

Ceremony Speaker

The University of Toledo

Fall Commencement 2015

Saturday, December 19, 2015 10:00 a.m. | Savage Arena | Main Campus

Ms. Christi Paul

You'll find Christi Paul every weekend

through the first 5

hours of the Newtown, CT school shootings

and the Virginia Tech shooting as well as

anchoring extensive coverage of Hurricane

Sandy, several presidential elections and

court cases such as the Casey Anthony,

Warren Jeffs, Drew Peterson and Dr. Conrad Murray trials. And she secured an exclusive interview

with Vice President Joe Biden, talking about his motivation to combat domestic violence as well as

addressing the issues with Obamacare.

She's a wife and mother of 3 daughters and also has a passion for helping children and teens.

She serves on the Advisory Board for Robin McGraw's "When Georgia Smiled" foundation which helps victims of domestic violence and assault find healing, safety and joy. She's also serves on the

National Advisory Council for the One Love Foundation in honor of Yeardeley Love, the University of

VA Lacrosse player beaten to death by her boyfriend, and involved with Girl Talk Inc, an

organization where high school girls mentor middle school girls to help build self-esteem and

combat bullying.

Tired of simply having to tell viewers news stories about children who are missing, Christi took action to help, founding "Find Our Children"...a partnership with The National Center for Missing

and Exploited Children in Washington, DC. DCN features a segment about a missing child, asking

viewers to help find them and to date, 35 of the children they've profiled have been brought home

safe and sound. In 2012 NCMEC honored Christi with their prestigious Hope Award...an award she

shares with past winners such as former Secretary of State Colin Powell, Senator Joe Biden and

actor Ben Affleck.

I understand wanting & needing to be valuable at work. But to “~~say~~ just trying to stay relevant” strikes me as very dangerous verbiage. ~~The~~ words we speak matter so much more than we recognize.

Being relevant isn’t about how many FB friends or Twitter followers ~~we~~ have. It’s not about your salary, your status or your stamina. It’s ~~all~~ about numbers.

Being relevant is about being authentic. Having a solid sense ~~of~~ self, a strong gauge of your worth & your goals without being tainted ~~by~~ your circumstances.

I know that’s not easy to do. Figuring out who you are & what ~~you~~ want takes time & effort & I want to encourage you to do ~~that~~ ~~at~~ got to a point in my life where I knew I needed to make some ~~changes~~ not just to my external life but to the way I spoke to myself ~~to~~ thought of myself.

I’m not ashamed to admit I’ve been ~~through~~ some counseling, I’ve ~~studied~~, I’ve taken time to look at myself with brutal honesty... ~~I~~ discovered a few things that are worth sharing because you’re embarking ~~on~~ a whole new world after today. And as ang ~~stilled~~ as it might feel ~~sometimes~~...It’s ~~an~~ adventure & I hope you embrace that.

#1. One of my biggest takeaways from the work I continue to do is this; WE CAN’T LET ANYONE ELSE DEFINE US.

In my mid ~~t~~ twenties,

doing this work isn't saying "it's OK what happened to you". It's saying "I'm not going to hold onto it & let it wreck me".

I remember my head physically hurt after that assignment but I had more than 60 answers to that when I was done. You know what some of the benefits of verbal abuse were for me?

It helped me redefine what security really means; that being part of a family doesn't give you more value...especially if you're with someone who doesn't treat you with respect & dignity. I learned I'd rather be alone than with the wrong person. And there's plenty of value in each of us already. We don't need someone else to give it to us.

It expanded my capacity to forgive. I knew I could forgive him for everything that happened but forgiveness doesn't mean I condoned it. You can forgive someone & still cut them out of your life. Just because you've forgiven them, that doesn't make them suddenly safe for you.

One of my biggest epiphanies was about boundaries & this was something I was really bad at for a long time. I was always the one saying "Oh let's all just get along. Let's all accept each other" I didn't like conflict. I didn't like to make anyone feel as though they were being left out because I knew what that felt like. But here's the thing; you not only have a right...you have a responsibility to set boundaries in your life. To discern who is really there for you -& who might not be. Because until someone is healthy enough to deal with you respectfully & with consideration, even in conflict...they're just not healthy enough to be in your life & you have a right to set that line.

You don't need anyone else's approval to be happy. One of my favorite quotes is from Eleanor Roosevelt "Do what you feel in your heart to be right, for you'll be criticized anyway." Get on twitter for 5 minutes & you'll see how true that statement is. Sometimes you just have to unfollow people in real life. I promise as you continue to grow up you'll realize that it's less important to have lots of friends & more important to have real ones. Real friends have your back. They lift you up. They celebrate you without fear of losing their own value. Be that kind of friend because it's powerful. The truth is, how someone treats you is most often a reflection of them...not you.

So I encourage you to pay attention to your instincts & take time for yourself to figure out who you are, who you want to be & to evaluate what's going on in your life. It's scary. We're often afraid to figure that out because we think "what if I'm

not good?”. I assure you at your core you are good. You don’t have to be defined by any mistakes or bad judgment you’ve made in the past or by something someone else says about you. But until you sit down, shut up & “be still” ...you’ll be at the mercy of other people. And if you live for their praise you’ll die by their criticism. No one deserves that much power over your life.

#2. One other thing I’ve learned is to RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU CAN’T CONTROL. Be very honest with yourself here. You can’t control what anyone else does or says but you can control how you react & when you react with integrity & honesty...this is where you really get the chance to shine & grow.

Many years ago when I was working primarily at HLN, I was moved from that network to In Session which was a court show on TrueTV & is seen by most people including myself, as a demotion. My boss at the time told me I wasn’t a good “fit” for HLN’s new direction & I wasn’t morning material. I remember going home, looking at my husband & saying “that man isn’t gonna tell me who I am”. I knew I was good enough. But I also knew he was the boss & the hierarchy of that says she was in control of my job for the moment.

So I went back to my thoughts shifting exercise it works in all aspects personal & professional. As hard as it was on my ego I realized a few important things; A) I was able to do more field reporting on some high profile cases and conduct extended, substantive interviews (which we weren’t afforded at HLN).

B) I was assured I was off on all holidays (which in news is unheard of)

C) I was able to finish a book I’d been writing & immediately got to deal with Tyndale House Publishers. That book, which is the story of how I overcame that abusive relationship...is a big part of my life’s mission because we know so many other people are living that dreadful life behind closed doors.

Once I learned to love where I was, a strange thing happened, again, I had no control over. After about a year & a half that boss got moved I got a call that the producers wanted me back at HLN. In the meantime I also started some fill in work at CNN & eventually, I ended up being offered the weekend morning gig at CNN & 3 days a week at HLN. So that transfer to In Session that I initially thought was a step backward was actually preparing me for something even bigger & better. And by the way, that former boss who was in a different position now actually sent me an email congratulating me on my new job & said he was really happy for me. That was class & it meant a lot for me to hear that from

The takeaway is this; Life is short. Don't waste time in all that angst to control what isn't for you to control or prognosticate what's coming next. You've got to trust the journey. trust the struggle.

Quiet your ego, listen to your gut & work for what you want no matter where you are. What is meant for you will happen.

#3. I learned the art of LISTENING WITH INTENTION & INSTINCT.

Listening is highly underrated these days. There are so many screaming "look at me!" and doing some crazy things to get noticed. Think about the last time you said something you wish you hadn't. We've all done it. Speaking without thinking is like shooting without aiming. I know people who've fired off a thought on twitter & lost their jobs over it. Listen to your gut. Listen to your instinct. And don't tweet when you're drinking.

One time my instinct saved me... Yes I was sitting on the news desk one Sunday morning & we have an earpiece that our producers talk to us from the control room. My producer got in my ear & said "We have new pictures of General Dempsey with Al Abadi". She was referring to Haider al Abadi, the PM of Iraq. Well I heard "We have NUDE pictures of General Dempsey with a body".

I'm almost hesitant to admit it because now you know where my mind goes sometimes. But I'm sitting there thinking "I don't want to say that out loud. Surely I'm not hearing what I think I'm hearing". So I said nothing. Went to a break & clarified everything & had a good laugh about it. Listening is a lost art. But it's imperative because at the end of the day...people want to be heard. Be that person who not only has a voice but helps other people find theirs.

#4: I've learned I have to BE WILLING TO FAIL & WILLING TO CHEER SOMEONE ELSE ON.

There's an author you may be familiar with..he's sold more than 200 million copies of his books that have been translated into more than 15 different languages. They've been the

There's always going to be the risk of failure...but there's glorious confidence & celebration when we overcome it. Be brave. Be bold. But don't take yourself too seriously. What is smart to take seriously is how you treat other people. Energy doesn't lie...kindness & karma go together. People will always remember how you made them feel. Lift them up.

Be their cheerleader. Life is a journey, not a constant competition. That's exhausting.

Comparison is the thief of joy. Someone else's success takes away from you. Real leaders don't tell you how powerful they are...they show you how powerful YOU are. So please don't be afraid to fail & don't be afraid to lift other people up. That's living with honesty & integrity & it matters.

#5. LASTLY, as you might be sitting there ruminating, thinking "where am I going to be 5, 10 years down the road" REMEMBER THAT PERFECTION ISN'T THE PLAN...PURPOSE IS.

If you look at what's trending, you'll almost always find diets about the "perfect" something...the next great diet to give you the perfect body, the best advice for a perfect relationship, the perfect car, the perfect house, the perfect job.

There is no such thing as perfection. Perfection is a myth & anyone who tries to sell you their perfect life is lying & what's sad is they're probably not only lying to you...they may be lying to themselves.

You want to be a real success? Put purpose behind your passion. One of the greatest examples of that kind of meaningful, prolific success is Blake Mycoskie. He's the founder of Tom's shoes & the man behind the "One for One" business model. I'm sure you know how it works...for every pair of shoes you buy, his company gives away a pair of shoes to a child in need. Blake had gone to Argentina about 10 years ago & was so shaken by what he saw...these children trying to get through their days without a basic protection that we take for granted every day. That sparked his idea.

And do you know how this company has expanded now? With every pair of glasses you buy, they help secure eye exams & medical treatment for people in need. According to their website, they've helped restore sight to 325,000 people who otherwise wouldn't have had it. Each bag of Tom's

roasting company coffee provides a week's supply of safe water to a person in need. Each backpack they sell provides training for school staff & counselors to prevent bullying. Blake Mycoskie didn't care about perfection. He cared about people. He put a purpose to his passion & he's changing the world... One for One. You can do that too. In your own way. In your own time.

But you have to decide your values. You get to decide who you want. I just want to encourage you to use your voice. Use your talents to something bigger than what will just buy you a fancy car & a grand house.

D.L. Moody may have said it best; Our greatest fear shouldn't be failure but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter. How do you conquer that? Choose faith over fear. Choose hope. Every single day. Choose confidence over arrogance & gratefulness over everything else.

And today... come on up here when your name is called, graduate, do your little dance & celebrate. Be proud of yourself then go show the world what you're made of.

And remember, don't let anyone else define you. I don't care where you've been or what burdens you might still carry. This is the day to let go of everything that no longer serves you. And when times get tough remember; At any given moment you have the power to say "This is not how my story is going to end".

And that power comes from your relevance. And that, my friends, is already wholly intact within you.