

**Commencement Address-Graduate School-
Rutgers University, Campus at Newark
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Marc Holzer

Thank you very much President McCormick, Provost Diner, members of the faculty, graduates and guests. I am honored to address the graduates of 2006, and the members of the faculty, the administration and the family members whose support was instrumental in making their graduations possible.

I congratulate our masters and doctoral graduates today not simply for their accomplishments in earning their degrees, but for their dedication to careers in the service of the public.

For many of you that link is obvious: public administration, criminal justice, global affairs, nursing.

But others of you whose careers may be largely in the private sector-in biology, chemistry, neuroscience, psychology or management -- may think I am mistaken. Let me assure you that I have not misstated my intent. My view is that you are indeed all public servants. A strong public service ethic will represent a common thread across all of your careers as you improve the common good, the human condition, the quality of our lives. Private corporations are government's partners in improving public health, building our necessary infrastructure, developing and applying our emerging technologies. Private practitioners help individuals and families improve the quality of their lives. Private foundations support important public purposes. Private citizens in the U.S. are exceptionally generous in their support of the not-for-profit institutions that increasingly deliver our public services.

If you still doubt your identity as a public servant, let me assure you that whether or not you are in the employ of a public or not-for-profit agency, you will-if you do not already-very likely devote a great deal of time to voluntary efforts for the public good. You may serve on a school board or tutor students, deliver meals to the elderly or help Habitat for Humanity build a house, serve on a government task force or an arts advisory board. In the U.S., 100 million individuals volunteer each year.

As graduates of Rutgers-Newark you have been infused with the ethic of public service. Rutgers is a public university. The Newark campus is the epitome of that public mission. This is a campus that, by its urban mission, communicates a very public and relevant commitment to all members of our educational community. This is a campus that is more diverse than any in America, and that diversity emphasizes our common purposes as a society. This is a campus that welcomes and assists immigrants, empowering them with the skills that strengthen their abilities to serve those common purposes. This is a campus where the world comes together for the common good.

Society's support for this university and this campus are critical if we are to stand a chance of supporting this dream.

Why is public service so important? Because the important purposes of our society are largely carried out in the public sphere: public health, public education, justice and security, environmental protection, museums and universities, and scores of other necessary services.

Yet, despite its importance the public sector and public servants are continually under attack. That leads me to three observations:

First, the attacks are simply a constant, a fact of life. Ignore 98% of them. Too many result from ignorance of the real accomplishments and sacrifices of very dedicated citizens, employees or volunteers. As public servants, we are dedicated to our clients. We put in long hours and work under difficult conditions. One social worker underscored that commitment:

We don't have plush office space for many years we weren't treated like professionals, but my office is very professional. We have to take everybody who comes here. You've got to love it to stay I've been here 25 years.

Second, take pride in your public service. For the country to succeed, the commitment to public service through capable government, not-for-profit and corporate organizations must be strong. Thankfully, despite negative images, low pay and dangerous circumstances, many people do choose to serve their fellow citizens in the spirit of the oath to public service first sworn by citizens of ancient Athens:

We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public sense of public duty;
That thus we will transmit this city
Not only not less, but greater, better and more beautiful
than it was transmitted to us.

Increasingly, people are responding to such values, abstractions, or callings to serve others, to solve challenging problems, to improve the public condition. Tom Downs, a top public official, has compellingly argued that: Only in public service can you find the sense of completion that comes from working on a successful program and then realizing that 35 more children are alive this year as a result of that effort. The opportunity to help solve a community problem and then to witness the changes that occur is the cement that binds us to public service.

A corporate manager turned teacher emphasized the importance of that intangible compensation that comes with public service:

Some people feel they were put here for a reason, and I guess I feel like that. This was the best thing I ever did. I wake up in the morning, and I can't wait to get to the classroom.

Third, avoid unethical behaviors. Abide by the law and the spirit of ethical behavior. Public servants should go beyond written minimums of ethical standards. All that is legal is not necessarily ethical. A clear conscience is all-important. Yet too many people jeopardize their agencies and their careers by unconscionable, selfish actions, ranging from stifling good ideas to corrupting good programs, from treating clients impersonally to treating them unjustly.

Thomas Jefferson said it best: "I have the consolation of having added nothing to my private fortune during my public service, and of retiring with hands clean as they are empty."

We will all take great pride in your successes in service to your fellow citizens.