

**Kimberly St. John-Stevenson- IABC Keynote Speech
June 2, 2010
“Who I Am, Who YOU Are, How WE Can Create A “Sticky
Revolution”**

Thank you Kavita and IABC Cleveland for this incredible recognition. It is truly an honor to be acknowledged by my industry colleagues, many whom I am honored to call my friends.

In the words of William Shakespeare, “I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks.”

I must also thank all who’ve contributed to the woman who stands before you

My husband Tony, who had the audacity 15 yrs ago to suggest that we might consider STAYING in Cleveland vs. returning to my home state of CT

My loving daughters Jessica, my personal stylist, and Sydney, the 5 year old queen of the world who begrudgingly shares

this day of celebration with her Mommy as she graduates
from pre-school later today

My parents – my mom especially. I wish they could be here
physically but they're ALWAYS with me in spirit

My wonderfully diverse group of family, friends, former bosses
and colleagues, who "know me as I am, understand where I
have been, accept what I have become, and still, gently
allow me to grow."

And I wouldn't be honest if I did not acknowledge my faith and
the multitude of blessings that have brought me to this point

I especially want to recognize the incredible team – staff, board,
community partners – of the Saint Luke's Foundation. I couldn't do
what I do without them – many of whom are here today

Every day, we all think "How can you not love this work?"

But it takes a phenomenal leader to guide us. To that end, we work for a truly remarkable woman, Denise San Antonio Zeman. She guides us, respects us, allows us take risks. She lets us blossom and be us. In that kind of environment – who wouldn't thrive?

She nominated me for this award and for that, I am eternally grateful.

This afternoon, I want to take a few moments to talk about Who I am, who WE are collectively and how we, as professional communicators, can be a part of what I affectionately call a "sticky storytelling revolution."

So who am I?

Officially I am the communications officer at the Saint Luke's Foundation – a.k.a. the “keeper” of the Saint – that's S-A-I-N-T Saint – Luke's brand”

But unofficially, people who know me will tell you I am a courageous innovator who banishes stereotypes, turns challenges into opportunities and refuses to stay down when the going gets tough.

Before I came to the Foundation, I was privileged with many great work experiences, from the hallowed halls of corporate America to the wild and unpredictable world of nonprofit theater at Great Lakes Theater to agency life and now to the world of philanthropy.

Each step of the way – I've worked hard to leave my mark and prepare fertile ground for the next person – the next young person – the next me.

At times along the way –I’ve been the “only” – the only woman, the only person of color, the only mom, the only communicator with a “blended” set of for-profit and nonprofit career experiences. But that never stopped me –

I am who I am largely because I have been that ONLY – and because those experiences enhance my ability to view the world from different perspectives – as a parent, a wife, an American, a communications professional, a proud resident of Northeast Ohio, a believer, a woman of color

These perspectives inform what I see and enlighten the ways in which I communicate with – and about – others

And no, the “ONLYS” haven’t been limitations

Because my mom always told me there was no limit to my potential.

Now I offer that same encouragement to my daughters...
to my colleagues...to my community partners... and to
the many nonprofits I work with in the community

Unofficially I like to think of myself as the Town Crier for Greater
Cleveland's nonprofits.

Nonprofits like Malachi House, where I met Rosa, who in her
final days of life shared her inspirational story so others might
know they could die with dignity at an amazing place that
serves the terminally ill

Nonprofits like Recovery Resources, which created an
amazing blogsite for children of alcoholics who need to
know they are not alone in their struggles

Nonprofits like Beech Brook, who've nurtured young Simon's love of art and animation while healing his mind and spirit broken after being removed from his birth mother's custody

This quest for the great and touching story began early in my career and played out in most if not all of the jobs I've held ... stories about people I wrote about who were truly inspiring

Like the telephone operator who had faithfully and honorably worked for 40 years without missing one sick day – and still believed in her heart that good customer service was priority #1

Like my late grandfather, a master storyteller in his own right, who spent the last 30 years of his life chronicling the history of our native American ancestors who inhabited southern CT in the 17th century

Like the first African American pastor at a 150 year old CT church, whose first sermon was so moving that I became a member there ...got married there...and still return there whenever I am home

Like the group of young men from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District who groaned as Richard the Third uttered those memorable first words "Now is the winter of my discontent..." But as the play ended, with Richard pleading "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" those same bored young men literally leaped to their feet cheering, then remained riveted through the discussion of how that play – a SHAKESPEARE play – mirrored their lives in inner-city Cleveland

These stories have touched my life – and by my sharing them;
they've touched the lives of others as well.

As many of us in this room know -- there is an art to storytelling and
an art to making those stories STICK in the minds of donors and
volunteers – and that's the art I work every day to master,
because there are so very many stories to tell from so very many
amazing nonprofits

But let there be no mistaking – great stories can never mask the
fact that what we do in the nonprofit sector is SERIOUS work on
SERIOUS issues

But while the work is serious, and the issues are important – time
and experience has taught me to NEVER take myself or my job
TOO seriously.

Truth be told – by my ever-so-wise children – sometimes we adults make things WAY too hard.

They remind me daily that everything I REALLY need to know about life I can learn from that great, insightful philosopher

Dr. Seuss!

After all, it was Dr. Seuss who gave us

Oh, the things you can think if only you try

Oh, the places you'll go

If I Ran the Circus

You're only old once

Did I Ever Tell you How Lucky You Are

And my personal favorite—a classic that guides my work today and every day -- "Horton Hears a Who"

For those who don't know the story, Horton's job is to make sure
the Who's in Whoville are heard

"We are here, we are here" they cry.

But the naysayers say there can't possibly be people on that little
speck of clover

But Horton persists and as the story goes, he gets the embattled

Mayor of Whoville, in the town's darkest hour, to plead with

residents "We've got to make noises in greater amounts! So open
your mouths – for every voice counts!"

That mayor, and Horton too, were onto something

They believed, as I believe, that those of us with a voice must work

to uplift the stories that need to be told

To illuminate the work of nonprofits who are often this community's
unsung heroes

"They are here, they are here."

That's what I strive to do, every day, right here in Northeast Ohio

For those of you who don't know me personally, I moved here
from Connecticut 15 years ago.

Since then, my "adopted" home of Cleveland has embraced me,
nurtured me, fed me.

This is now home.

That means I have to work extra hard to make this the best place
it can be, because my kids will grow up and tell people they were
born in Cleveland.

Together – we must celebrate the great things here and work hard to improve the stories when things aren't so great.

Come on – let's admit it...in our heart of hearts we all know Cleveland doesn't suck!

But how come we sometimes act like we don't believe that?

Is it because of the many challenges in our city, our region, our state?

Is it because we don't think there are solutions?

Is it because we are afraid to get into the mix and be a part of change?

It isn't easy and at times, it doesn't feel good

But who wants to wake up every day and think "This place stinks."

I would suggest that if you don't like what you see, do as

Gandhi said,

“Be the change you want to see in the world.”

We all have to stand up to the naysayers – like Horton did – to those who say that Cleveland will never rebound, who say our corporate citizens and non profits don't do anything for the economy and community.

And we have to do it and say it so it STICKS.

In fact, making stories “STICK” is a prime motivation in my work.

A motivation that was born 3 years ago when the book

“Made to Stick” by Chip and Dan Heath crossed our

radar at the Foundation.

Since then, we've been part of a "sticky storytelling revolution" in Greater Cleveland –helping nonprofits tell their stories in compelling, emotional ways, so donors, volunteers and others in the community understand and remember the value they bring to Greater Cleveland

"They are here, they are here."

This revolution led us to develop the "Make it Stick" grantmaking program whereby nonprofit organizations whose work is a match for our mission could apply for communications grants.

With that opportunity we also offered seminar scholarships, webinars, and other free resources.

The good news is we received 161 responses to our RFP totaling 7 million dollars

The not-so-good news is the requests total about \$6.5 million dollars more than we are able to fund

That's 6.5 million dollars worth of projects that have the potential to raise the awareness of about 150 nonprofits across northeast Ohio

Nonprofits that recognized the importance of telling their story, but need our help doing so

Nonprofits who took a strategic look at their existing communications efforts and engaged in discussions with experts like many of you in this room to figure out what they needed

Nonprofits that every day serve people across northeast Ohio in need

Nonprofits eager to say "we are here, we are here."

And, that's where all of you come in

In CLE I have met the most amazing communicators through organizations like IABC, PRSA, the American Advertising Federation, and the Northeast Ohio Communications Affiliates

We are blessed to have such a large pool of talent in our community

I stand before you with a challenge for you, for your firms to use your talent and carve out time to support the good stuff.

To help tell the stories that need to be told.

Not just because we can – because we should.

Trust me – you'll be glad you did.

You'll meet people like Rosa, and Simon, and those high school boys at their first Shakespeare play

And you will be renewed by a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment that will inspire you to keep going

Because, in the end, it comes down to all of us to tell the stories of the people who make this community exceptional

Because, as Dr. Seuss says "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

I challenge each and every one of you to work to make this community, our children's hometown, the best it can be

I challenge each of you to get outside of your comfort zone

To TRULY embrace and value diversity

To spend time in CLE neighborhoods

To do something unexpected and extraordinary

To be a Horton and help the Who's be heard

Now I realize that we can't all give away our services for free

But we can all give something.

Margaret Meade once noted that we should "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Use your time, talent, treasures.

Serve on a board – and really work. Don't just be a butt in a seat.

And bring you're A-game –don't relegate the nonprofit work to an intern or some other junior staff person. It's too important

And nurture your staffs for service.

But as I said before – the work isn't always easy.

A wise man once said – and I believe this to be true, that "Change is never easy. Mistakes are only lessons in disguise and everything takes time.

But he also said, " Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for.

So thank you again for this amazing honor, and allow me to close with a few final words from the inimitable

Dr. Seuss from " Oh the Places You'll Go, "You'll get

mixed up, of course, as you may already know. You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go. So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact, and remember that Life's a great balancing act. Just never forget to be dexterous and deft/and never mix up your right foot with your left. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed. 98 and $\frac{3}{4}$ percent guaranteed."

Thank you.