Thank you for the kinds words of introduction. It is always my pleasure and privilege to address my colleagues here at WCCCD. As I pondered what to share with you on this occasion on the broad subject of “faculty excellence,” a strange thing happened. As I prepared for this moment, I discovered that I wanted to talk about teaching and leading. The importance of the moment made clearer to me how these two disciplines – so often separated in our administrator vs. faculty worlds – illuminate each other. They grow from the same root, flower from the same branch, and bear fruit from the same tree. In my finest moments of leading, I am a teacher. In my most inspired moments of teaching, I am a leader.

Listen as John W. Garner lists the fundamental leadership tasks: visioning goals (teaching), affirming values (teaching), motivation (teaching), managing (teaching), explaining (teaching), achieving workable unity (teaching), serving as a role model (teaching) and renewing (teaching). How are these not the tasks of teaching? How are these attributes and skills not those required of leaders in and beyond the classroom? *PAUSE* To perform with distinction, and excellence, the dynamics are the same.

For that is my simple definition of excellence – being the best you can be in the leading, teaching and serving professions you have chosen. Excellence demands the kind of effort that opposes half-hearted, drifting along, and going with the flow.

Let me hasten to add that I will not be equating excellence with success. Success is about being THE best while excellence means being YOUR best. Success, to many, means being better than anyone else while excellence to me means being better tomorrow than yesterday. In other words, the excellence I would hold out, as an exemplar is not about competence.

I would also not be speaking about pedagogy, although I think it is vital. I will not be summarizing best practice, although group discussion, thoughtful questions, reflective responses, learner participation, learning communities, collaborative work, modeling, feedback, climate setting and fostering responsibilities are not only important categories of best practice in teaching, but have equal relevance for best practice in leading.

Teaching and Leading Excellence

As I continued to think about this presentation I could not move my thoughts away from a book that I just read that really sums up the role we each should play here at this wonderful learning institution. It’s called Leading Out Loud, authored by Terry Pearce. While leading out Loud is essentially about leadership, it is, most importantly, a book about communication. The kinds of communication that allows the ability to create an honest and compelling vision. Leading Out Loud allows one to discover what matters, apply courage and discipline and create images or pictures that resonate. It also creates a vision that I believe can be developed, honed and defined by applying several points made in Leading Out Loud, which are

- First, remember that trust is built by communicating from the mind AND the heart. It has been said that if you know others, you are intelligent, but if you know yourself, you are wise. Do we have the ability to open our hearts and minds to really know each other?

- Second, understand the power of the human voice. We are all on a personal journey of self discovery from the earliest age. We discover who we are through all life experiences, especially from our interactions with others. I recall as a child, my deeply felt reaction when a teacher would give me a word of
praise and encouragement. This simple gesture made me feel OK. Someone thought I was OK – valued and loved.

- Third, all of YOUR communication is built on the foundation of core values that make up our teaching and leadership message, who WE are, and what WE care about. Ralph Waldo Emerson put it succinctly when he said, “What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I cannot hear what you say.”

- Have the courage to be human. Courage allows us to boldly recognize that most people in our lives are doing the best they can with who they are and what they know.

- Understand how powerful it is not having to be right. You don’t always have to be right. People are culturally conditioned to have to be right. The parents are right. The teacher is right. The boss is right. Who is “right” overrules what is right. Political parties have institutionalized having to be right. Having to be right becomes a barrier to learning and understanding. It keeps you away from growing, for there is no growth without changing, connecting and questioning yourself. If you have to be right, you put yourself in a hedged lane, but once you experience the power of not having to be right, you will feel like you are walking across open fields, the perspective wide and your feet free to take any turn.

- And finally, by making the decision to lead, you now have the responsibility to extend yourself beyond the immediate emotional response to one that includes empathy for others regardless of the situation.

**Teaching and Leading Out Loud Relies On Community**

By offering mutual acceptance and support, leaders who embrace community understand that they don’t have to do everything by themselves. In Leading Out Loud, Pearce writes, “Leading is a personal pursuit that by definition involves other people. The primary distinction between a leader and someone who merely conceives and expresses good ideas, or one, who merely gets results, is the ability to relate to others.” In other words, when we form bonds with colleagues, they can lessen extreme behavior, burnout, and stress, not to mention isolation and competitiveness. A community also offers a way to hear the diverse, sometimes different voices among us and is a place where individual differences can be truly valued.

One of the things I want our faculty to understand is that teaching and leading in a community college can be stressful. Ron Pritchett writes that stress “… is an invisible epidemic among us, one that antibiotics can’t touch and the microscope cannot spot.”

As I look at this assembly – this network of friends and colleagues – I challenge you to make the most of community – to see it as an antidote to stress, a resource for inevitable uncertainties, and a requisite support system for excellence.

**Excellence in Teaching and Leading Grows from a Professional Calling**

It is not a mad dash up some hypothetical career ladder. Rather, a sense of vocation that is built on self-understanding and the discovering of work we truly love. In Frederick Buechner’s words: “Vocation is the place where your deep gladness serves society.” challenge all of us to honor and, if necessary, rekindle the fundamental passions that have called us to our professions. And if we cannot find that passion in our current work, I challenge us to find our way again to that deep gladness.

**Excellence in Teaching and Leading Releases Human Potential**

This final element focuses on those we serve as we teach and lead. Fundamentally, as educators, our responsibility is to develop the talent that will ensure the vitality of our institutions and communities.

Here we come full circle. Whether in the classroom or in the larger community college environment, we are about creating tomorrow’s leaders – helping them better understand their
potential, the complex world in which they live, the importance of service, and the promise of meaningful work.

So these are my truths. Our pursuit of excellence in teaching and leading is a journey. It grows from relationships. It is a messy, varied pursuit that relies on community, grows from a vocational calling and releases human potential. How can we ask for more? How can we not help but see that we who teach and lead, and serve, are bound to each other by purpose, method and experience? I borrow from the timeless words of John Gardner:

“I know that each of you has within you a light that won’t go out. I know that there are times when the flame burns low, that it’s almost smothered at times by weariness, skepticism or defeat. But I know that it springs back to life. I know you have more faithfulness than has ever been asked, more strength than as ever been tested, and more to give than has ever been given. So let the faith begin with you.

True teaching and leading is a messy process. It is not just about connecting the dots nor is it about pushing forward change to achieve results. Effective teaching and leading today and tomorrow is about a commitment to tap into the essential nature of oneself and others to engage in the exchange of deep thoughts, honest feelings and purposeful actions. The lessons for teaching and leading out loud enables us to bridge past history and old memories, allowing us to all fulfill our highest potential. And that is, to me, the real work of the teacher and leader of the future.

As I said before, I know you have more faithfulness than has ever been asked, more strength than as ever been tested, and more to give than has ever been given.

So, once again, let the faith begin with you.

What a wonderful opportunity we have to lead and serve in the Wayne County Community College District.