Good morning...Thank you very much for the kind introduction and for the invitation to be a part of this celebratory breakfast. It is a genuine pleasure to be here with you this morning.

How many of you have heard of the TV series, “America’s Got Talent?” (AGT) How many of you have ever watched AGT?

These talent programs have popped up on television stations all over the world. Britain’s Got Talent, Canada’s Got Talent, Arabia’s Got Talent, every country has talent!

For the next few minutes I would like to talk about “talent” and why it is so important. I would also like to share some thoughts about making the most of your talent for the university and for yourself.

So, the question is: How does an organization “leverage” talent to get the most out of its investment? The operative word here is “leverage.”

Last Sunday afternoon I was reading a book on the subject of “competition.” The author, Margaret Heffernan (A Bigger Prize) wrote something that captured my attention and caused me to pause and think about it. Here is what she said:

“There is more talent in ordinary places than most people ever imagine or see.”

Not only do I agree with this statement, I really like it. I know it’s true. There is incredible talent in ordinary places.

I saw this talent in the hundreds of college and university courses I taught over the past 50 years. I saw it in the shy student sitting on the back row; I saw it in the older student trying to finish her degree while working full time and taking care of her family; I saw it in the student hippies in the 60s and 70s; I saw talent in Hispanic students, African American students, white students, poor students and those not-so-poor. I’ve seen it every year in every class I taught.

I’ve seen incredible, world-class talent among faculty members in the universities where I’ve been privileged to work: Virginia Commonwealth University, U. of North Texas, University of Alaska, Zayed University in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and here at the University of Toledo. And because I’m a little biased, I say “Especially here at UT!”
I’ve also seen incredible talent...world class talent...among the people who actually make the university function, the staff. These are the people who operate the complex systems that make teaching, learning and research possible for students and faculty. A thousand different jobs are required to run a university and each of these jobs requires talent.

I’ve always felt privileged...maybe a better word is “blessed” to work with such talent. True, we kind of expect to find talent on college and university campuses. It is no secret that our universities generally are places where we find enormous concentrations of talent; talented students, talented faculty, and talented staff.

That’s one of the reasons universities are so important to our communities, our cities, our regions, our states and the nation. Universities are reservoirs of talent that our communities and country depend on.

That’s the reason UT is such an important institution. We are, I know, the major, and largest reservoir of talent for Toledo and Northwest Ohio. We also contribute to the talent pool of our state, our nation and the world.

UT’s Got Talent! We have talent in what we consider “ordinary places” here at UT.

Being a reservoir of great talent, however, is not protection against problems. Our nation’s greatest concentrations of talent--our public universities--are also institutions that are sustaining some of the nations’ greatest challenges and problems. Having talent does not immunize our universities against problems and challenges.

Our nation’s public universities are going through one of the most troubled periods in the history of higher education. Many describe this period as a “crisis” or “perfect storm”.

The phrase “perfect storm” has become a part of our language and culture and it is frequently used to describe problems of an extraordinary scale and scope. A perfect storm is one in which there is the convergence of several storms, coming together, creating a mega or even meta storm.

I’m a little reluctant to use the phrase “perfect storm” to describe the problems of public higher education today but it is a phrase that is used by some. However, if the challenges and problems of public higher education are not quite a “perfect storm” today, it is not difficult to see it forming. Every university president, provost, vice president, dean, and higher education policy maker can see it on the horizon. Even the President of the United States sees it coming.

We all know the challenges and problems of our public universities, particularly here in Ohio. Our concern is that these challenges and problems appear to be converging.
There are at least three major storms on the horizon that we have to understand and resolve.

1. **One storm on the horizon is the way we currently deliver higher education:**
   While I may be in the minority on this, I believe the jury is still out on the big questions related to the meaning of academic credit: how it is measured, what is the best way to deliver credit, and how should we package it to offer a university “major,” in physics, engineering, medicine, English, sociology, or the humanities.

   The problem we have to resolve is the appropriate and most effective role of technology in providing a “university degree.” For some critics, the university campus is too big, too expensive, too inconvenient, and pedagogically obsolete. Technology, they argue, is the answer.

   Where we ultimately come down on this question will, in large measure, determine the future of higher education.

2. **The second storm I see on the horizon is the way we currently fund public higher education:** Ohio is among the highest tuition states in the nation (top 1/3) and that is because it is also one of the more poorly funded university systems in the country. There are many metrics that show how poorly public higher education is funded, particularly here in Ohio; let me give you just one. **Per capita funding.** The national average for per capita funding of higher education is $141. Per capita funding for higher education in Ohio is a low $81. We can do much better than this; Ohio must do a much better job. It is past time for reform.

3. **The third storm is closely tied to the second and that is the high cost of tuition and its implications for our students, our economy and our society.** The high cost of tuition is the direct consequence of inadequate funding of our universities. For the past 20-plus years, state legislators and governors have been shifting an ever-larger share of the cost of higher education from the state to the students and their families. Each year for the past two decades, we’ve been told to “do more with less.” The net result is the growing burden of debt our students now carry...more than a trillion dollars, an amount greater than the nation’s total credit card debt.

   The nation and particularly Ohio must address this tuition storm before it is too late. Students routinely leave UT with 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 dollars of loans to repay. Some of our graduate and professional students graduate with debt exceeding $100,000. I know some of them personally. Their monthly payments are $800, $900, $1,000 a month and more.

   As a result of their debt from student loans, they can’t afford to buy cars, houses, furniture, appliances, take vacations, and all the things that fuel our economy. Many defer marriage, having families, and moving ahead with their lives because of this debt.

   The implications of the high cost of tuition are not only real for students, they are real for our economy and ultimately our society as a whole. This is a very serious issue in Ohio and even here at UT.
So, what can we do about this?

I believe this is where we **draw on our talent**. But, having said that, I'm not sure talent alone will get us through these storms. In fact, I know **talent alone is not enough**.

However, I also know that if we **leverage** our talent...this pool of talent we collectively possess here at UT and in our universities generally, we can successfully navigate our way through this storm.

So how do we leverage our talent...the talent in our public universities and, especially, our talent here at UT?

I’d like to offer a few suggestions on how we can do this.

When my dad was a young man back in the 1930s living on a small family farm in Athens County, Ohio, he joined what President Franklin Roosevelt called the “three Cs” or the Civilian Conservation Corp.

Well, I would like to borrow President’s Roosevelt’s acronym, the “three Cs,” to describe what I think are the **best tools for leveraging talent**.

1. The first of these three Cs is **Communication**. Communication is the **life blood** of any organization, especially universities. It has to be top down, bottom up, horizontal, inter-departmental, inter-collegiate, inter-institutional. The problem is, **we are still an institution of silos and these silos drastically limit our effectiveness**. Information is power and we need to learn how to share information and share power if we want to leverage our talent. **Communication**.

2. The second of the three Cs is **Coordination**. When you have effective communication, you are in a much better position to **coordinate** your activities, projects, and programs.

Let me cite one example: When I returned from Dubai, the President asked me to lead the development of a **global strategy for the university**. I was pleased he asked me because I knew we needed such a strategy. UT has global interests and these interests are scattered across the whole university. We have people traveling internationally nearly every day to some country. **We have no system for knowing who is traveling where, when or why**.

Think about it: If we had a system for knowing and communicating who was traveling where and when, they could represent the broader interests of the University. We could align our interests and coordinate our relationships. Coordination can and will make us more efficient, more effective and ultimately more successful. **Coordination**.

3. The third tool for leveraging talent is, in my view, the most powerful tool of all. **Collaboration**. Person with person. Department with department. College with college. And, university with university. **Collaboration produces a whole that is**
greater than its parts. Collaboration changes an organization’s math from 1+1=2, to 1+1=3 or 4.

There is personal and organizational power in collaboration to accomplish things that cannot be accomplished when a single person, single department, single college or single university tries to go it alone.

The truth is, every university has talent, just as UT has talent. It is how we use that talent, how we leverage that talent that determines the outcome and who succeeds.

Our universities are in rough waters. It’s pretty stormy out there. That is particularly true in Ohio.

How we fare, how UT fares in these rough waters, will depend on how we tap into our great pool of talent, and more importantly, how we leverage that talent through communication, coordination, and collaboration.

This room is full of talent. My thought for you this morning is, “Leverage your talent.” You will be amazed at what communication, coordination and collaboration will do for you, your department and, most importantly, for UT.

Thank you for all you do for UT and congratulations on your accomplishments.

Dan Johnson
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