt.edu/~history/humor.html>

³ Bill Gates, 1981, Humorous Quotations, <http://ei.cs.vt.edu/~history/humor.html>

⁴ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/technology_does_not_run_an_enterprise/176857.html

⁵ <http://www.fripp.com/>

ISU Extension always has used technology, in some form or another, to connect lowans with research-based information and education: from a seed corn train, to a field day, a home demonstration, a satellite uplink, the World Wide Web. The list goes on. Over the years the technology we've used has changed, but the goal is the same. Through it all, we remain true to our mission — to build partnerships and provide research-based learning opportunities to improve quality of life in Iowa.

These days we're framing our mission in terms of healthy people, healthy environments, and healthy economies. It's a short cut we can use to illustrate our relevance to the people of Iowa and demonstrate that we're in sync with the opportunities they seek.

Extension promotes **healthy people** and lifestyles by providing education on public issues, food and nutrition, health, financial management, youth development, and family relationships across the lifespan.

Extension supports safe, sustainable, and **healthy environments** by helping to enhance the value of Iowa's agricultural industry, providing recreational opportunities, and disseminating research and education aimed at protecting the state's natural resources.

Extension advances **healthy economies** by supporting growth and working to improve quality of life through encouraging business development, helping to create jobs, and expanding entrepreneurial activity.

Whether healthy people, environments, or economies, to each of these lists of examples I could add — *so much more*. We are making a difference in people's lives as we *build our relationships* and carry out our land-grant mission.

As author Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."⁶ I tell you as Extension staff and university employees, you are useful; you are honorable; you are compassionate. And — *you are making a difference in people's lives ... every day*. You owe it to the people of Iowa — and you owe it to yourself — to make that difference the best way you can. You owe it to yourself to take advantage of opportunities for professional development like you have here today.

I'd like to thank the 2008 Professional Development Day planning committee for making this conference possible. Their months of planning have resulted in a great day of wide-ranging educational opportunities. I'd

⁶ http://en.thinkexist.com/reference/quotes_about_making_a_difference/

also like to thank the P&S Council for supporting these types of events. P&S staff account for approximately 46 percent of Extension's FTEs. So the professional growth and development of P&S employees is essential to the continued vitality of Extension and the strength of our relationships with the people of Iowa.

Just two months ago, I met with the committee that is planning Extension's professional development program in communications; another key aspect of our relationship building. That group of your Extension colleagues is planning professional development opportunities to help you improve your core competencies in written and verbal communications as well as communication strategies — and thus, further improve the relationships you build. You'll be hearing more about these opportunities in the coming months, and the training will be delivered during an 18 to 24-month period beginning in fall 2008.

To better serve and engage our clients, ISU Extension is creating a portal option as the access point for our web presence. The portal will provide comprehensive access to all ISU Extension content and services, while allowing website visitors to personalize their view of these services to meet their individual needs. The portal also will provide our clients the opportunity to participate in online communities organized around current issues and areas of interest. The portal is part of our new marketing plan and will provide a uniform brand for ISU Extension's online presence.

Because it's all about building relationships. And it really doesn't matter whether we're building those relationships through e-mail, a website or portal, or a face-to-face meeting — as long as we remain in touch with lowans' needs and involved in finding solutions to the challenges they face.

So let me repeat: I'm glad to see that you've come here today to "find your place in a MySpace™ world." Indeed it is a different world, but we *can* learn to understand it.

After all, it wasn't so long ago — or maybe it was — that those of us in the baby boomer crowd may have turned on, tuned in, and dropped out,⁷ to paraphrase Timothy Leary, much to the chagrin of those over 30 whom we didn't trust anyway. So today, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that what an older generation considers socially rude behavior is merely multi-tasking to the younger set. Today's Millennials — and many of Generations X and Y as well — are MySpacing, Facebooking, Ipod-ing, and text-messaging; not to mention watching TV and YouTube and carrying on a cellphone conversation at the same time.

According to psychologist Dave Verhaagen, author of *Parenting the Millennial Generation*: "Their ability to have multiple conversations through

⁷ http://thinkexist.com/quotes/timothy_leary/

multiple technologies is different from previous generations, but in and of itself is not a bad thing. ... This generation uses technology to facilitate relationships and interactions in a way other generations never have.”⁸

So technology brings us back to relationships. And us old dogs can learn some new tricks from our younger counterparts. I, for one, have 6,000 songs on my I-pod. But whether you have your own Facebook page and are LinkedIn and all a Twitter — or if you are on the other end of the technology spectrum and need to have your teenager program your cell phone for you — it doesn't matter. You're here, ready and eager to learn more about the technology you can use to increase your own professional development and to further the relationships that are so important to Extension and to the people of Iowa.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

⁸ USA Today, "Tech Creates a Bubble for Kids," http://www.usatoday.com/tech/2006-06-19-oblivious-kids_x.htm