

9-11-2021

High Competence, High Character

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eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "High Competence, High Character" (2021). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 278.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina/278

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High Competence, High Character

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Saturday September 11, 2021

By Eric F. Spina

(Here are University of Dayton President Eric F. Spina's remarks to the 2021 Alumni Award recipients. They were honored at a Sept. 11 dinner on campus.)

I am thrilled, just thrilled, to be here tonight — both in person *and* virtually — to honor five exemplary individuals who represent the best that the University of Dayton offers to the world.

It's been too long since we've been able to gather in person, which makes this evening all the more joyous. In addition to tonight's recipients, I'd like to recognize Clementine Bihiga, who received the Joe Belle Memorial Young Alumni Award in 2020. Your story of resiliency and grit after fleeing war-torn Rwanda as a child inspires all of us. Thank you for coming back home tonight.

Finally, I offer a special Flyer welcome to family and friends joining us virtually. We feel — and appreciate — your presence.

Why do our students think they can make a difference in the world? It's because our honorees have shown them how to do just that. Your lives of leadership and service started as students on this campus, and you have continued as alumni to live out the mission of the University of Dayton. You have charted a path of selfless service to your communities, to your cities, to the world — and by your very actions are encouraging another generation of students to follow in your footsteps.

I've described this pattern as a virtuous circle. Others describe it differently, but the meaning is the same. Several years ago Molly MacCready, a 2008 graduate whose nonprofit provides scholarships to street children in Uganda, coined the catchy phrase, "Learn. Lead. Serve. Repeat."

Learn. Lead. Serve. Repeat.

The more time I spend with our alumni award recipients, the more I deeply admire the way you live out those words. You are people of both high competence and high character. You're the kind of leaders who imagine a better world, then go about the business of creating it — without fanfare and bluster but with great purpose.

To be able to celebrate your achievements tonight is truly a blessing. A huge thanks to Jen Weed, president of the Alumni Association, and the Alumni Awards Committee for shining the spotlight on you.

Our honorees will share their stories in their own words tonight, but one word describes each of them — *inspirational*. They have used their UD degrees to follow their dreams and, in that journey, have encouraged others to dream big, too.

Larry Soong, the recipient of tonight's Distinguished Alumni Award, came to UD, a stranger in a strange land, on a scholarship. Every night, as he burned the midnight oil translating his textbooks from English into Chinese in his dorm room, he thought about giving up on his quest to become an engineer. But he didn't — thanks to his own perseverance and the support of the Marianists and his professors. Today, he's one of the world's foremost authorities on developing engineering techniques to protect skyscrapers, bridges and other structures against earthquakes and other natural disasters. Mindful of his humble beginnings in this country, Larry and his wife, Dottie, have established a scholarship fund to help other students from modest means. His advice to today's students? It's advice he took himself. "Find the work that you love. You can only excel if you do something you love."

Our Special Achievement and Christian Service Award recipients are all extraordinary servant-leaders.

Wendy Humphrey Doolittle found the work she loves — helping individuals and families with substance abuse issues create meaningful lives. As CEO of McKinley Hall, she helps people find housing, transportation, employment and mental health services to aid in their

long-term recovery. Her philosophy? “I want to work with people to get mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy to be able to live their best lives.” She’s inspiring.

Throughout **Jeffrey Jones’** successful career with household name companies such as H&R Block, Uber, Coca-Cola and Gap, he’s put people first. As CEO of H&R Block, he’s committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the communities the company serves. That’s leadership.

William and Jan Tweed are champions of shrinking the opportunity gap for talented students who see a college education out of their reach. The couple were the earliest supporters of the Flyer Promise Scholars program, which not only removes financial barriers for high-achieving underrepresented students, it also changes the trajectory of their lives — and their families’ lives. I can’t fully describe my joy and pride this spring when nearly every member of the first class graduated. This program is transformative.

Finally, **Jack Meagher**, our Christian Service Award winner, has devoted his life to reconciliation, healing and peacemaking, particularly around the Vietnam War, where he served. He has one of the biggest hearts of anyone I’ve ever met, and after you hear his story, you’ll know why. He inspires us all to be peacemakers.

Congratulations — and thank you — to tonight’s honorees. We are so proud of all you’ve accomplished — and the mark you’ve made and will continue to make on the world.