

# *The Care and Keeping of BYU's Human Resources*

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Good morning, brothers and sisters. This is a real privilege for me to share my thoughts with you this morning. When Brother Skousen called me, I thought about any number of reasons why he would be calling. Giving a devotional talk was the furthest thing from my mind. But here I am. From the introduction you know that I was recently released as Primary president—one of the choicest positions in the Church. At this point I can guarantee you that doing sharing time in Primary is a lot less intimidating and stressful than standing before you this morning.

Brother Skousen encouraged me to talk about my work in Human Resources, working with the people who make up the campus community. I hope that what I share with you this morning will give you pause to think about the brothers and sisters who serve you every day and your responses to them. My remarks contain experiences from my time as a student, Human Resources employee, and Primary president.

In Human Resources we have a mission to promote a working and learning environment that helps BYU's campus community to be the best it can be. That means we work within the framework of the gospel and professional guidelines with the hope of helping those with

whom we interact, including students, to be successful, happy, and productive in life and in the workplace. My thoughts today center on how you and I treat those human resources who make BYU's environment a wonderful place in which to study and to work.

I would like to pose some questions to each one of you. The first is: Why are you here at BYU?

Certainly one reason is to get an education in an environment of positive gospel values. People in general have a desire to be with those who believe as they do and who have similar values. In our case, we want to learn and work in an environment where religious beliefs are blended with secular learning. The prophet Jacob in the Book of Mormon gave a good reason for wanting to be together in such an environment. He said: "And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul" (Jacob 2:8).

I don't think you are wounded in the literal sense of the word, but it is truly a blessing to

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come to BYU where you can learn, participate, and, for many of you, work in an environment that allows you “to hear the pleasing word of God.” What great strength comes from that opportunity alone!

My next question is: How do you and I show appreciation and gratitude to those who provide services for us?

Do we follow our Savior’s admonition to love one another and do unto others as we would have done unto us? How do we express appreciation for the many things we seem to assume are rightfully ours?

Primary children love stories, and so do adults. So here is the first story of the morning. It comes from my student days. I hope that at its finish its purpose will be clear. I remember coming here as a freshman to live in Heritage Halls, to study, and to make new friends—some of whom are still good friends who stay in touch. They are resources of comfort for me.

During the summers I was a commuter student. And every morning as I drove past a wonderful garden at the corner of Ninth East and Center Street in Provo, I would admire the flowers and vegetables, and the thought would pass through my mind, “I ought to stop and tell that man how much pleasure his garden gives to me.” For three summers I made the same drive and had the same thought. That garden brightened my day and brought joy to me. Then one day the *Daily Herald* had a special feature on the gardener. It was on the obituary page. I never had the opportunity to thank him for the pleasure his garden had given me. I vowed at that time to let people know how they had brightened my life.

As you leave this devotional today, I would encourage each of you to look at the beautiful grounds that BYU’s human resources in the Grounds Department have developed to create an environment that is conducive to learning and to working. Have you ever said “thank you” or “I appreciate your efforts to make campus beautiful for me” to one of the grounds

crew? It only takes a moment. Don’t lose an opportunity to recognize the efforts of so many to make life pleasant for you.

There are others on campus who quietly and efficiently go about their work assignments in order to make life pleasant and the environment welcoming to those who learn and work here. Have you ever thanked, smiled at, or acknowledged the Dining Services people who serve you lunch or snacks? Have you expressed appreciation to the custodial staff members who work early and late to keep campus buildings clean and welcoming? There is always a danger of mentioning specific areas on campus because someone will be forgotten. For example, there are all the people in Physical Facilities, Admissions and Records, the Lee Library, the Health Center, the Press Building, and the Bookstore. I could go on and on naming the human resources found on this campus. All of these brothers and sisters—full-time and students—are here to make campus a place “to hear the pleasing word of God” and a place to learn those secular things that will help to make each of us productive and worthy of the blessings we receive.

As members of the Church we have been given guidelines on how we should treat each other. When the prophet Alma was preaching privately to the people, he reminded them of the responsibilities incumbent upon those who sought baptism. He set forth criteria for those who wanted to be part of the fold of God and to be called His people (Mosiah 18:8–11). They included:

1. To be “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light”
2. To “mourn with those that mourn”
3. To “comfort those that stand in need of comfort”
4. To “stand as witnesses of God at all times”

The reward for them would be to be redeemed of God and numbered with those of

the First Resurrection. I love the response of those who accepted his invitation to be baptized, and I would hope that each one of us could and would respond in the same manner. In Mosiah we read: “And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts” (Mosiah 18:11).

As members of the BYU community, you and I are blessed in many ways. We all may not have an opportunity in the same manner as these Book of Mormon people to bear each other’s burdens or to mourn with those who mourn or to provide comfort, but on a smaller scale you and I have an opportunity to help a classmate or a roommate who is struggling; we can help a coworker who is ill or who is facing odds that appear to be insurmountable. We certainly can all stand as witnesses for Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. And I would hope that in doing so, we would feel the same joy and want to clap our hands to affirm the joy we feel from actively supporting each other in our efforts to gain an education and to become more Christlike in our behavior toward each other.

Other very important BYU human resources are the faculty members who are here to help guide and direct your studies. Many have come to BYU out of a love of teaching and a sincere desire to be part of the BYU mission to prepare young people to be successful in their lives and careers. They appreciate the opportunity to teach at a university where the gospel can be shared openly and without fear of offending someone.

I would like to share with you the story of one professor who left an indelible impression on me—one that lingers with me today years after my college days. This professor’s name was Christen Jensen. He was the son of Danish immigrants who had struggled to give their son an education. As a history major I had the privilege of taking a constitutional history class from this man. Nearing the end of a

long and service-filled career, he was a legend on campus. He had been acting president of the university twice and dean of two colleges, one of which was the graduate school. He served faithfully in the Church. He was a kind husband and father.

Dr. Jensen would come to class and sit down at the head of the table in the dean’s conference room in the old Joseph Smith Building. As students in the class, we were expected to be prepared and to participate. He would talk, ask questions, discuss, and develop thought processes for an hour without benefit of book or notes. His face radiated a joy in teaching and sharing that was easily apparent. Time in that class passed so quickly that it was hard to realize the class time was over.

One faculty member said of Dr. Jensen, “I think we have never had a more loyal and devoted supporter of great music and important lectures than the beloved Christen Jensen.” His obituary in the *Deseret News* said, “The natural kindness of Christen Jensen, his love for young people, his ready sympathy and devotion to learning are characteristics for which this good man will long be remembered” (“Dr. Christen Jensen,” *Deseret News*, 18 August 1961, 18A). Does this description bring to mind the Savior’s admonition to love one another and to serve each other?

Dr. Jensen gave me a love of learning for which I will be eternally grateful. To this day I hope I thanked him appropriately, and I acknowledge today by my words all of those men and women who opened my mind and soul to the joys of learning, including those with whom I have worked and do work.

I am sure that each one of you has had or will have a similar experience. I challenge you to review carefully your opportunities to interact with these men and women who are prepared to share with you their love of learning and their joy in teaching. A verbal thank you is always appreciated, as are sincerely written notes at the end of a class. These are

recognitions of their service and support of you as a student.

Now, having shared some thoughts about those who educate and those who support those efforts, I would like to turn to you and your experiences on campus and you as a human resource. The BYU Honor Code says that students and personnel will seek to demonstrate the moral values encompassed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is a big challenge. In Primary the children sing a song “The Church of Jesus Christ.” It goes:

*I belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*

*I know who I am. I know God’s plan. I’ll follow him in faith.*

*I believe in the Savior, Jesus Christ. I’ll honor his name.*

*I’ll do what is right; I’ll follow his light. His truth I will proclaim.*

[Songbook, 77]

Knowing who you are is very important, but it brings obligations not only to help others and appreciate them but also to follow Christ’s example in all ways possible. An understanding of that makes each person, as an individual, a better person and one worthy to receive the promised blessings from Heavenly Father.

The poet John Donne proclaimed: “No man is an island, entire of itself” (*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* [1624], no. 17). He explained that there is a unity that makes people part of a whole. From my perspective that means being part of the family of our Heavenly Father. As children of our Heavenly Father, we understand the need to share with others and to serve others—to be part of a whole. President N. Eldon Tanner told Church members on a number of occasions that “service is the rent we pay for living on this earth” (quoting Lord Halifax). King Benjamin told those who read the Book of Mormon:

*And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. [Mosiah 2:17]*

Next time you read King Benjamin’s teachings, substitute “I” for “ye” and personalize his instructions.

Elder Sterling W. Sill explained our obligation to serve each other when he said: “That man loves God most who puts his own life in harmony with Him, and who serves his fellow men as though his life depends upon it, as indeed it does.”

The author George Eliot made a brief statement that I have posted on the bin above my desk: “What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?” (George Eliot, *Middlemarch* [1871–1872], chapter 72). Hopefully, while you are at BYU, you will gain a greater appreciation of service and what Heavenly Father expects as you interact with His children wherever and whoever they may be.

In the Equal Opportunity Office we work with the laws of the land, particularly Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and its amendments. These laws established certain protected categories of people who must be treated fairly and where discrimination should not occur. These categories include color, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, and disability—the things that sometimes make people appear different. It seems obvious that everyone deserves to be treated fairly, but in some places and situations, this is not the case.

As children of our Heavenly Father, we should know that how we treat each other is very important in His eyes. All of His children deserve respect, kindness, and love.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shared some thoughts on our behavior with others in the recent April conference. He counseled each one of us about how we should treat each other.

First he warned against “cold, caustic, unbridled words,” and then he went on to say:

*Our words, like our deeds, should be filled with faith and hope and charity. . . . With such words, spoken under the influence of the Spirit, tears can be dried, hearts can be healed, lives can be elevated, hope can return, confidence can prevail. [“The Tongue of Angels,” Ensign, May 2007, 17, 18]*

In the Employee Relations/Equal Opportunity Office, we work occasionally with people who have said demeaning and hurtful words to friends or coworkers. We also work with others who in the heat of the moment have said words that have hurt, wounded, and chilled others. Once those words have been said, it is difficult to recall them. To help mend those relationships is a challenge.

I remember working with one young woman who was offended. She could not understand why she was receiving inappropriate, aggressive e-mails and telephone calls from male friends. She questioned why they would think she appreciated receiving these less-than-polite e-mails and calls. When I visited with the young men, they said they were just joking. Because of the way she had behaved earlier, they thought she would enjoy receiving these edgy messages—messages that sounded like they came from bad TV shows or B movies. Both sides realized that in their behavior toward one another they had crossed over the line of appropriateness and had not followed the counsel of latter-day prophets and the Savior regarding the treatment of others.

Also in April conference, President Hinckley gave counsel in the priesthood session. As he spoke of his concerns about today’s trend toward inappropriate behavior and casual and edgy language, he said:

*A filthy mind expresses itself in filthy and profane language. A clean mind expresses itself in language that is positive and uplifting and in*

*deeds that bring happiness to the heart. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “I Am Clean,” Ensign, May 2007, 62]*

Just because the idols in today’s world use language and behaviors that are less than civil or appropriate, that is no reason members of the Church should be caught in the web of actions that offend and hurt others. On numerous occasions President Hinckley has counseled members regarding civility in the treatment of others. In his book *Standing for Something*, he noted that civility is one of those virtues that is often neglected and forgotten by people today as they interact with each other. Sometimes people today have an in-your-face attitude that is destructive and harmful to others. (See *Standing for Something* [New York: Times Books, 2000], 47–58.)

Once again I turn to my experiences in Primary. Let me repeat the words of a song the children love:

*If on occasion you have found  
Your language is in question,  
Or ugly thoughts come to your mind,  
Then here’s a good suggestion.*

*Just hum your favorite hymn,  
Sing out with vigor and vim,  
And you will find it clears your mind.  
Hum your favorite hymn.*

*Before you say an angry word,  
Remember you’ll regret it,  
For once it’s said the harm is done,  
And some folks won’t forget it.*

*Just hum your favorite hymn,  
Sing out with vigor and vim,  
And you will find it clears your mind.  
Hum your favorite hymn.*

[“Hum Your Favorite Hymn,” *Songbook*, 152]

As you continue your life’s journey, I would encourage you to choose good mentors and



strong examples to help you develop those Christlike characteristics that the scriptures and latter-day prophets have been so persistent in telling each of us to be mindful always of how we treat others and how we represent the Savior.

I will share one final story on the treatment of others who appear to be different. Recently, over the Internet, I received a picture story called “The Hippopotamus and the Tortoise.” This true story happened in Kenya, where storms and tsunami waves had hit the coastal region. A baby hippo had survived the waves and storms but had lost his mother. After the storm the baby hippo, nicknamed Owen, bonded with a century-old tortoise at an animal rescue facility. This tortoise was a giant land turtle, and Owen weighed about 650 pounds. The turtle replaced Owen’s mother. They swam together, ate together, and slept together. They have bonded and now accept each other totally. Their differences are forgotten. The e-mail story ended this way: “This is a real story that shows that our differences don’t matter much when we need the comfort of another.” (See Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Paula Kahumbu, *Owen and Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship* [New York: Scholastic Press, 2006].)

This brings us back to the scripture from Jacob. I will paraphrase what it says: We come

to learn the good word of God in a good environment and to be comforted by those around us (see Jacob 2:8). Just like Owen, we want and need a friend, a mentor, an example—someone to help us and to love us. Hopefully we won’t have to suffer a tsunami to learn how much we depend upon each other, how we should treat each other, and how we use and benefit from BYU’s human resources.

As I close my remarks today, it is my prayer that each one of us will remember that individually and collectively we are children of our Heavenly Father. We are His human resources. He loves us. He expects us to accept the responsibilities that come with being brothers and sisters in the gospel. BYU is a special place. It is a place where men and women can join together in an atmosphere permeated by the gospel, but it is also a place where strong secular knowledge can be gained.

I appreciate this opportunity to talk about BYU’s human resources—about you and me and our friends, roommates, and coworkers. We are truly blessed. In following the teachings of our Savior and staying true to gospel standards, we can stand as witnesses of our Heavenly Father and we can give comfort to those around us while we are learning the pleasing word of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.