

TASH Annual Conference, 2017, Atlanta, Georgia, Turnbulls' Keynote:

“Ten (Plus) Truths from 150 (or 200) Years of Our Lives.”

FIRST TRUTH: “Sweat.” The Greek poet Hesiod (circa 700 BC) wrote, “Before the gates of excellence, the high gods have placed sweat; long is the road thereto and rough and steep at first, but when the heights are reached, then there is great ease, though grievously hard in the winning.” When you face a challenge, start climbing; mop your brow; sweat again; imagine the end; be direct in your purpose; relish the victory.

SECOND TRUTH: “Seek the Envable Life.” Do not do to a person with a disability what we would not do to another person or ourselves. Beyond equal treatment, imagine the life you want the person to lead, the life you want to lead – the enviable life. Imagine it, and then sweat for it.

THIRD TRUTH: “Expect the Unexpected.” As much as we want to be in control, we often are not and cannot be. Greet the unexpected with sweat and imagination of the enviable life; and enliven it with humor. Beware of touching yourself in the wrong places, especially when you are in public. Laugh, if you do.

FOURTH TRUTH: “Nurture Relationships.” Admit your needs, even to strangers who enter your disability world. Do not fear their response; they too want the human connection that you need and that you offer. Admit your red cards of fear, and take another's green cards of hope. Do likewise with others.

FIFTH TRUTH: “Go Boldly into the Unknown.” If you seek enviable lives and relationships, and if you have reached the end of your rope, then go boldly into the unknown. Sweat. Seek the enviable life. Expect the unexpected. Nurture relationships. And don't be afraid to tell someone exactly what you think when they oppose you.

SIXTH TRUTH: “Be Accountable for the Whole Life.” Know where you are now is not where you will be next year. Plan ahead. Life's a marathon, not a sprint.

SEVENTH TRUTH: “Breathe Some.” Be compassionate to yourself; care for your body, mind, and soul. You are a precious vessel for others. You'll have self-imposed cracks. But don't break yourself.

EIGHTH TRUTH: “Recognize System Impact.” Your family is a system; whatever happens to one of you happens to all of you. Try to understand each person's needs; try to respond to them all; know you will not do so perfectly; know you will

incur blame and feel regret. But try to do for each what each needs. And be cautious: Let no family member consume all of your attention.

NINTH TRUTH: “Never Lose the Capacity for Outrage or the Ability to Respond.” When another offends your rights under law, your sense of ethics, or both, allow yourself to be outraged. Then respond strategically. Use law, ethics, and “insiders” and their alliances with you to make a difference.

TENTH TRUTH: “Grow Your Best Effort.” Whatever you think your best effort is, admit it’s not really that. Sweat, seek the enviable life, nurture relationships, go boldly into the unknown, take into account the future, breathe some, be accountable to all those who love you and whom you love, be outraged and strategic, and then remember: Today, your best; tomorrow, better.

ELEVENTH TRUTH: “Ask and Act upon the ‘So What?’ Question.” Once you know something, or once a researcher teaches you something new, ask: “So what?” The question really is: What is the significance of what you know and what will you do to make that significance a reality for yourself and others?

TWELVTH TRUTH: “Take Action to Enhance Cultural Justice.” Beyond the colors of our skins, the places we were born, the families into which we were born and later joined, and the cultures and ethics we adopt, we are all basically alike. Open yourselves to strangers; find in them what you know is in yourself; and seek for them the justice you seek for yourself.

THIRTEENTH TRUTH: “Pursue Dignity Diligently.” People with disabilities have inherent worth. But they also receive dignity or stigma from others. The more you dignify another, the more others will dignify that person. We are all in the dignity business. Esteem, do not demean. Less able does not mean less worthy.

FOURTEENTH TRUTH: “Never Postpone Joy.” When the music of life is funereal or seems so bleak that it is intolerable, remember the days when the music was otherwise – when it was joyful. Seek that music. Never postpone joy. It sustains you and converts sorrow to delight, especially when you need it most.

END