

My dear friend Celestine Sibley was an Atlanta newspaper reporter for more than 60 years. She called me early most every morning of our 15-year friendship to chat over coffee before work. She'd end each call with: "Have fun. Do good."

That's exactly what she did until she wrote her last column the week before she died. She did great works of daily journalism and wrote more than 30 books, but she also did good things for all of those around her: her readers, her coworkers and especially her community.

She sent a thank you note to every reader who took time to write her, and there were dozens each day. She was never too busy to hold forth with new reporters, especially over beer or three, and give advice. She was never too busy to sit a minute with a homeless man on the street and share her sandwich, their life stories and a few dollars.

She was always doing good and having fun at it.

Celestine often said that she took time with scoundrel politicians, street characters around Atlanta and even murderers in the trials she covered across the South because **every person has something to teach us about humanity and about ourselves**. I've found that to be true.

When I look back over my career, I owe so much to being curious - learning from the people I meet and the opportunities life gives, while trying to have fun and do good.

When I was a 4-H'er, I was in the Fashion Revue project. We had to make an outfit and model it for judges who sized up our sewing skills. One night I sat hunched over my mother's sewing machine for hours. As midnight inched forward, I found myself ripping out a crooked zipper and trying to get it sewn in correctly for the 50th time. My mother, my extension agent and I were all in tears. It just would **not** work.

Finally, my extension agent took the dress from me, looked it over and said, "This thing doesn't need a zipper. Just sew it up and pull it over your head." I came home a week later with a blue ribbon.

That was a very valuable life lesson:

Sometimes, we have to stop following the pattern, create a new way and go in headfirst.

That experience taught me to **see every project as an opportunity to create something new and exciting.**

Never underestimate the power of your work and the good it does for those we serve. Last week, I was talking to an old newspaper editor friend of mine who told me the story of his neighbor - an 87-year-old farmer, who at one time was the

largest minority farmer in Georgia. He was visiting with Mr. Bellamy one day when he reached into his desk and pulled out a crumbling, yellow newspaper clipping. "Back in the early '70s, the folks at the Extension Service in Athens did this story on me and they ran it in the local newspaper," Mr. Bellamy fondly remembered.

For more than 40 years, he has lovingly preserved the article and took pride in sharing it with visitors. It was a few hours in some Extension news editor's life that has given a lifetime of honor to old farmer. It was a good feature story for that reporter, but it was a validation of self-worth for that farmer.

We should take time to learn from everyone we meet. Every person has value. If we take time to find out what that is, we will gain value, too.

At my very first national ACE conference, I stood in the corner of a hot hotel suite full of people I didn't know and watched the ACE president sign an endless stack of papers creating a charter partnership with Russian agricultural communicators.

From the corner of my eye, I saw this interesting looking redhead slaughtering a huge cake. She'd take the knife, and WHAP, slam it down into the cake, then slowly drag icing into a multicolored mess and then WHAP, stab that cake again. Icing was flying everywhere.

Finally, I inched my way over to her and said, "You've never been a bridesmaid, have you, honey?" She said, "NO!" I said, "Please, let me show you how to cut that cake."

From that moment on, we've been great friends and trusted partners. But never turn Frankie Gould loose with a cake knife! **Know your team members' limits.**

Over the years since, Frankie and I developed many trainings and impact systems and managed pressing regional issues together for the good of the land-grant system. None of that would have ever happened had I not taken the cake killing as an opportunity to get to know an interesting person in my path.

Look around this room. While you are here, make your way over to someone you find interesting and get to work. Start a new team. Create something magnificent. Design your own pattern. Have fun and do good.

When I was growing up, my neighbors across the street had steak dinner every Friday night. My family had steak once a year, if we were lucky. So, at 5:30 on Friday nights, I was beating a path across the road to take a seat at their dinner table. They had five kids and they all assumed one of them had invited me to dinner. Nobody invited me. I just wanted steak.

But, I never showed up empty-handed. Sometimes I'd run through our big garden and pick some fresh produce or fruit to contribute to dinner. My father was a bread deliveryman, so sometimes I'd grab a cake off of his truck and take dessert. I had steak dinner every Friday night for nearly a decade.

Don't sit around and wait to be invited to join a group you want to be a part of. Just show up and ask to be included. But always show up prepared to contribute something of real value.

And, remember, the difference between a guest and an intruder is the style and grace of your entrance and the value you bring to the table.

A few years ago, I wrote a proposal to the Administrative Heads Section of APLU asking them to consider adding an ACE representative to the system's Communications and Marketing Committee.

When the chairman, Bruce McPherson, read the proposal to the group, he laughed and said, "We have a proposal here from Faith Peppers recommending that we add a professional communicator to the Communications and Marketing Committee. And, well, when you read it out loud it's embarrassing we haven't thought of that."

I've spent the last four years representing you on that committee, working to show the value of our expertise to their efforts to raise the profile of the land-grant system.

This year, "Creating a greater connection with and leveraging the expertise of land-grant communicators to further the committee's efforts," is a high-priority action item in their plan of work. They have asked me to stay on the committee for another 3-year term to help them forward that priority.

If you show up at the table and bring value, you get invited back.

However, you can bring a lot more value if you build a good team.

When given national opportunities, I've never had to go it alone. Among you, I've found willing, talented team members. Collectively, we always bring more value than was anticipated. To all of you who have stepped up and volunteered to be a part of those teams and who have worked hard to show the value of us as communicators and ACE as a vital, rich resource of expertise, THANK YOU.

In order to be a useful contributor to any team there are some important steps you must take, so I'll leave you with these ideas to chew on:

1. **Know who you are.** If you aren't sure what value you bring, you will never be able to convince anyone else that you should be on the team.
2. **Know what you do well.** Don't volunteer for every project. Pick those where you can contribute the greatest value. There is plenty of work to go around.
3. **Know why you do what you do and know why what you do matters.** If you can't articulate your mission and the value of your work, then perhaps your heart isn't truly in it. Find your heart and follow it. If you can be so lucky to match what matters to you with your gifts and skills and make a living doing it – that is the key to happiness, fulfillment and success.
4. **Value visionary leaders.** Work hard at carrying forth their vision. It's up to you to build trust, to demonstrate your value and to be successful.

5. **Be kind.** Always. To everyone. I'll never forget a story a former 4-H camp counselor told me. One day she sat down with a little girl at camp and painted her fingernails. When she finished she gave the little girl a hug. When she turned to walk away, she noticed the camper's county extension agent standing to the side with tears in her eyes. She walked over to her and said, "I'm sorry. Did I do something wrong?" She agent said, "Oh no! Thank you so much for doing that. That's probably the only time in that child's life that she's been touched out of kindness." You may never know how much your kindness means, but know it always matters. People will likely forget the things you do, but they will long remember how you treated them. It's often not what you say, but how you say it that gets you to success.
6. **Be helpful.** At the end of every day, ask yourself, "Whom did I help today?" If the answer is, "No one," rethink what you are doing.
7. **Be grateful in all things.** Take time to say, "thank you." Know that I am grateful to all of you who make ACE a great place to build strong partnerships, do good work and make life-long friendships. Know that I am especially grateful to all of you young members who bring new life to our organization, who will keep our profession strong and who will help us grow in exciting new ways that we can't even imagine today.
8. **Tell a good story.** Stories matter. They make your point in a way people will feel and think and remember your message long after you leave the room.

Thank you for being patient.

Thank you for your partnerships.

And, again, thank you so much for the tremendous honor.

Have fun and do good. Every day.