

Thank you for this honor and for indulging me a few moments of your time and attention – especially at 8:00 in the morning!

I am both proud and humbled to receive this honor. To be recognized by people I admire and respect, to be included in a group of past recipients whose work has defined our profession is something that is both special and intimidating.

It seems appropriate, being in Asheville, to note that the first ACE Fellow – then known as the Professional Award – was Thomas Byrd, an associate professor and agricultural information specialist from North Carolina. Many ACE Fellows are in the room this morning – Frankie Gould, Faith Peppers, Mary Wirth, Beth Forbes (Dave King, who was at the conference yesterday) and Thomas Knecht, who was recognized 16 years ago. Our successes are built on the contributions and accomplishments of these individuals. Will those individuals please stand so that we may acknowledge you with our appreciative applause?

One of my favorite sayings is that success has many parents and failure is an orphan. That is truly the case with me.

I am indebted to the many people who have been so influential and impactful in my life and who have made any success that I am credited with possible.

I believe we have multiple families that we lean on and who support us throughout our lives. My professional family is large and expands across the nation. It includes women and men who have given me opportunities, who have supported me and who have also made me very proud.

Women like my colleagues Beth Steuver, from Michigan State University, who introduced me to ACE 15 years ago. My University of Florida/IFAS family -- most of whom are here today and far too many to name individually here.

And the many many colleagues and friends whom I have met and collaborated with through ACE-- I could be reading this conventions roster – but a special shout out to my 2022 Level Up family of Lori Greiner, Lori Tyler Gula, Maggie Lawrence, Tobie Blanchard, Stacy Stearns, Cha Nae Bradley, and Ana Iverson. They represent exactly what ACE is all about.

Last year they all jumped in and said yes to a project that had not happened before, with little time, and no idea of the adventure of planning a fall conference that we were on. And they delivered.

And people who I worked with early on in my career, especially those who I hired into entry level jobs. These individuals have gone on to great positions – one is in a leadership position at a Michigan college, one a deputy city clerk for the city of Lansing, Michigan, another is the executive director of a Louisiana museum. Who knew where these young women and men who start their careers with us eventually end up!

My point is, that there is a time in our careers where we no longer are the young rising stars learning everything we can -- as we should have then. But now we should turn to nurturing and sustaining those who will come after us. Just as we stand on the shoulders of those leaders who opened doors for many of us, we need to wear our shoulder pads for the next generation of leaders who are eager to reach for new heights on our shoulders.

One of the most effective contributions to our profession that we can make is to proactively engage and support our colleagues, celebrate their successes, and create opportunities for them to surpass our accomplishments.

I am proud of my profession. I have always hated and physically cringed when someone referred to what I do as “spinning” the story.

I have always hated the word spin.

Because our job is telling the truth.

We are champions of truth. We are all champions of FACTS.

And our jobs are hard. Especially today.

The truth and facts are under siege in our world today. Facts need all the champions they can get. The truth and facts need us.

And it seems to be harder today to be those champions. There are days when I just want to go in my office, hide behind my computer, and stay out of the way of the haters out there.

But we need to be present. We need to show up. We need to restore faith in the power of truth.

That means...

Talking truth to leadership;

Talking truth to those disillusioned ;

Talking truth to those who may not want to hear it.

We need to **have faith** that facts will be heard and that they will make a difference.

We need to **have hope** that facts and objectivity will not only be heard but understood.

Even when there are differing opinions, we need to be stewards of hope in an evolving future that embraces a variety of opinions.

And we need to **nurture our love** for our profession, nurture our love for the power of communication and how it can change the world... how we as communicators can change the world.

Never, never abdicate your power as a change agent.

Never, never abdicate your power ...

To tell the truth

with faith in facts

With hope that the truth will be heard

And

With love for the work that we do

And when we embrace that faith, that hope and that love, we will continue to change the world.

One final thought—

I have always loved the Wizard of Oz. At first it was the great music, the magical Emerald City of Oz, those ruby red shoes – really, I still want a pair of those shoes!

But as I got older, I loved the story – the story of a journey of self-discovery that Dorothy and her crew were on. Because nobody gets anywhere or accomplishes anything – even confronting the great Wizard of Oz -- alone.

We need people who bring out our best at work and at home. We need the brilliance of the scarecrow, the courage of the lion and the love of the tin man on our yellow brick road. Find your crew and move on down that road.

I have been truly blessed to have found my own brilliant scarecrow, brave lion, and loving tinman in my husband, James. This success is a shared one.

Thank you again for this recognition.