



INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

The Latin word *spīro*—“to breathe”—is a component of many modern English words. For example, *conspire* comes from roots meaning “breathe” and “together”; *expire* from “breathe out”; and *aspire* from “breathe on.” But my favorite *spīro* derivative is the word *inspire*, which means “breathe into.” Recounting this etymology, I am reminded of Genesis 2:7, in which God “breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life.” In the Latin Vulgate, the word used is *inspirare*—God inspired Adam. It is not hard to see how *inspire* has come to mean “to infuse some thought or feeling into (a person, etc.), as if by breathing.”¹

At BYU Law School, I hope that all of us are inspired with a simple but profound idea: we can change the world for the better. I refer to this idea as *inspiring leadership*.

In his seminal talk on the subject of “inspiring learning,” President Kevin J Worthen noted the dual meaning of the term: it “describes actions that inspire or motivate students to learn” and is “learning that leads to inspiration or revelation.”² Similarly, I view inspiring leadership as actions that inspire members of our community to lead as well as leadership that produces inspiration.

I suggest here three simple words—corresponding to the three years of law school—that I hope will illuminate the idea of inspiring leadership.

YEAR 1 Excellence (Leadership of Self)

Inspiring leadership demands excellence. Although we have a faith-based mission, graduates will inevitably be judged by the world’s standards when seeking employment, sitting for the bar examination, and, eventually, making their mark on the world. As a law school, we take President Dallin H. Oaks’s injunction seriously: the Law School “must attain a greatness that transcends religious lines and establishes itself in the eyes of legal educators, scholars, the judiciary, the legal profession, the business world, officials of local, state, and federal government, and citizens at large.”³ Thus, we aspire to be a great law school in the same way that other law schools are great: as a source of great ideas and as a training ground for great professionals.

YEAR 2 Together (Leadership with Others)

Traditionally, leadership was viewed as a natural outgrowth of legal education, but BYU Law is making leadership training explicit with a suite of innovative reforms. In a course entitled Foundations of Law and Leadership, we promote the theme “Excellence Together” because a distinctive feature of inspiring leadership is community, rather than the more common heroic individual who guides a group of admirers. In our best moments at the Law School, we learn and serve together.

Inspiring leadership is particularly evident in our clinics and field placements, where students “get proximate”⁴ with people affected by the legal system. In the Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Clinic, our professors and students create conflict resolution systems in contentious environments. In the Legal Design Clinic (known as LawX), we design legal technology solutions to improve access to justice. And in the Refugee and Immigration Initiative and the Community Law Clinic, professors work with students and alumni to represent immigrants. In these and myriad other efforts, members of the BYU Law community work together to change the world for the better.

YEAR 3 Innovation (Leadership in the World)

As a Law School, our goal is to advance peace, justice, and opportunity; achieving these ends requires inspiring leadership, which in turn requires innovation. Known as one of the most innovative law schools in the nation, BYU Law is introducing several new initiatives that will promote inspiring leadership. Pro Bono Boot Camps will help people with problems such as domestic violence, housing discrimination, debt collection, and elder abuse. LawStories will launch a series of training sessions and stage a national storytelling event featuring law students. The Leadership Incubator will help students develop legal innovations for real-world implementation. The Council of Innovation Leaders will support BYU Law’s efforts in leadership training financially and through time and expertise.

Many law schools claim to train leaders, but the special mission of BYU Law integrates faith and intellect to that end. We can accomplish great things when we demand excellence of ourselves and those around us, when we work together in true collaborations, and when we explore innovative approaches to providing legal services. We have been emboldened by our initial efforts in leadership training, and we invite faculty, students, alumni, and friends of the Law School to generate and implement ideas that will change the world.

NOTES

- ¹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “inspire,” definition 4.
- ² Kevin J Worthen, “Inspiring Learning,” BYU university conference address, Aug. 22, 2016.
- ³ Dallin H. Oaks, in *Addresses at the Ceremony Opening the J. Reuben Clark Law School*, Aug. 27, 1973, 6.
- ⁴ D. Gordon Smith, “The Path of Present Intention,” *Clark Memorandum*, Spring 2018, 5–6; see also Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2014), 12–13.

D. GORDON SMITH



Dean, BYU Law School

