“We’ve Got What It Takes!”
KEYNOTE ADDRESS
2nd Annual Women Who Lead Conference
California State University, San Bernardino

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1-2 p.m.

Dr. Karen S. Haynes, President
California State University, San Marcos
Introduction

I’ve been a university president for 20 years. This is 2015 – the 21st Century! Everything has changed for women in leadership. The glass ceiling, if not yet gone, is well on its way to come crashing down. Right?

Well, if you think we’ve “come a long way,” let me quickly say – “not far enough yet.” Let me tell you something that happened to me just three weeks ago. A TV station asked to film me for a video tribute to a community leader. Here’s the “advice" they sent me in advance for what to wear to the filming: “A tan, navy or black jacket … and a solid tie.”

That is on the more humorous side of so many situations I’ve encountered … so much behavior I’ve observed … and so many lessons I’ve learned in my career in academia. My own experience with women and leadership has two dimensions.

The first, and most obvious, is that I am a female executive, so I can speak on this topic from a personal perspective. Like every woman who has reached an executive position, I have traveled my own path to leadership; I have bumped up against – and put some cracks in –what has been called the highest, hardest glass ceiling in America.

The second dimension is that I am a professor who has taught, and a scholar who has studied, women and leadership, so I also approach this topic from a research angle.
My remarks today come from both of these perspectives and touch on four themes:

- First, *One Woman’s Story* – a bit about my career trajectory … how I got to where I am now, the senior female president in the CSU system.

- Second, *A Promise Unfulfilled* – the state of affairs – in this, the 15th year of the 21st century – for women in academic leadership.

- Third, some *Mentoring Advice* I’ve observed and gained over the years that really can make a difference for women leaders … for you.

- And finally, I’ll close by talking about *A World with More Women at the Table* – a message for academia about the proven benefits to be gained when more women are at the leadership table.

*One Woman’s Story*

But let’s start with *this* woman’s story … and let’s roll the clock back several decades. I am, first and foremost, a macro-practitioner of social work. I trained in community organization in the 1960s for my Master of Social Work … and I trained in policy and planning in the 1970s for my Ph.D. in Social Work.

This has shaped my values … and my values have shaped my leadership, vision and goals as a university president.

The 60s and 70s were – shall we say – a less enlightened time in American society. Even though the 70s were the beginning of the women's movement, I had very direct encounters with the sexism, bias and
misunderstandings of the era. Let me share a few … so you can hear them from one who lived them …

My first job interviews in 1970 consistently included questions like:

- “Are you married?”
- “Do you plan to have children and, if so, how soon?”
- “Does your husband approve of you working?”

At that time there simply wasn’t much advice for women on how to handle – nor any legislation to forbid – such difficult and irrelevant interview questions.

In 1973, as a full-time faculty member at a large university, I walked into my department chair’s office to ask about the university’s maternity leave policy. He looked at me and said, “Karen, we’ll be sorry to see you leave.”

I was confused. I explained I only wanted a few weeks off for maternity leave. His response: “We don’t have maternity leave. You’ll have to resign and take your chances on being rehired.”

It took me three separate requests to the Board of Regents – and pointing out the recently passed federal legislation – to finally be allowed maternity leave … albeit using my accrued vacation time. And, each time, the Board of Regents indicated that this was not going to change their policy!

In 1979 – with a Ph.D. earned two years prior – I was offered a promotion to direct the Bachelor of Social Work Program at a different
institution, Indiana University. I took a few days to think it over, then returned to the dean’s office to discuss what I felt I’d need to successfully do the job.

Call me crazy, but this included a clearly defined job title, office support, a modest travel budget for staff professional development, and some increase in salary to reflect going from a faculty to an administrative position.

Upon hearing this totally rational request, the dean became enraged. He barked at me … “You cannot make the rules AND force me to play the game!”

Not only did he revoke the job offer, he suggested he would make sure that I would never receive tenure either. He failed on that threat, since later a committee determined I had performed sufficiently to receive tenure early. However, he did give the job to a male member of the faculty … who seemed to receive most of the things that so enraged the dean when I suggested them.

In 1985, after many years of teaching social work, I thought of that irrational dean … when I became the first-ever female Dean of the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Houston.

Why did I aspire to be a dean? Because I felt I could do the job better than some of the male deans I’d seen or worked for! Because as a macro practitioner of social work, I had skill sets in policy, evaluation, and management.

But, let me tell you, a culture shock came when I found out just how different my philosophy and style of leadership were from the 13 other deans, all male. Despite this difference, my leadership approach has served me well over the years. It is based on:
Transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making;

- Advocacy for one’s team;
- Direct and clear communications;
- Nurturing and constructive with criticism that is timely and behaviorally specific;
- And taking my position, but not myself, seriously.

I was dean at University of Houston for ten years – the only female dean for all of those years. Over time I realized that my philosophy and style was effective and successful. I enjoyed the position, being close to the profession I loved and finding a comfortable level of work-life balance. I envisioned my career staying at that level – I NEVER wanted to become, or even THOUGHT about becoming, a university president.

Then life came along and provided me with an unexpected challenge and opportunity. In 1995, I got a call from the chancellor of the University of Houston system. He was looking for an interim president of the system’s Victoria campus who could rebuild morale there and re-establish trust between administrators and faculty members – and between the community and the administration.

“Hmmm,” I thought, “I’m trained in social work – these are things I know how to fix.”

Besides, it was only an interim presidency, I thought, and only for a year max. So I said, “yes.”

Well that year became two years, but during that time my attitude toward the role of university president changed. I learned I had the skills sets to do the job. I saw that I could bring a fresh perspective and new leadership qualities to
the challenge. I discovered that I could be authentic ... as Karen Haynes ... as a woman leader ... in this position.

So I put my hat in the ring to drop the “interim” from my title. After a national search, I was chosen as the university’s new permanent president, a job I relished for seven more years.

However, during this time, I became more and more aware of a hard truth – one that I am sure many of you know all too well: That leadership is challenging enough, but even harder as a woman who is a “first” in a position ... an “only” on an administrative team – and I remained that for almost nine years – one female president of four; with a male Chancellor ... or the “lone” woman interviewing for an executive position.

Bleak descriptions of what it’s like to be a university president don’t help. Long hours. Answering to numerous stakeholder groups. Being pulled in a million different directions. The media on your trail endlessly. Many ready to criticize you at any moment.

But I am here to give you a different description of the job. It takes work, strategic thinking and careful planning, but leadership can be rewarding. You can achieve work-life balance – maybe not every day, but overall.

You can gain sustenance from the wonderful and talented faculty and staff around you ... and from the truly great work you are doing. And I don’t have to tell you – in our field, we do some of the most important work of all: Transforming students’ lives and improving our communities and regions.

The path to leadership I found myself unexpectedly heading down has led to some pretty amazing places.
My presidency at UH-Victoria led me to accept appointment as the President of Cal State San Marcos, where I am now in my twelfth year. I am proud of the work we have done at Cal State San Marcos to increase opportunities for women and strive for greater equity in our workplace. CSUSM is successful, in part, because of the talent that I have hired.

Three of my five vice presidents are women - including the VP of Finance. Half of our academic deans are also women and, uncharacteristically, one of those female deans is the Dean of our College of Science and Mathematics. And a very large percentage of our associate deans and associate VPs are women.

I was once asked by a male reporter of the student newspaper at my campus, “Why are there so many women leaders at Cal State San Marcos?” As anyone in this room would, I had multiple, simultaneous reactions to the question:

- I was glad he noticed.
- I was cranky. Why in the 21st Century would this be an issue? A story?
- I was dismayed. Would this question come up if there weren't still glass ceilings? Does anyone ask, “Why are there so many male leaders on our campuses?”
- And I was so very proud … that we are the only campus, out of 23 in the CSU system, with this amount of “woman power.”

I will add that, in each VP and dean selection process, we select the best candidate, regardless of gender. And whether male or female, I fully trust each of my vice presidents to do their jobs and to lead their teams in a manner that will produce results while maintaining positive morale.
A Promise Unfulfilled

From my vantage as a university president who has achieved some notable “firsts” – my pride is dampened by a sobering reality: After two-and-a-half decades of research, and despite progress on some fronts, data on women in leadership positions is still disheartening for the snail’s pace of those improvements.

Women equal slightly more than half the population and nearly half the workforce. So, how are we doing?

According to the Center for American Women and Politics, as of this year women have only 20% representation in the U.S. Senate, up from 14% five years ago, and only 19.3% in the House of Representatives, up from 16% five years ago.

In the corporate world, according to Catalyst, as of last October, there are 26 women serving as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Although that number is up from the 12 women who led Fortune 500 companies five years ago … it is merely 5.6%!

At least a few countries are addressing this disparity head on. Earlier this month, Germany passed a law requiring about 100 of its biggest companies to have at least 30% of their corporate board seats held by women, starting next year, with another 3,500 companies required to submit plans to increase board equity by September of next year. Other nations who have passed similar measures include Spain, France, Iceland, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Looking specifically at higher education in the United States, women account for more than half of the undergraduate student population – that’s right, male college students are now considered an “underrepresented” group!
But the higher you go on university organization charts, the fewer women you find. According to recent figures from the American Council on Education, or ACE, women hold only 38% of all full-time faculty positions, only 21% of tenured full professor positions, and only 26% of all presidencies.

In the CSU system, it is nice to see the number of female university presidents increase to six with the recent appointment of Dr. Soraya Coley at Cal Poly Pomona. All six of us will be recognized next month – collectively for the first time – with Trailblazer Awards from Leadership California for the qualities we have brought to our campuses and for blazing new paths in the CSU system. However, we are six in a group of 23 – that’s 26% – no better than the average percentage of women presidents in higher education nationally.

In AASCU institutions, our kind, the percentage of female presidents is only 22% and it has stayed at that percentage for the last two decades.

I should point out that the Executive Council of ACE’s Women’s Network has this disparity squarely in their sights. They issued a blueprint for action last year with a vision of raising the percentage of female chief executives in higher ed to an impressive 50% by the year 2030. It will take a lot of hard work and vigilance from a lot of people – including you in this hall – to make that happen.

But for now, regrettably, we still see far too much of the same pattern in every field: Women may get in the door, but they don’t make it very far up the staircase. And once in the door, they encounter further obstacles barring their path.

“Chilly climate” is a concept that originated in the 1980s to depict how women who aspire to be leaders are subjected to stereotypes and institutionalized
prejudices … and undermined in subtle and insidious ways. As women who are in leadership positions, or aspire to be, we know this all too well.

Women are too often "appointed" to "velvet ghetto" positions which look like a career move but they are "impossible" to get out and up from. Women are team players, so they get these appointments, but in those team they aren’t able to shine as leaders.

When I arrived in San Marcos in 2004 to begin my second university presidency, I was asked by a female clerk if I was new to the community – my driver’s license still had a Texas address. I said I was, and that I came to work at Cal State San Marcos. The clerk asked what I did there. I said I was the President. She smiled at me and said, “Oh, what do you do for the President?”

In time, we have lessened the power and presence of these stereotypes, but we still face perplexing challenges.

Like getting paid, on average, only 78 cents for every dollar earned by men … in virtually every occupation where there is sufficient data to calculate an earnings ratio, according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

Or being told, for example, that we need to be more assertive, but not so assertive that we are disliked; that we need to be collaborative, but not so friendly that we lack credibility; that we need to be more competent than our male colleagues, but in a way that does not threaten those male colleagues; and that we need to be role models for other women, but that women may need to behave more like men to succeed.

And, my conclusion from all of this advice is that women obviously also need a good sense of humor! And mine has become finely tuned over time.
Mentoring Advice

I’d like to give you some clearer advice – wisdom that comes from that 30 years of academic administration.

In the late 1990’s I co-authored a book called *A Dream and A Plan: A Woman’s Path to Leadership in Human Services*, which was uniquely focused on encouraging women to become leaders in the human services field.

While writing that book, my co-author and I conducted research into how women attain leadership positions. We discovered that successful women do the following …

They form expansive networks of social support. They build new professional relationships while sustaining earlier ties with families, friends, communities and organizations.

They are active in professional associations, where they take advantage of women’s networks and ethnic affinity groups to build even more – and more relevant – connections. They find outlets – like ACE – for resources such as webinars, newsletters and online networking groups.

Another great idea is to take action on your own campus. I know you have data and would like to see more women administrators at CSUSB. That won’t happen without your action. Be bold enough to present a plan – aspirational and multi-year – that examines institutional policies and practices for hidden biases; that recommends increases in women in administrative positions; that assures representation on hiring committees.

Our research also showed that successful women leaders reach out to other women as role models and mentors. Don’t be afraid to seek out a woman who
you admire and ask her to be your mentor. Chances are, she will. And if she won't, don't be deterred, chose someone else!

I’m passionate about personally mentoring women. I have found that one of the most rewarding aspects of being a leader is the opportunity to mentor and inspire the next generation of women leaders.

And expand your our portfolio by asking for specific task assignments and by saying NO to tasks you already have expertise in.

I would also like to share with you some old-fashioned social work values and principles that help keep me “centered” in my presidency and better able to keep pace with the complexities and challenges of the job.

**Be an active listener.** Leaders have to stop talking in order to actively listen; we have to be able to provide opportunities to listen and we must be willing to listen to things we don't want to hear.

**Focus on people and on doing good.** When I think of powerful people, I think of people who recognize their own limitations, who appreciate the resources, strengths, and skills of others, who touch and affirm others.

**See your choice to be a leader as a special opportunity to make a difference,** not as an opportunity to take the spotlight, or get the praise.

**Don’t be afraid of leadership.** I have learned that, whether purposive or accidental, assuming a leadership position can be both daunting and exhilarating; can be felt as both an honor and a burden. But, when I am asked whether being a leader is worth it? I answer, “Yes. Absolutely.” And how many other jobs can lay claim to helping transform so many lives for the better?
Build coalitions, embrace inclusiveness and respect diversity – in the people you surround yourself with, those you hire, and in the voices and opinions you listen to.

Give yourselves a break. I like to call them resiliency breaks. You need to find ways to occasionally unplug and disconnect from the demands of the job and I really mean UNPLUG. Use the time to relax and reconnect with other aspect of your life, with your loved-ones and friends. You will come back recharged and ready to continue making a difference at your workplace.

And, finally, be an optimist. Focus on the good and the possible … instead of the wrong and the unlikely. Optimism can frame your encounters with others, so that you ask where this person is smart, rather than is this person smart. Optimism is the 90% of the time that I say, “I love my work!” … instead of the 10% of the time I hope nobody will ask!

Active listening … coalition-building … resiliency breaks … focusing on people … embracing optimism. Some call these “soft skills.” But let me tell you, they are very hard skills to master and they are hard to actualize day in and day out.

*A World with More Women at the Table*

Which leads to how academia would change for the better if women had true equity at the leadership table.

Unlike many corporations, academic institutions are unique in that they are built around a multiplicity of gifted and persuasive voices, rather than a single vertical chain of command. Ultimately, decisions have to be made, but not before as many views as possible are canvassed, weighed, and, if possible, harmonized with one another.
And I would argue that heeding different voices and bringing different minds together is something that women presidents, and women in general, tend to do extremely well.

A 2005 leadership study of more than 700 university presidents published by *Inside Higher Ed* showed conclusively that female presidents outperform male presidents in key benchmark areas … like fund-raising, student academic success, and institutional growth!

The study revealed “Female college presidents are more innovative and entrepreneurial than male presidents. Females are more inclined to take measured risks in their jobs … A rising tide of empirical evidence now connects these characteristics to leadership success in college presidencies.”

The same is true in the private sector. Research has shown that companies with the highest representation of women in leadership positions outperform those with fewer women in senior management … in such key indicators as financial success, productivity and innovation.

A new study released just this month by Quantopian, a trading platform based on crowdsourced algorithms, pitted the performance of Fortune 1000 companies led by women between 2002 and 2014 … against the S&P 500’s performance during the same period. The comparison showed that the women CEOs during those 12 years produced equity returns 226% better than the S&P 500.

**Conclusion**

So I think it’s clear we've got what it takes – to lead … to inspire … to bring new skill sets and fresh perspectives to roles of leadership … and to truly improve and transform our nation’s politics, businesses … and academic
institutions. I can feel it in the energy, see it in the eager faces, and sense it the sharp minds filling this room.

My generation of women and those preceding us have trail-blazed a path of “firsts” for women, but it is the next generations – many of you here today – who must remove the “token” aspect of these achievements and make them the norm.

So keep pushing for equality, keep pushing for fair recognition and compensation for your contributions, keep pushing for practices that embrace and respect your talents … and keep coming together at vital conferences such as this to organize, strategize and make your voices heard.

I am optimistic that, as you continue to showcase your contributions, build on the talents of one another, affirm and empower others, and speak in your own powerful voices, you will meet with increasing success and finally shatter that glass ceiling.

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