

Alumni Award Speech - Oct 20, 2017, Hinckley Assembly Hall, BYU

Lt Col Brett Swigert

Remarks provided during a luncheon with the faculty, the Romney Institute's Advisory Board and MPA students.

Let me begin by saying thank you...thank you for getting me out of the Pentagon! Any day outside of the beltway is a nice day! Don't get me wrong...D.C. is pretty neat, with a lot of history and things to do...but I love coming back to BYU and seeing the beautiful, mountainous backdrop here in Provo. It also gives me an excuse to check in on our son, Riley, who is attending Utah Valley University...or from his perspective...dad is here to buy me dinner and pay my tuition!

In addition to our son being here, I'm also blessed to have my parents, in-laws, sister and her family, and dear friends here with me—thank you for coming today. Most importantly, I have to thank my lovely wife Tammy, who came with me and is the REAL reason for any personal or professional successes I may have had. She is so amazing and is the wind beneath my wings...honey, I can't read the rest of this...just kidding. I'm also positive she could deliver a much more animated and exciting speech. She's definitely the more social (and better looking) half of this relationship.

I am extremely honored and humbled to accept this award. It is truly a privilege to be named among the list of previous recipients that include distinguished city managers, senior federal and state officials, and non-profit leaders. I am also honored to represent the many men and women who have come from this great institution that have served in our nation's military uniform. And today it just happens to be BYU blue...go Air Force!!!

Thank you Joe Flores and the Romney Institute for the beautiful painting. We're very fortunate to have with us Colonel Gail Halvorsen, a World War II veteran who is also known around the world as the "Berlin Candy Bomber" or "Uncle Wiggly Wings" for his efforts to bring hope to the people of Germany during the Berlin Airlift. Thank you Colonel Halvorsen for being here with us today.

You may have heard the story behind this painting. Col Halvorsen, brought cheer and hope to thousands of Germans in Berlin following a Soviet blockade by leading an allied effort to drop candy regularly as the Americans established an air bridge bringing life-saving food and supplies into the isolated city. It is a beautiful painting and tribute to the selfless work of our service members and veterans. Thank you Col Halvorsen for the work that you have done and for being here with us today!

I also wanted to give a quick shout-out and congratulations to Dr. Lori Wadsworth as the newest chair of the Public Management department and Director of the Romney Institute. 16 years ago, although it seems just like yesterday, we were sitting in her class...and Lori made us all feel at home...and Lori, please forgive me if I embarrass you, but she would start class by taking off her shoes...and making everyone feel comfortable, encouraging them to open up and contribute to class discussions. Thanks Dr. Wadsworth...we had a great time and learned a lot from each other. The same goes for Dr. Facer, Hart and my other professors who are undoubtedly some of the best professors and public administrators you'll ever meet. Also a big thanks to Heather Chewing and Vicki Okerland for facilitating everything today.

Advisory board members, public service professionals, faculty and anyone else I may have missed...I appreciate the opportunity to address this group today. I've been asked to share with you my vision for successful public service and how WE can make an impact in improving the governance of the organizations we work within.

I think a good starting point is to look at our predecessors who were among the most successful...such as George Romney, for whom the Institute of Public Management was named. He is an example of an extraordinary public administrator who worked diligently to improve things wherever he rolled up his sleeves. Over the course of his career, Governor Romney made significant contributions in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. George Romney was an innovator in the automotive industry and led a large company. He served as Michigan's governor three times where he helped to eliminate the state's deficit, bolstered education, and streamlined government. George Romney was also a big advocate of civil rights at a time when it wasn't popular. He went on to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. And then, after retiring, he continued in service as a volunteer.

George Romney is clearly a leader with vision, and dedicated to the principles of public service. We can only aspire to be more like him, and try to continue to carry the mantle of effective public service.

Over the past 20 years, I have had the opportunity to work for some quality leaders like George Romney, and have tried to incorporate some key characteristics that made them so effective. One of which is our current Secretary of Defense, who I believe is an amazing leader. I ran into him in the hall a few weeks ago and he said "How are you doing young man". First of all, I was feeling pretty good because he thought I was young...but at the same time I was just a little nervous though because as you may have heard, he has been quoted as saying "*Be polite, be professional, but have a plan to kill everybody you meet.*"

I've survived my encounters with the Secretary thus far and am proud to serve under his leadership.

In the Air Force, we have three core values...Integrity First, Service Before Self and Excellence in all we do. Today I'd like to focus on service. We've learned about the importance of serving others since Primary, in Scouting and from our families. Those who have chosen a career in public service have a unique opportunity to put this principle in to practice in a very tangible way.

Now before I share what I've learned to help me be a more effective administrator and leader, let me provide a little background...as anything I share on this subject is through the lens of my own experience.

I graduated from the BYU Marriott School and Air Force ROTC program in 1996 (don't be fooled by the flowing locks of hair...yes, I am old)...and was commissioned in the Air Force. I started as a brand new Second Lieutenant as an intelligence watch officer, in charge of over 100 Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines...fortunately I had a good Senior Non-commissioned Officer...Master Sergeant John Butler, who took me under his wing and mentored me.

Since that time I've been fortunate to serve as an intelligence officer working legacy Cold War missions and Counter-terrorism; an executive protection officer for Presidential travel; an instructor & commandant here at BYU's Air Force ROTC program...what a rewarding experience to help shape the next generation of leaders; I also earned my MPA during that period. A reconnaissance aircrew member flying combat missions over Iraq and Afghanistan supporting my real heroes...those on the ground in harm's way getting shot at, and working with the local people. There were many times that we'd be on our way home after a long mission only to receive a call to divert to support what we call Troops In Contact (or a TIC). So we'd get topped off with more gas from a tanker and I'd make contact with the unit calling for help. On one particular mission over the radio we received a call that a 13-man team had come under fire in an ambush while out on a mission. I could hear the desperation in his voice and continuous gunfire in the background. I immediately took down their coordinates and let them know we were en route. We began working with close-air support aircraft that were also en route. The team was pinned down and receiving arms fire from multiple directions. I continued to hear the gunfire and the urgency in his voice as they began to take casualties. We got to work, locating the bad guys and working with the pilots, providing target after target until each enemy position was struck. When the dust settled, we heard the call for medivac support for several casualties who likely wouldn't make it back. With a heavy heart, I went back to my bunk, & I couldn't sleep...playing everything back in my mind, looking for

anything I missed or could've done better. I thought of their families and the potentially devastating news they would be getting that next day. THOSE are the men and women I admire for their bravery and heroism and I am proud to have served with them.

I later served as an operations officer, working with talented civilians and military people who work hard every day to provide our leaders and warfighters with critical information needed to make decisions to protect Americans, our allies and our interests across the globe. They are true patriots whose work often goes unreported or unnoticed by the public.

Later I was fortunate to lead nearly 400 Airmen as a Squadron Director of Operations and then as a Commanding officer. There is no greater responsibility in our nation's military than commanding our young men and women...taking care of them and motivating them to accomplish difficult tasks.

I went on to serve as a Deputy Group Commander, leading our nation's global missile warning mission...protecting America. Now I work for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, leading our nation's effort for combat targeting systems. We are faced with some of the greatest challenges our nation has ever faced...from around the globe...with the smallest military in our history. Trust me, the Pentagon is a busy place these days.

So over my 20 years of service, I've learned a few specific things that have helped me to be a more effective administrator and leader. I discussed them in greater detail during the student lecture but they include the following:

- 1) Give "Commander's Intent" & then turn your people loose! Provide vision (the why), a mission statement (the how) and empower people to make a difference in your organization. I am amazed every day at how bright, creative and resilient our young men and women are. We invest a lot in training them and sometimes, just like with our kids, we don't trust them to take the wheel for fear that they might fail. And sometimes they do fail but it's how they respond to those failures that allows them to grow and be better. Sometimes they don't fail but take the organization to new heights. What we as leaders owe them is providing "the why" ...creating a culture and climate of belonging and trust. We articulate that in our mission statement...or the "how" of our organization and then we empower them to execute our mission. I've seen it every day...it works...and Airmen have come up with some creative solutions to tackle some of the biggest challenges. Whether it's pulling out the guts of our electronic systems in the back of the airplane over Afghanistan...soldering parts together or rewiring things to enable us to stay on mission, piecing together elaborate terrorist networks in time to stop a

major attack, or coming together when one of our own experiences a tragedy in their life. We owe them the training, clear guidance and trust to do their job....and then we follow up with top cover when things don't go as planned, or hold people accountable when they make wrong choices.

- 2) Foster a culture of teamwork! Anyone who has ever served in the military will tell you that the part they missed most was the comradery...there's nothing else like it. We know that we have to trust each other to survive...starting with basic training...there's a saying "cooperate to graduate". Going back to my story in Afghanistan, if we had not trained, practiced and worked together, that unit on the ground may not have made it back. Everyone played a key role and had to work together to succeed. If the maintainer hadn't repaired the radar equipment, the whole team never would've gotten off of the ground and would've failed. If the refueling team hadn't made their time on target, we wouldn't have the gas to respond. Those experiences made me realize that whether you're an infantryman, weapons controller, pilot, bomb loader, maintainer, cook or an administrative staff member...we all have an important part to make the mission happen. It's about the people...they make or break our mission.

- 3) Last, but not least, Care at the individual level! People will do the minimum out of respect for rank or position (or fear of reprisal)...BUT people will be willing to take a BULLET for a leader who has earned their loyalty! Loyalty is earned through genuine interest & caring as well as through actions that demonstrate your confidence in them. Schedule time to visit with your people!...learn their names, interests and about their families; if you don't put it on the schedule, it won't happen! As a Commander, there were not enough hours in the day to do all the things the Air Force would have me do...from executing the daily mission, writing annual evaluations, reviewing inspectable programs, conducting disciplinary actions, reviewing budgets and spending...it meant a lot of long days and phone calls after hours. But, I tried my best to block out time to walk around and visit with my Airmen. It always ended up being the highlight of my day. Asking them about their plans for the weekend, hobbies, talking about football, families...it made them more real to me and made them feel closer to me. When they knew that I cared about them individually...they were more likely to follow through and do what I needed them to do.

These rules of leadership apply to administrators in all sectors...not just the military. At all levels of government, non-profits and industry, we need more men and women who are

willing to believe in...and invest in their people. We need leaders who speak the truth, face the facts, take a long-term perspective, and prepare our society for the changes and challenges of this century. Many of these challenges are unprecedented in their size, scope, complexity, and potential impact. I believe this is true at the federal, state, local and organizational levels.

Let me conclude by thanking all of YOU for YOUR service. You may not necessarily be wearing a uniform or going into hostile territory (although some of you might argue otherwise!)...but we are all in a people-focused profession, and the people of our universities, towns, cities, states and nation depend on US every day for invaluable services.

We face new challenges every day in this calling. These challenges can sometimes seem daunting. Sometimes the bureaucratic red tape can cause those working in government especially, to feel jaded. But remember, that at the end of the day...the targets of your efforts (no pun intended) are real people. People are the engine that drives our industry...our employees, our peers, our bosses, our customers. So try to view challenges as opportunities for growth and change. I encourage each of you to look for ways to empower others. Create a vision for them...give them something to believe in as an organization. Foster teamwork...build relationships and continue to learn from those around you. And take care of your greatest resource...people!

Thank you again for this honor and for allowing me to share my thoughts with you today. Thank you.