

Remarks by Elizabeth Gregory North, Department Head, Office of Agricultural Communications, Mississippi State University, at the occasion of her receiving the ACE Professional Award from the Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Life and Human Sciences at the annual conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 14, 2013.

## **My best advice for the next 100 years**

I especially want to thank Elaine Edwards for her great kindness and generosity in making this nomination. And I want to thank all of you for your friendship and professional camaraderie over the years. We have worked together, laughed together, and you have sustained me.

As I think about receiving this recognition at this meeting, when we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of ACE, and as we look towards 2014, when we will celebrate the centennial of the Cooperative Extension Service, I am reminded that we all have warmed by the fires we did not build and drunk from wells we did not dig. Whether we are aware of it or not, we all are heir to a rich legacy of talent, professionalism, and commitment to service from all who have gone before us.

If I have seen farther, it is indeed because I stood on the shoulders of giants.

If I have succeeded, that success has been due to the administrators who have placed their trust in me, the clients who gave me the opportunity and the challenge to do the work, and the colleagues whose talent, imagination, and ability dazzle me, inspire me, and make the work joyful.

As I think about those who have received this recognition before me – two of whom served as my supervisors, three of whom preceded me at Mississippi State, and all of whom I have admired and hoped to emulate in my career – I feel awed, and humbled, and very grateful to be among their number. Perhaps most of all, I feel a bit old.

So I will claim that privilege of old people and give you my best advice for the future of our profession – in our next one hundred years.

The stakes are high.

In today's crowded and competitive communications and economic environment, the future of our organizations, indeed, of our industry, depends a great deal on how good we are at what we do.

It is critically important to remember:

Successful communication is now and always has been *focused on the audience*.

Successful communications *cannot* be purely tactical. It must be grounded in research, guided by strategy, and integrated across media.

*People pay attention to communications messages when those messages answer their needs (not our own).*

The point of communications is not the coolest or latest technology. *It is about building relationships* between people and organizations.

“Good enough” never is.

“No” is rarely a final answer. Stay alert, wait for your moment, and try again. And again.

Be open to the possibilities, and never lose faith, and never lose your imagination. Even when the worst happens.

Communication inspires, encourages, teaches, stimulates, infuriates, soothes and lets us know we’re not alone.

And we are never as good working alone as we are when we work together.

As many of you know, I was an English major.

And one of the first things you learn when you study literature is that there is always someone who has said something better than you can.

So I’d like to close by quoting Shakespeare, who said all things best:

I can no other answer make but thanks,

And thanks, and ever thanks.

Shakespeare

*Twelfth Night*, III.iii.