

Dr. Peterson

Omicron Delta Kappa Initiation

6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2015, Library, Ferst Room

I'm so glad to join you this evening, to celebrate your initiation and talk with you about leadership. I want to personally thank you for your leadership at Georgia Tech.

Like many important things in life, good leadership is more caught than taught.

Through the way you are approaching your time at Georgia Tech, you are serving as mentors for those coming behind you. You're giving back.

More than 400 student organizations that enrich the campus experience, give students a way to engage with the community, and prepare them to be the adults that they are going to be in society. ODK places an emphasis on the development of the whole person, as a member of the college community and as a prospective contributor to a better society. Student membership is based on participation in the Georgia Tech community, outstanding scholarship, and exemplary character. When it comes down to it, leadership is character put into action.

I want to talk a few minutes and share my thoughts on leadership and a few examples, and then open the floor up to you so that we can have an interactive discussion.

Leaders have vision for the future.

For example, by hosting your annual leadership conference for undergraduate and graduate students, you are helping students begin to think about their leadership style, characteristics they want to further develop, and the leaders that they want to become when they graduate.

When I first came to Georgia Tech in Spring 2009, one of the first things I did was to bring together faculty, staff, students, and other members of the Georgia Tech community to develop a 25-year Strategic Plan. We launched the plan in September

2010, called “Designing the Future.” Most of the students who worked on the plan’s development have graduated, or will graduate this spring. They will not be on campus to experience some of the things we’re implementing, like the joint master’s law degree with Emory University, or increased flexibility in designing a program of study.

Each year ODK holds a Think Tank event to discuss and address campus issues. In Fall 2013 your Circle held a Mental Health Think Talk, bringing together groups with various perspectives on mental health. Solutions were reported to the President’s Mental Health Task Force to consider for inclusion in the Institute-wide action plan. Some of you may have participated. That work is now coming to fruition. We’re changing the way we educate students, embracing new technologies and teaching methods, with things like Vertically Integrated Projects and Problem-Driven Learning. Those are skills that you can take with you and use throughout your life.

Leaders are innovative.

We encourage students to be innovative through programs like the Georgia Tech Integrated Program for Startups, TI:GER, Business Plan Competition, and Ideas to Serve, and InVenture Prize competition. Many of the winning innovations from the past three years of the InVenture Prize have already been commercialized.

Technology changes quickly. Things that were state of the art when you began school here are outdated when you graduate. Innovation isn’t a product; it is a mindset.

There are levels of leadership.

John Maxwell has defined five levels of leadership, with one being the lowest, and five the highest.

Level one is position, which is the basic entry level of leadership where your influence comes from a title. People follow you because they have to. Positional leadership doesn’t work in volunteer organizations. You lead by influencing others.

Level 2 is Permission. People follow you because they want to. Level 2 is a greater level of influence. People know that you care about them as a person, and you create win-win situations.

Level 3 is Production: People follow you because of what you have done for the organization. People are working together to accomplish a goal. You become a change agent.

Level 4 is People Development. People follow you because of what you have done for them. You mentor someone, and they grow. You're a model for others, and you expose them to great opportunities.

The highest level of leadership, according to Maxwell, is **Level 5: Personhood.** People follow you because of who you are and what you represent. It will take a lifetime of proven leadership to attain this level. Followers are loyal and sacrificial. An example of a leader who inspired people to follow because of personhood is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. People would follow you because they share the same vision, and because of your integrity.

Each fall we give freshmen the opportunity to participate in what we now call Project One: the First Year Experience. Several years ago, for what was then called the freshman reading experience we asked new students to read "I have a Dream," writings and speeches by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that changed the world. I was invited to include a message in the front of copies that we had printed for Georgia Tech freshman.

It was especially appropriate, as the year marked the 50th anniversary of the matriculation of African American students at Tech. It included examples of great writing, including compelling speeches, sermons and articles from a man who dared to take a leadership position for the cause of democracy.

I quoted the late Ted Sorensen who had a significant role in crafting President John F. Kennedy's major speeches and writings. In Sorensen's book "Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History," he wrote about the power of words:

"Rare is the speaker who has the power to make others listen, and, if they listen, to act, and if they act, to do so in the manner he advocates. Nevertheless, I do not dismiss the potential of the right speech on the right topic delivered by the right speaker in the right way at the right moment. It can ignite a fire, change men's minds, open their eyes, alter their votes, bring hope to their lives, and, in all these ways, change the world. I know, I saw it happen."

Dr. King wrote eloquently and passionately, and he demonstrated his commitment to what he believed in through his life, his everyday decisions, his sacrifice, his vision.

We all have a different sphere of influence. When we maximize opportunities today, we don't know what doors that will open for us tomorrow. (Share example of how you got to work at NASA, and how you got appointed to NSB by both administrations. Honored to be able to serve.)

Close: I encourage you to take full advantage of your time at Tech. You have a world of opportunities before you, here and after graduation.