

I have the great honor today of introducing my husband, Don Laackman.

Let me start by sharing a few of Don's professional highlights:

- Don served as a managing director at Accenture, a global technology, consulting, and outsourcing firm. Over a 23-year career, he developed and implemented strategic, change, and information technology solutions for his clients.
- Deciding the time had come to focus on efforts more closely aligned with his core values of giving back to society and working to change the world, Don decided to leave Accenture. He earned a Master's in Public Policy and then joined Civic Consulting Alliance, where he managed the firm's pro bono workforce development and education consulting practice.
- Don was then appointed president of Harold Washington College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago. During his three years at HWC, Don led the college and its 9000 students to an increase in 150% in the college's graduation rate and a 70 % increase in the number of graduates. He also managed an aggressive effort to partner the College with insurance, banking and accounting firms, under Mayor Emanuel's College to Careers initiative.

As compelling as Don's professional successes are, however, they reflect just part of his story.

I had the good fortune of working for a very special woman not long ago who was often asked to introduce her husband at major events. In doing so, she focused on telling his personal story. She demonstrated over and over again that if you really want to know someone, you have to know their personal as well as their professional side.

Following her example, I now want to share a bit about Don's personal story. In preparing for today, I realized that Don is many things to many people. So rather than just sharing my

perspective, I asked friends, family and former colleagues - many of whom are here today - to help me introduce Don by sharing a word or two about what makes Don special to them.

Though I asked everyone to focus on Don's personal strengths and characteristics, it quickly became apparent that there is no divide – Don brings the same core values to his professional and his personal life. So that is the first attribute we want to share with those of you who don't yet know Don – **he is a man of consistency.**

Don is inspiring. This is an adjective I heard over and over again from friends, family, and colleagues alike.

- Many of the staff at Harold Washington College said they would not have come to the College, but for Don being there. They even had a name for it - the “Laackman factor”. Don's commitment, focus, drive, and leadership inspired them do more and to be better at what they do.
- Don also inspires others through his actions – encouraging them to follow what they believe in, and to choose a path that makes them happy.

Don is a leader – Some describe him as a natural leader; others call him the quintessential, mission-driven leader.

Don's leadership style can be summarized by three theorems (with credit to Stephen Covey for two of them):

- First, seek to understand,
- Second, always keep the end in mind, and
- Third, 90% of the world's problems are caused by role confusion (I am pretty sure Don made that one up, but boy is it accurate!)

Innovation and creativity evolve under Don's leadership due to his ability to create and foster a collaborative and idea sharing community.

Don leads by example. There is nothing he will ask anyone to do that he is not willing to do himself. He will not hesitate to roll up his sleeves and dive into the work. One of his former staffers said, “Great leaders are hard to come by but you will know a great leader when you work side by side with Don.”

Don is a mentor – both in the strictest sense of the word AND by example. Don pushes people to grow individually and coaches them through any roadblocks. This isn’t limited to work colleagues – a family member commented that Don has been so important to her development, providing support and advice that has been the cornerstone to her life.

Don is thoughtful, reflective, and thorough. He has an incredible memory and even better mind for details. Don always digs down - way down- before he speaks and acts. And Don listens -really listens. He solicits and processes the ideas and opinions he hears from the talented people he surrounds himself with - to ensure he fully understands the situation from every angle, as well as potential implications and outcomes - before deciding on the solution.

Don is direct –What might appear intimidating at first blush - Don’s directness encourages everyone to step up.

Don is a wonderful storyteller with an incredible sense of humor – He shares these traits with our children and his sisters. Many hours are spent sitting around the dinner table telling stories that turn everyday situations into unexpectedly great stories that are equally hilarious and poignant.

Don has a strong social conscious.

- **He has great empathy for those who have been left behind through no fault of their own.**
- **Don is driven to make a difference**
- **Don desires to positively impact the lives of others**
- **And he is committed to excellence in doing so.**

Don has a generosity of spirit.

Don has a sharp intellect. He is a lifelong learner who is incredibly well read and well informed. One of our friends described Don as one of the most intelligent individuals they know. But there are a lot of smart people in the world. So they created a word that summed up Don - "*Humilligence*". Don is truly special because his intelligence is matched by his humbleness and humility.

Don loves hearty debates – He is skillfully able to engage in spirited conversations with those whose opinions differ drastically from his own - without letting it affect relationships.

This comment came from a friend who has seen Don engage in sometimes-heated political debates with family members without ever letting it impact his respect and love for them. I know this to be universally true, however – whether at home and at work, Don values the informative benefits of a good debate. As a result, he encourages these conversations and respects those willing to engage.

Don't get me wrong – it is not always easy to be on the opposite side of a debate with Don, since he comes at each topic armed with passion, facts, and logic at the ready. But it is worth it, knowing how much he truly respects and is impacted by hearing and learning about all sides of an issue.

Don has incredible endurance. This term was originally used by a friend of ours to describe his biking ability. He has that ability to keep pumping out more and more effort and never seems to tire or slow down. This endurance, however, isn't limited to biking – it applies to everything about which Don is passionate.

Don is passionate about music. One of our good friends commented that they most admire his incredible knowledge and love of music. There is a special side to Don's personality that comes alive through music.

Don is dedicated to his students – he is committed to making sure they have the every opportunity for success.

- Improving student outcomes.
- Engaging with students.
- Everything Don does is ultimately focused on how it will benefit his students.

This goes beyond policies and actions aimed at making the college a better place for his students to succeed. Don cares about his students personally.

- At the beginning of each semester at Harold Washington, Don stood at the door and greeted everyone as they arrived.
- He attended every school play, fashion show, every potluck dinner, and as many other student events as possible, to show support for their interests.
- He regularly met with students, and made sure they had access to him or whomever else they needed depending on the issue.

His students realized and appreciated just how much Don cared about them. This summer, I ran into one of his former students, who is an officer in the college's Student Government Association. Upon learning I was President Laackman's wife, he launched into a passionate description about how much Don cared about the students, how much he would be missed. He said he hoped the next president would feel the same way, would be an advocate for them and care about them the way Don did.

Don is a great friend. He is always there when you need him, even if it is just to blow off some steam. You can count on him to have your back even when you don't think you need help.

Don is a loving, caring, supportive family man. He is the big brother to three sisters, the only son of his parents Don and Marie, and the son-in-law of my parents, Al and Margie.

Don is an incredible father to our two wonderful children who are now amazing adults.

- When asked the one word that best describes what makes his dad so special, our son, Don, said “Responsibility.” He said his dad instilled in him a sense of responsibility for one’s own actions AND for making the world a better place. He also said his dad exemplifies this sense of responsibility every day.
- Our daughter, Emily, said her dad helps her be prepared – for interviews, for jobs, even for conversations with friends – by helping her clear her thoughts and focus. When Emily feels that prepared, everything just makes sense - there is no room left to be nervous, only confident. And nothing helps her prepare better than having a conversation with her dad.

Emily knows she is lucky to have had this kind of support her whole life – so lucky in fact that she sometimes feels guilty. She feels she wouldn’t be the person she is today without her father’s guidance and support. So she is especially pleased that in recent years, her dad has dedicated his life to helping as many people as possible prepare just as he has our daughter – from his students, to his colleagues, to friends and family.

Last but not least, Don is a loving and supportive husband. When I “disappeared” for most of 2008-2012 to work for the President and First Lady, I did so with Don’s blessing, even though it turned our personal life upside down. He took care of our home life back in Chicago so I had the freedom to do what we both believed was important.

Now it is my turn. I am so proud to have moved to Burlington just this week, so I could join Don and share in his commitment to Champlain College, as well as our new home city and state.

I really loved hearing what Don special through the eyes of so many of his friends, family and colleagues in preparing my introduction today. Every description was unique, yet together they painted the picture the man I know and love so well. I hope that by sharing his personal story here today, it helped everyone know Don more clearly, deeply, and personally. Understanding Don and knowing what drives him, one can’t help but see why he is so excited, committed, and ready to lead Champaign College.

Members of the Champlain community, the 8th President of Champlain College, Don Laackman.