

**Keynote Address to the Oklahoma State University Spears  
School of Business Ph.D. in Business for Executives Cohort  
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Andy Lester**

You know, people say that, to start a speech and put your audience at ease, you should always tell a joke. Well, as you heard, I am by profession a lawyer. And I'm proud to be a lawyer. But some people – for reasons completely inexplicable to me – seem to think otherwise. Hence we have an entire class of quips called “lawyer jokes.” For example, I could quote Winston Churchill, who said, “Lawyers occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.” Or Samuel Johnson, who quipped, “I would be loath to speak ill of any person who I do not know deserves it, but I am afraid he is an attorney.”

But I'm not going to tell a lawyer joke, because there is an old saying among lawyers that lawyers shouldn't tell lawyer jokes.

Other lawyers don't find them funny, and non-lawyers don't think they are jokes.

On behalf of the Board of Regents for Oklahoma State University, welcome to the 2013 Cohort of the Spears School of Business Ph.D. in Business for Executives. One of the exciting things about serving on a governing board for a comprehensive institution of higher education is the chance to start a new program that will make a difference in people's lives. In my judgment, the Ph.D. in Business for Executives program is one of the most exciting things we've started recently here at Oklahoma State University. It allows people like you – CEOs, COOs, VPs and others – to further their education while maintaining a business work schedule. And doing this fulfills OSU's land grant mission, to bring the benefits of higher education to all, even including those who work.

The purpose of the Spears School of Business is to “engage and inspire the student in everyone to dream big, stretch [his or her] leadership potential, transform organizations and make a difference in the world.” What better way to do this than by offering a program like the one on which you are embarking.

I’ve been asked to speak, briefly – speaking of lawyer jokes, have you ever known a lawyer who could “speak briefly?” – about the Importance of Higher Education in Oklahoma. As Chairman of our Board of Regents, I’ve had many opportunities to speak on this subject. Why is higher education important to individuals, the local community, the state, the nation, indeed, the world?

Some today seriously question the value of higher education. I find that both surprising and wrong-headed. Yet, there are many voices calling for lessening our support for higher education. Here in Oklahoma, there are even some voices claiming we have too many people who have college degrees.

At times, I find it hard to believe it is necessary to state the importance of higher education. I grew up in an age when this was a given; everyone, it seemed, knew the value of a higher education. No one had to explain it; we simply assumed that obtaining a college education was key to a successful life, and obtaining a Ph.D. or other terminal degree meant the ability to reach the pinnacle.

Consider this. Last year, Oklahoma's public institutions of higher education produced 8,874 Associate degrees, 15,545 Bachelor degrees, and 4,844 graduate degrees. According to the 2012 United States Census Statistical Abstract, 27.9% of the nation has earned a Bachelor degree. For Oklahoma, it's 22.7%. The numbers for graduate degrees are 10.3% nationally, and 7.4% for Oklahoma.

Despite the nay-sayers, it is still true. The fact of the matter is that, the further one goes in higher education, the more likely he or

she is to earn more, to enjoy his or her career, and to be a community leader.

I've had the honor of working in higher education not only as a Regent, but also as a law school professor. I know a secret and please allow me to share it with you. There is a certain joy one gets to experience with great regularity when working in higher education, and it consists of this: A higher education – an Oklahoma State University, Spears School of Business higher education – transforms lives. I've seen it over and over again. And what a wonderful thing it is. I suspect you will have that experience here.

If my math is correct – Let me stop here for a moment and say that lawyers tend not to be math whizzes; indeed I've often wondered whether the reason many go to law school is they don't understand math. So, when I say, "*if* my math is correct," it may have special meaning. In any event, if my math is correct, this is a

diverse group. The 18 members of this cohort come from 7 different states and, including the United States, three different countries. And you represent a dozen or so different industries.

Yet, as different as each of you is from your fellow doctoral candidates, you have come together to gain and to enjoy the benefits of a rigorous higher education.

You are embarking on an exciting adventure. Each of you is highly accomplished; yet none of you is satisfied to rest on your laurels. You are ambitious. You are willing to work hard, to sacrifice, with the goal of bettering yourself, your career, your family, your business. And in doing so, you will make your business, your community and those with whom you and your business come into contact, stronger, more vital, and better off. I commend you and salute you, and, on behalf of the Board of Regents for Oklahoma State University, welcome you to the newest Class of the Spears School of Business Ph.D. in Business

for Executives program.