

Parting Words: Remember to 'Make Other's Conditions Our Own'

By SHERRY MAGILL

In a few weeks, I will retire as president of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, closing the door on what has been an extraordinary 27 years with the Fund, 25 of them as the chief executive.

As I end my career in philanthropy, I first wish to thank my Jessie Ball duPont Fund colleagues for sharing the work with me, for caring deeply about how we carry ourselves, and for never disappointing. They are an extraordinary team and it has been my good fortune to lead them. I wish also to thank the trustees, past and present, who embraced my leadership.

I wish to assure our readers, especially Jessie Ball duPont Fund grantees, that I leave the presidency knowing that the Fund is well positioned for the future.

During the past three years, we have streamlined our operations, ended ineffective grant strategies, and designed a smooth governance and executive transition, all to ensure robust resources for the future. We, of course, cannot predict what the financial markets will do, but the Fund's endowment is well-managed and our program-related investment strategy allows us to stretch our resources for the greater good.

We created an internal knowledge management system, capturing our organizational values and lessons learned from three decades of grantmaking. My fervent hope is that future staff and trustees will not reinvent the wheel, but learn from our past.

With the assimilation of two new trustees in 2018, the Fund has a full and knowledgeable trustee body to select and engage a new chief executive. These trustees bring a wealth of expertise as well as a deep commitment to continuing the legacy of Jessie Ball duPont.

While I never met Mrs. duPont, I have spent the better part of my working life fulfilling her *Last Will and Testament*, a

document I may have read 50 times. Like all of us, she was not a perfect human being. But she was generous, philanthropic before she was wealthy, as exemplified by her

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early donations to help young people attend college. Her will is an exercise in restraint. Unlike many donors, she set down few restrictions, arguing that circumstances would change over time and allowing her trustees enormous discretion in meeting future challenges and naming successors. Choose well.

Those of us who work in philanthropy bear witness to the unusual intersection of wealth and poverty. We must recognize that operating from this place of privilege demands that we approach the work with a sense of humility and gratitude. In my 27 years of watching local leaders and just ordinary folk, of investing modest grant funds in community change, I have never once not been impressed by how very much local people accomplish with so very little.

I confess to an enormous frustration as corporate and political leaders, journalists, and opinion shapers alike, ignore the local nonprofit sector and the dispossessed they serve. If you wish to know what's happening in local communities and how to invest our way out of social problems, ask local nonprofit leaders. They know what works and they know why policies succeed and fail. They are the glue that holds us together.

People writing laws and policies and shaping our lives most often ignore these leaders, embracing one ideology after another and ignoring facts and reality. This willful ignorance is thoroughly exhausting. If I live to be 1,000, I will never understand why the American people have chosen to invest large sums of taxpayer dollars in for-profit entities whilst allowing nonprofits to beg for support. We cannot serve the common good by “privatizing” the provision of public goods and services. It simply does not work.

I am reminded of the words of John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

“to prosper, we must be knit together in this work as one man. . . . We must delight in each other; make other’s conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor

and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body.”

As for me, I plan to stay engaged in the civic life of Jacksonville, a place my husband and I call home. Active citizenship is essential if democracy is to survive. Attention to what we have in common is essential if we wish to live in healthy communities. One’s stewardship responsibilities do not end when one ends a professional career.

And I will watch the work of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund and its grantees from a distance, with admiration and anticipation, knowing not what comes next but confident that the Fund will remain a faithful partner.

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