

January 01, 2003

Address to the American Jewish Committee

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Recommended Citation

Freeland (1941-), Richard M., "Address to the American Jewish Committee" (2003). *Freeland Speeches*. Paper 12.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d10010853>

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Speeches of Richard M. Freeland

Address to the American Jewish Committee National Human Relations Award Ceremony March 24, 2004

On Wednesday, March 24, 2004, President Freeland presented the keynote address at the American Jewish Committee's National Human Relations Dinner in Boston. Michael Joyce, former managing partner of the Boston office of Deloitte, received the AJC's human relations award in recognition of his commitment to diversity and community service. In his address, after speaking about the strong partnership between Northeastern and Deloitte, Freeland turned to the importance of extra-governmental institutions as vital participants in the civil society upon which democracies depend.

Thank you, Frank Doyle, for that generous introduction. I am honored to join you, Bink Garrison, Bob Mahoney and Northeastern's own Chet Krentzman as we gather to affirm the values of the American Jewish Committee and to reflect upon the character and achievements of tonight's honoree and the firm he has led.

Other speakers will have the honor of talking about Michael Joyce in more detail, but I must take a moment to recognize him — and Deloitte — for being such superb partners of Northeastern University. For some years now, Michael has been a member of our College of Business Administration's Board of Visitors. With his support, Deloitte has cosponsored the college's highly acclaimed CEO breakfast.

Last year, Michael and Deloitte also cosponsored our annual banquet honoring companies that participate in our program of cooperative education. Deloitte currently employs 25 Northeastern co-ops, and counts more than 100 Northeastern alumni and friends among its permanent workforce, including partners Jeffrey Bakutes, David Elsbree and Dave Lemoine, and Senior Manager Mike Brodsky.

Deloitte's retired CEO and board chair, NU alum Doug McCracken, has recently joined our corporation. The examples of the Deloitte-Northeastern partnership continue, but I will stop here, and simply say to Michael how much we value our collaboration with you and your colleagues. I extend to you the

university's deepest thanks.

I am aware, of course, that Deloitte's partnership with Northeastern is part of a larger pattern of social engagement by a company that places constructive participation in the community at the center of its corporate values. Deloitte encourages all its members to be active in community service and energetically promotes the values of diversity and respect for all individuals. Northeastern is grateful to be one of many beneficiaries of this company's strong social ethic, and we heartily commend the American Jewish Committee for recognizing the special qualities of Michael and Deloitte with tonight's award.

II

I mention Northeastern's relationship with Deloitte not only to acknowledge our debt to Michael and his company but because our partnership provides a helpful backdrop to some reflections on tonight's occasion. There is something striking about the way three very different organizations have come together this evening. Our sponsor, the American Jewish Committee, is an advocacy organization that promotes democracy, pluralism and respect the individual on a global basis. We are honoring the former managing partner of the Boston office of a Big Four accounting firm, who sees this occasion as being as much about his company's character as his own achievements. And the president of a private university is giving the keynote address. So the question comes: What is it that three such different organizations have in common that brings us together in a spirit of celebration?

The short answer, of course, is shared values. Representatives of both Deloitte and Northeastern would affirm the values that the AJC represents and honors with tonight's award. That much is pretty obvious.

Yet, it is worth pausing on this point to ask a deeper question. Deloitte is, after all, a business organization that makes money and creates jobs by providing professional services. What does this mission have to do with the values of the AJC? Northeastern is an academic institution dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, and the modern university is more comfortable as a marketplace for ideas of all kinds than as a proponent of particular social values.

So what are we celebrating? Do we gather to affirm institutional activities that, however admirable, are essentially peripheral to the main purposes of two of the organizations represented on this evening's program — activities to be classified as "good works" undertaken to promote good will and effective public relations? Or, are we celebrating activities and values that play a central role in the lives of our respective institutions? And if the latter proposition is true, how is that fact consistent with the

specific social and economic functions each of us performs?

III

Before attempting to answer these questions, let me step back for a moment and consider a concept that has been much on our minds in recent years, as we have witnessed events of historic significance unfold around the world. That is the concept of civil society.

This phrase is widely understood to refer to a range of social structures and organizations within a particular nation-state that exist outside the direct control of the government. A narrow definition of civil society refers to politically oriented structures — everything from political clubs and parties to newspapers, magazines and advocacy organizations of varying kinds; in short, a collection of extragovernmental organizations, each seeking to influence public policy in a given society. A broader definition of civil society includes virtually all nongovernmental organizations that do some portion of society's work, including professional associations, nonprofit institutions, as well, of course, as businesses and private universities.

Whichever definition one chooses, the point about civil society is the same: it is that independent, nongovernmental entities are essential to the strength of a democratic state. Democracy in this conception is not just a matter of free elections, representative legislatures and the rule of law. Democracy can truly flourish only when it is sustained by a dense network of independent organizations outside the control of government that steward and promote vital social values.

International events have made us acutely aware of the importance of civil society. Following the collapse of the Soviet empire, many commentators observed that the greatest challenge of restructuring political life in eastern Europe was not crafting the institutional apparatus of democracy but rather the re-creation of a civil society that had been all but eradicated by an omnipotent and all pervasive state. Consider also the case of Iraq, where, in the wake of our rapidly gained military success, we are wrestling with the profound difficulty of nurturing a democratic state in the absence of a well-developed civil society. Free elections and elected governors are not enough.

What the examples of eastern Europe under the Soviets and Iraq under Saddam Hussein make clear is the incompatibility between top-down forms of social organization and the existence of a vibrant civil society. Turning that reality around, we can see that civil society is not only a precious consequence of freedom of association, but is, in fact, an essential part of the social infrastructure of democracy.

Civil society provides multiple, independent centers of initiative

and expression within which individuals can act, can articulate values they care about, and in this way can help define the character of the broader society. This is hardly a new thought. More than 170 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville identified the propensity of Americans to come together in a dazzling array of private enterprises and independent associations as the essential underpinning of our youthful democracy.

IV

I refer to the idea of civil society to underscore the significance of tonight's occasion. The American Jewish Committee, Deloitte and Northeastern represent three participants in this nation's incomparable fabric of private associations. The AJC exists, of course, to promote certain values, but our honoree and his company are in business. Yet, Deloitte's leaders have chosen to be part of our civil society in ways that go far beyond the responsible provision of professional services. They have chosen to promote values that lie outside the realm of their most obvious and immediate interests. Why have they done so? It is their answer to this question that I believe makes them truly worthy recipients of tonight's award.

What Deloitte represents — and what Michael's leadership so clearly symbolizes — is a company that understands that in affirming democratic social values it is not just doing good works "pro bono publico" but pursuing its enlightened self-interest within a complex socioeconomic system to the strength of which these principles are central.

All institutions and enterprises employ women and men who are acculturated to the society's values. Those of us who lead organizations know that our workers seek a sense of purpose in life through their work. We must know, therefore, that if we create a place for our employees to express their views and enact their values — if, indeed, we empower our employees to express their values through their work — we can build loyalty and infuse in our workers an authentic passion for what they do.

And what we know about our organizations applies as well to our clients and customers. Now more than ever the citizenry is attentive to the culture and values of the businesses they patronize. Given all this it is hardly surprising that a recent study of American's most successful and profitable enterprises found them much more focused on enacting a well-articulated set of core values than on maximizing their profits. The profits did not drive the passion; the profits derived from the passion.

Consider the concept of diversity, a value of great importance to Michael Joyce. There is much debate about how best to create institutions and a broader society that are truly inclusive of all members of our community. But some things are beyond debate. Our nation has been changing, and the people we seek to employ and the customers and clients we attempt to serve are

increasingly drawn from multiple ethnic and social backgrounds, and conscious of the need to achieve full equality for all citizens.

Enlightened leaders, therefore, work to create environments within their organizations that provide ample room for such a heightened consciousness. It is in this way that the independent organizations that make up civil society become the agencies through which the values of society get expressed and institutionalized.

V

It is apparent to me that Michael Joyce and Deloitte understand that advancing the values of our democracy through their commitment to diversity and community service is both good business and good for the larger society within which the business must flourish. Michael is a good person. Deloitte is an admirable company. It would be enough, perhaps, to acknowledge them for the good work they do, the good values they represent.

But I am inviting us to honor them tonight for a far more important reason. I am inviting us to honor them because they choose to be a part of the civil society that makes the nation great, that makes our democracy the strongest in the world, that causes immigrants and refugees and freedom-loving people from all over the world to come to our shores to participate in the American dream.

We know that Deloitte's choice is not inevitable. There are companies that take no interest in the larger community of which they are a part, that see that community as little more than the vehicle through which they seek private gain. There are also companies and organizations that actively promote values that are antithetical to the best qualities of our democratic society. A vibrant civil society makes room for variations.

So, we are especially appreciative of the leadership of Michael Joyce and of Deloitte. In embedding democratic social values in their company, they have not only built a great business but they make our country a bit stronger and make the values that hold us together a bit more secure, and they provide an example for leaders of business enterprises and private organizations across the country.

There is a lot of talk these days about business ethics. The scandals that have made household words of names like Enron and WorldCom have focused public attention on the dangers to our economic well-being represented by irresponsible, self-interested executives who abuse their positions for inappropriate personal gain. This is an important focus, and it is generating a heightened attention to corporate governance and personal ethics within our business community.

But there is certain narrowness to this discussion, as if the entire point about business ethics is to play within the boundaries set down by regulatory agencies. Important as that version of ethics is, I would hope our gathering tonight would help us understand that it is not enough. There is a broader concept of corporate responsibility that involves thinking about how the organization one leads can contribute to the strengthening of our nation.

Apologists for self-interested behavior like to quote Adam Smith's comments on the invisible hand to make the point that self-serving actions lead to the best outcome for the community. But it is often forgotten that Smith assumed that the idea of self-interest would be influenced by — and the invisible hand ultimately guided by — deeply held social and religious values.

Tonight, as we salute Michael Joyce, and as we salute Deloitte, we recognize a man and a company that are not only successful in their professional work but who understand at a deep level the connection between that work and a larger social vision, who understand that business ethics involve something more than playing by the rules. Northeastern is proud to be associated with Michael and with Deloitte for just these reasons. They inspire us, and we seek, in our own way, to follow their example.

Thank you.