

AN ADDRESS BY HAROLD RILEY*

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE COMMENCEMENT
May 18, 1996



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I am deeply honored to have been selected for the 1996 Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award. It comes as a pleasant surprise during the twilight of my professional career that began here at Kansas State nearly fifty years ago. I am extremely grateful to those here in the College of Agriculture who were responsible for my being selected.

I have always been very proud of being an alum from this institution which down through the years has established a reputation as one of the leading Land Grant universities. I feel deeply indebted to my Kansas State professors especially the late George Montgomery and C.P. Wilson, for the knowledge they imparted, for their guidance, inspiration and support which included work opportunities that enabled me to obtain both my B.S. and M.S. degrees. In retrospect I must also acknowledge the positive influences of my fellow students, my professional colleagues and the campus environment on my life and my career.

This occasion is sort of a homecoming for Mrs. Riley and me. We met and were married here at Kansas State during the turbulent years centered around WWII. Our children were born here while I was a struggling young staff member in the Department of Agricultural Economics. It's good to be back again to share this happy time with those of you who are receiving degrees, along with your family members and friends, who are gathered here to honor your achievements. Also, it has been a special opportunity to visit with old friends and to enjoy the beauty of the Flint Hills landscape at this season of the year.

When Dean Mugler finally reached me at our winter retreat in Naples, Florida with the good news about the Distinguished Service Award he also mentioned that it was a tradition for the awardee to make a short, challenging address to the graduates at the Commencement ceremonies. I have found this to be a tough assignment. However, I do have a few serious thoughts to share with you realizing that you are here in a celebration mood. I'll probably come across in a grand fatherly manner since I am about two generations further along the road of life than you are.

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Looking to the Future

I will share with you some perspectives on forces of change that are already apparent and then offer some bits of advice on how you might further prepare and position yourself to cope with change.

Let me begin by stating the obvious. We are living in a very dynamic fast changing world. If the 21st century is anywhere near as eventful as the present 20th century you're in for some exciting experiences that are sure to affect your professional careers and your lives in ways that are difficult to anticipate.

The virtual explosion of advances in computer and communication technologies has opened almost unbelievable world-wide access to vast amounts of information. Already the partial utilization of this technology in businesses, government, educational activities and the entertainment industries has moved so fast that it is almost impossible to keep up. Undoubtedly there is much more to come even as we strive to make fuller use of E-mail, the Internet, and the World Wide Web. We are all being swept along in a sea of rapid change. Meanwhile, administrative and management procedures are being modified, jobs are being re-defined, and some enterprises are pushing outward into more distant global markets. Where are you in this overall process of technological change? Are you prepared to grab on and go with it?

The roles and the strategic behavior of the U.S. is being reformulated, or some might say it is evolving, in the post cold-war world. Major realignments are emerging among the more powerful countries. Meanwhile, many developing countries are becoming more important in international trade. It is a high-stakes, on-going game involving ideological conflicts, aggressive tactics in international trading and sporadic outbreaks of violence. Whether we like it or not the U.S. is cast in a leadership role as the most powerful nation in a world community being pulled ever closer together by rapidly advancing communication and transportation networks. Whatever the outcomes these political-economic forces can and probably will have rather over-riding impacts on your lives as you experience the 21st century.

Within the U.S., our food system and our rural communities are going through significant adjustments as government policies and programs that originated during the depression conditions of the 1930's and the Post WWII period are being phased out or substantially modified. The traditional roles of the USDA - Land Grant University system in research, extension and teaching are being challenged. Some activities are being downsized, revamped or even eliminated as public sources of funding are reduced. The adjustment process is far from being over.

I have not tried to be comprehensive in sketching out some of the forces of change that will influence your future. Major changes and some surprises, both good and bad, can be expected. What can you do to better cope with change?

Some Bits of Advice

- Commit yourself to a lifelong learning strategy that will enable you to keep abreast of new developments in your area of specialization. Be alert to new ideas and new ways to solve problems. Seek out relevant information sources, take advantage of seminars, short courses and opportunities to engage in dialogs with leaders in your field. Some of you will find it advantageous to seek additional formal education. Broaden yourselves by travel, both in the U.S. and abroad. Developing skills in a second language could have a pay-off in job opportunities. Be ready to move on and up as your career unfolds.
- Develop your ability to be an effective team player. Sharpen your communication skills. Listen carefully to others and consider their points of view. Be creative and constructive in group efforts to achieve problem resolution. Exercise leadership in an appropriate manner by being open, trustworthy and well informed.
- Prioritize and manage the use of your time so as to achieve a balance among work, family responsibilities, community involvements and recreational activities. This is difficult in the modern world that provides such a wide array of affordable diversions and such persuasive promotional pressures. It takes a great deal of self-discipline to effectively manage your time and resources under these circumstances.

A Personal Challenge

Finally I would challenge you to do your part in helping make this a better world for your generation and those that will follow.

- I sincerely hope that you will make meaningful efforts towards the rearing of children, whether they be your own or others, so that they might develop into well motivated, compassionate human beings, capable of coping with the complexities of life in a dynamic global community. Your efforts might include support and active participation in the on-going initiatives to improve our K through 12 educational system. All of you have benefited from the public support for your own schooling including substantial state funding for your education here at Kansas State University. You will now have an opportunity to give something

back through service to your community, state and nation, and a lifetime of personal giving to worthy causes, including your alma mater. You are a privileged group to have achieved this level of education. We have reason to expect good things from you.

- I appeal to you to actively participate in the democratic, political process, at the very least be an informed citizen concerning the issues, the alternatives and the qualifications of would-be political leaders. Make it a practice to exercise the privilege of voting. In the last general election less than 40 percent of the eligible voters actually went to the polls. The percentages were much lower among the younger age groups. I don't believe we can have a well functioning democracy if we don't have broad based citizen participation. So, if you don't like the way the present system functions you could do something positive about it. As I have traveled and worked on problems in other countries, I always return home with a feeling that most of us don't realize how fortunate we are to be citizens of the United States of America.
- Lastly, let's all strive to be more considerate and civil in our dealing with other people. I would like to believe this is less of a problem here among the good people of Kansas, but nation-wide our behavior has gotten noticeably worse in recent years. We can observe this every day in the media, on the street and highways, in schools, in the work-places and at sporting events. Let's turn this situation around. We all need to do our part.

It has been a pleasure to share this commencement with you. To the graduates, congratulations on your achievements. Best wishes for a rewarding career and a good life. You are off to a good start.



PHOTO



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