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50th Anniversary Eastern Academy of Management Presidential Address

Theodore D. Peters

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

50th Anniversary Eastern Academy of Management Presidential Address

Baltimore, Maryland, USA, Speech delivered May 10, 2013

Theodore D. Peters

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE: OUR MILESTONES

Good afternoon. I have hit that dreaded moment, for the audience as well as for me, when we are collectively called upon to endure the Presidential Address. There is little solace that the 49 preceding Presidents have withstood this ordeal—although there is a true sense of history and pride for me to deliver the 50th address.

I cannot sum up 50 years of EAM education, training, and service—I leave that to the Plenary presentation later this afternoon—I strongly encourage all of you to participate. I can tell you that past is prologue, that the first 50 years of EAM will serve as the model for the next 50 years. EAM will do so because of what Liz Davis addressed last year as the roles of our EAM community. I want to drill down one more level to talk about what makes up the EAM Community—in short, it's All About the People.

Let me indulge myself with a few personal reflections in front of what will be my last captive EAM audience. We all bring our own special, personal identity when we come to EAM. Our individual identities then meld into a collective. Social Identity Theory states that group membership helps shape a person's sense of self through “a sense of belonging” (McLeod, 2008). Clearly our involvement in EAM gives us this sense of belonging through Social Identity Theory, but it also overlaps a third circle in the Venn diagram—the circle of Professional Identity. I suspect for most of you, as it was for me, there were critical moments of discovery that created the pathway to this academic belonging. My first moment was that feeling of comfort in late September of my first year in my doctoral program, just walking around the grounds of my university. The second was late October that year when I received my first doctoral grade of A, which led me to believe I really did belong here. My third was following my first EAM presentation—such as it was. I had helped analyze some hospital data with my first faculty advisor, Dr. Tom Taber. On December 1, he presented me with “our” paper submission to EAM—I was second author! I was surprised but thankful. He brushed me aside by telling

me, “The good news is you're second author; the bad news is if it's accepted, you're presenting it.” I had two immediate thoughts—“Geez, they're not just giving this degree away” and “Presenting? I can't do no stinking presentation.” Turned out I was wrong—I could indeed do a stinking presentation. Yet despite my abysmal performance, EAM gave me, and perhaps most of us, our first sense of professional belonging. What became special, however, was the sense that this belonging to EAM had a markedly personal feel to it. It still does for me, now after 25 additional, consecutive conferences.

Like all relationships—the more you invest, the more you can get back. As the adage explicitly states, “You get what you pay for.” If you don't pay, as with an investment, you receive little to no value in return. Investing in EAM, as with any group activity, strengthens the personal commitment to the organization, and as in the case of EAM, it also strengthens your senses of Professional Identity and Social Identity. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to serve EAM in a myriad of jobs and tasks, all, I assure you, labors of love. I have been fortunate to have been elected to the Board four times, so far totaling 13 of the past 17 years, culminating with the incredible privilege and honor to lead EAM in our 50th Anniversary year. I can only hope that my stewardship has helped prepare Tim Golden, Kris Backhaus, and Paul Szwed for their turns to move us into our next 50 years. I know that my days as Grasshopper at the feet of so many prior Presidents, Directors, Officers, and Fellows clearly has set my course and confidence to pursue this investment of self into EAM.

As I said, I am incredibly fortunate to be part of EAM governance, but interestingly, I don't consider myself fortunate to have developed my many friends at EAM. I do not mean this observation as a slam or slur to anyone. I simply mean you do not have to be fortunate to make friends at EAM—friends here are everywhere: some new, some old, some close professionally, some markedly different from ourselves, yet many become close personal friends over the years. To belong in EAM, you simply need to look around for the next friendly face in an

inner harbor of friendly faces. There is no secret password, no initiation, no hazing—just a community of individuals, people dedicated to intellectual challenges, sharing their knowledge, ethics, and perspectives with their students as well as with their friends at EAM, people who care about each other, be they new or old members, and the many worlds in which we live.

It seems fitting to me that we close the door on the first 50 years of EAM with my being President, as I suspect I am the last of the old generation. My contemporaries are now in their sixties and, dare I say, seventies. My generation has had its time, and we leave an EAM that is in a decidedly good state. We are financially solid and stable, no longer fighting to pay our bills and worried about our survival and the pressure to always turn a conference profit. In addition to finances, we are addressing issues of technology and how we can be more efficient in handling these expenses and processes. Our annual conference is our significant product offering, and we have a site selection process that has sustained us in a variety of tried and true conference locations. With Newport next year, fittingly selected by one of the next generation, we are beginning to branch out into an untried and new site, but one we expect will soon be included in our tried and true group. And we continue to seek more and better ways to provide enhanced value to our members and to our affiliated organizations—EAMI, CASE, and ELA—through additional products and ongoing relationships focused on learning, shared values, and our continuing contributions to our profession through our professional identity.

After 50 years, it is now out with the old and in with the new as the next generation takes over and takes us forward into the next 50 years of EAM. The four young leaders in

the President Track, plus one old guy now finishing the Track, have a strategic process in place to create our strategic goals, and, more importantly, our strategic priorities. These priorities will lead to implementation activities by the Board and other EAM members to chart and follow our course for perhaps the next 10 years or so. The constant in this process, however, is the EAM label, the EAM brand, the EAM social identity. The new leaders will carry on the culture of our sense of belonging that will lead to a whole new generation of students and faculty who develop their professional identity through EAM. I clearly see this vision in these, my last moments as the sage, or perhaps just the old man, atop the mountain. It will be a struggle and a labor of love, yet, to paraphrase a far more eloquent American, “I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know [today], that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!” (King, 1968). It has been a highlight of my personal, social, and professional life to have had the honor of leading EAM in this, our 50th year, and I am thankful and grateful to all of you for the opportunity. Thank you.

REFERENCES

- King, M. L., Jr. (1968, April 3). *I’ve been to the mountaintop*. Delivered at Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters), Memphis, TN. Retrieved from <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>
- McLeod, S. (2008) *Social identity theory*. Retrieved from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html#sthash.WVIgk1VU.dpbs> [Social identity is a person’s sense of who that person is, based on the person’s group membership(s).]