

Ceremony Speaker

The University of Toledo

Fall Commencement 2015

Saturday, December 19, 2015 | 10:00 a.m. | Savage Arena, [Main Campus](#)

Ms. Christi Paul

You'll find Christi Paul every weekend morning anchoring CNN New Day Weekends as well as anchoring/reporting on HLN's The Daily Share during the week.

She's covered President Obama's 2nd Inauguration in Washington, DC, was on the news desk walking viewers through the first 5 hours of the Newtown, CT school shootings and the Virginia Tech shooting as well as anchoring extensive coverage of Hurricane Sandy, several presidential elections and court cases such as the Casey Anthony, Warren Jeffs, Drew Peterson and Dr. Conrad Murray trials. And she secured an exclusive interview with Vice-President Joe Biden, talking about his motivation to combat domestic violence as well as addressing the issues with Obamacare.



She's a wife and mother of 3 daughters and as such, has a passion for helping children and teens. She serves on the Advisory Board for Robin McGraw's "When Georgia Smiled" foundation which helps victims of domestic violence and assault find healing, safety and joy. She's also serves on the National Advisory Council for the One Love Foundation in honor of Yeadley Love, the University of VA Lacrosse player beaten to death by her boyfriend, and is involved with Girl Talk Inc, an organization where high school girls mentor middle school girls to help build self-esteem and combat bullying.

Tired of simply having to tell viewers news stories about children who are missing, Christi took action to help, founding "Find Our Children"...a partnership with The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Washington, DC. HLN features a segment about a missing child, asking viewers to help find them and to date, 35 of the children they've profiled have been brought home safe and sound. In 2012 NCMEC honored Christi with their prestigious Hope Award...an award she shares with past winners such as former Secretary of State Colin Powell, then-Senator Joe Biden and actor Ben Affleck.

Christi's also an author. Her book "Love Isn't Supposed to Hurt", in which she speaks about overcoming verbal and emotional abuse, immediately hit Amazon's top 20 and she recorded two songs in Nashville that coincide with the book. "Wake Up In It" and "Free" can both be found on iTunes. Christi's no stranger to singing as she's sung onstage with Grammy winners Richard Marx

and David Foster as well as singing the National Anthem for MLB and NBA games for The Atlanta Braves, The Arizona Diamondbacks, the Cleveland Indians and Cleveland Cavs among others.

Prior to joining HLN in 2003, Christi was an anchor, consumer reporter and weathercaster in Phoenix. First at KNXV, then at CNN affiliate KTVK where she created a segment with the Arizona Humane Society which helped hundreds of abandoned animals find new homes with families in the valley. Before moving to Phoenix, Christi was an anchor/reporter for KTVB in Boise, ID where the Idaho Press Club honored her for her series of stories about Julianne Prudhomme, a 4-year old girl who underwent a 5-organ transplant.

Christi began her career as a one-man band (anchor/reporter/photographer) in Clarksburg, WV at WDTV. A graduate of the University of Toledo, the Department of Communications has named her an "Outstanding Alumna".

COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

I'd first like to thank the staff, faculty, the Board of Trustees for this very special honor, and our University of Toledo President Dr. Sharon Gaber. I'm so humbled and honored to be here with all of you and to be here for Dr. Gaber's first commencement as President of UT. And might I also say - Go Rockets on Tuesday!

Let me ask you...how many of you have jobs lined up already?

Congratulations! How many are still on that mission to find one? If it's any consolation...I was in your shoes. The latter of you.

When I graduated I had the hardest time breaking into my field of choice. I graduated during a recession so I worked several odd jobs until I started as the main anchor at WDTV in Clarksburg, WV and my starting salary was \$12,000 a year. And no that wasn't that long ago - I'm not that old. It was a rough salary for anyone. So don't stress out...it gets better.

There's a term I hear a lot lately & I'm sure you do too. A Forbes article this past May was titled "How to Stay Relevant In the Rapidly Changing World of Work". It was an intriguing article, had smart points & clever insight...then I started hearing that term in speech. People saying "Oh you know - I'm just trying to stay relevant". I could hear in their voices the weight & anxiety attached to it. It struck me as so sad. I thought...if people think they're not already relevant then we've got some real work to do on ourselves.

I understand wanting & needing to be valuable at work. But to say “I’m just trying to stay relevant” strikes me as very dangerous verbiage. The words we speak matter so much more than we recognize.

Being relevant isn’t about how many FB friends or Twitter followers you have. It’s not about your salary, your status or your stamina. It’s not about numbers.

Being relevant is about being authentic. Having a solid sense of “self”, a strong gauge of your worth & your goals without being tainted by your circumstances.

I know that’s not easy to do. Figuring out who you are & what you want takes time & effort & I want to encourage you to do that. I got to a point in my life where I knew I needed to make some changes not just to my external life but to the way I spoke to myself & thought of myself.

I’m not ashamed to admit - I’ve been through some counseling, I’ve studied, I’ve taken time to look at myself with brutal honesty...I’ve discovered a few things that are worth sharing because you’re embarking on a whole new world after today. And as angst-filled as it might feel sometimes...It’s an adventure & I hope you embrace that.

#1. One of my biggest takeaways from the work I continue to do is this; WE CAN’T LET ANYONE ELSE DEFINE US.

In my mid-twenties, I was in a relationship that was abusive mentally & emotionally & a couple times physically. I was called names I won’t repeat, told I wasn’t good enough for my job or my friends, constantly criticized & living in fear. By the grace of God I finally left but I realized a lot of what that man said to me...was still stuck in my head & my own voice was criticizing me now. When someone tells you your worthless enough times...you start to believe it.

I don’t know what’s happened in your life but I want to ask you something ...what does your voice say to you? When you’re alone or looking in the mirror...what do YOU think of you? Is it what you know to be true about yourself or is it what someone else has told you you are? Insecurity & shame can do real damage if we let them. And I had some real damage to deal with. Part of my therapy was to essentially shift my thinking, to find the benefits of the negative in my life. The point is; if you can recognize how that hardship has served you...you can learn the lessons from it & let it go. I had to make lists & one of them was titled “The benefits of verbal abuse”. It sounded insane but my counselor reminded me that

doing this work isn't saying "it's OK what happened to you". It's saying "I'm not going to hold onto it & let it wreck me".

I remember my head physically hurt after that assignment but I had more than 60 answers to that when I was done. You know what some of the benefits of verbal abuse were for me?

It helped me redefine what security really means; that being part of a pair doesn't give you more value...especially if you're with someone who doesn't treat you with respect & dignity. I learned I'd rather be alone than be with the wrong person. And there's plenty of value in each of us already. We don't need someone else to give it to us.

It expanded my capacity to forgive. I knew I could forgive him for everything that happened but forgiveness doesn't mean I condoned it. You can forgive someone & still cut them out of your life. Just because you've forgiven them, that doesn't make them suddenly safe for you.

One of my biggest epiphanies was about boundaries & this was something I was really bad at for a long time. I was always the one saying "Oh let's all just get along. Let's all accept each other" I didn't like conflict. I didn't like to make anyone feel as though they were being left out because I knew what that felt like. But here's the thing; you not only have a right...you have a responsibility to set boundaries in your life. To discern who is really there for you - & who might not be. Because until someone is healthy enough to deal with you respectfully & with consideration, even in conflict...then they're just not healthy enough to be in your life & you have a right to set that line.

You don't need anyone else's approval to be happy. One of my favorite quotes is from Eleanor Roosevelt: "*Do what you feel in your heart to be right, for you'll be criticized anyway*". Get on twitter for 5 minutes & you'll see how true that statement is. Sometimes you just have to unfollow people in real life. I promise as you continue to grow up you'll realize that *it's less important to have lots of friends & more important to have real ones*. Real friends have your back. They lift you up. They celebrate you without fear of losing their own value. Be that kind of friend because it's powerful. The truth is, how someone treats you is most often a reflection of them...not you.

So I encourage you to pay attention to your instincts & take time for yourself to figure out who you are, who you want to be & to evaluate what's going on in your life. It's scary. We're often afraid to figure that out because we think "what if I'm

not good?" . I assure you - at your core you are good. You don't have to be defined by any mistakes or bad judgment you've made in the past or by something someone else says about you. But until you sit down, shut up & "be still" ...you'll be at the mercy of other people. And *if you live for their praise you'll die by their criticism*. No one deserves that much power over your life.

#2. One other thing I've learned is to RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU CAN & CAN'T CONTROL. Be very honest with yourself here. You can't control what anyone else does or says - but you can control how you react & when you react with integrity & honesty...this is where you really get the chance to shine & grow.

Many years ago - when I was working primarily at HLN, I was moved from that network to In Session which was a court show on TrueTV & it was seen, by most people including myself, as a demotion. My boss at the time told me I wasn't a good "fit" for HLN's new direction & I wasn't morning material. I remember going home, looking at my husband & saying "that man isn't gonna tell me who I am". I knew I was good enough. But I also knew he was the boss & the hierarchy of that says he was in control of my job for the moment.

So I went back to my thought-shifting exercise - it works in all aspects personal & professional. As hard as it was on my ego I realized a few important things;

A) I was able to do more field reporting on some high-profile cases and conduct extended, substantive interviews (which we weren't afforded at HLN).

B) I was assured I was off on all holidays (which in news is unheard of).

C) I was able to finish a book I'd been writing & immediately got a book deal with Tyndale House Publishers. That book, which is the story of how I overcame that abusive relationship...is a big part of my life's mission now because we know so many other people are living that dreadful life behind closed doors.

Once I learned to love where I was, a strange thing happened, again, that I had no control over. After about a year & a half that boss got moved. I got a call that the producers wanted me back at HLN. In the meantime I'd also started some fill-in work at CNN & eventually, I ended up being offered the weekend morning gig at CNN & 3 days a week at HLN. So that transfer to In Session that I initially thought was a step backward was actually preparing me for something even bigger & better. And by the way, that former boss who was in a different position now actually sent me an email congratulating me on my new job & said he was really happy for me. That was class & it meant a lot for me to hear that from him.

The takeaway is this; Life is short. Don't waste time in all that angst trying to control what isn't for you to control or prognosticate what's coming next. You've got to *trust the journey...trust the struggle*.

Quiet your ego, listen to your gut & work for what you want no matter where you are. What is meant for you will happen.

#3. I learned the art of LISTENING WITH INTENTION & INSTINCT.

Listening is highly underrated these days. There are so many voices screaming "look at me!" and doing some crazy things to get noticed. Think about the last time you said something you wish you hadn't. We've all done it. *Speaking without thinking is like shooting without aiming*. I know people who've fired off a thought on twitter & lost their jobs over it. Listen to your gut. Listen to your instinct. And don't tweet when you're drinking.

One time my instinct saved me...Last year I was sitting on the news desk one Sunday morning & we have an earpiece that our producers use to talk to us from the control room. My producer got in my ear & said "*We have new pictures of General Dempsey with Al Abadi*". She was referring to Haider al-Abadi, the PM of Iraq. Well I heard "We have NUDE pictures of General Dempsey with a body".

I'm almost hesitant to admit it because now you know where my mind goes sometimes. But I'm sitting there thinking "I don't want to say that out loud. Surely I'm not hearing what I think I'm hearing". So I said nothing. We went to a break & clarified everything & had a good laugh about it. Listening is a lost art. But it's imperative because at the end of the day...people want to be heard. Be that person who not only has a voice but helps other people find theirs.

#4: I've learned I have to BE WILLING TO FAIL & WILLING TO CHEER SOMEONE ELSE ON.

There's an author you may be familiar with..he's sold more than 200 million copies of his books that have been translated into more than 15 different languages. They've been the inspiration of 11 children specials, a Broadway musical & a major motion picture. He's won the Pulitzer Prize, two Emmy's, two Academy Awards, a Peabody. That's one impressive career isn't it? But did you know that author, Dr. Seuss, had his manuscript rejected 27 times by publishing houses before finally being published by Vanguard Press. Strong people aren't afraid to fail because they know that when they lose, they won't lose the lesson. And sometimes the lesson is simply to keep going.

There's always going to be the risk of failure...but there's such glorious confidence & celebration when we overcome it. Be brave. Be bold. But don't take yourself too seriously. What is smart to take seriously is how you treat other people. Energy doesn't lie...kindness & karma go together. People will always remember how you made them feel. Lift them up.

Be their cheerleader. Life is a journey, not a constant competition. That's exhausting.

Comparison is the thief of joy. Someone else's success takes away nothing from you. Real leaders don't tell you how powerful they are...they show you how powerful YOU are. So please don't be afraid to fail & don't be afraid to lift other people up. That's living with honesty & integrity & it matters.

#5. LASTLY, as you might be sitting there ruminating, thinking "where am I going to be 5, 10 years down the road" REMEMBER THAT PERFECTION ISN'T THE PLAN...PURPOSE IS.

If you look at what's trending, you'll almost always going to find it's about the "perfect" something...the next great diet to give you the perfect body, the best advice for a perfect relationship, the perfect car, the perfect house, the perfect job.

There is no such thing. Perfection is a myth & anyone who tries to sell you their perfect life is lying & what's sad is they're probably not only lying to you...they may be lying to themselves.

You want to be a real success? Put purpose behind your passion. One of the greatest examples of that kind of meaningful, prolific success is Blake Mycoskie. He's the founder of Tom's shoes & the man behind the "One for One" business model. I'm sure you know how it works...for every pair of shoes you buy, his company gives away a pair of shoes to a child in need. Blake had gone to Argentina about 10 years ago & was so shaken by what he saw...these children trying to get through their days without a basic protection that we take for granted every day. That sparked his idea.

And do you know how this company has expanded now?

With every pair of *glasses* you buy, they help secure eye exams & medical treatment for people in need. According to their website, they've helped restore sight to 325,000 people who otherwise wouldn't have had it. Each bag of Tom's

roasting company coffee provides a week's supply of safe water to a person in need. Each backpack they sell provides training for school staff & counselors to prevent bullying. Blake Mycoskie didn't care about perfection. He cared about people. He put a purpose to his passion & he's changing the world...One for One. You can do that too. In your own way. In your own time.

But you have to decide your values. You get to decide who you want to be. I just want to encourage you to use your voice. Use your talents to do something bigger than what will just buy you a fancy car & a grandiose house.

D.L. Moody may have said it best; *Our greatest fear shouldn't be of failure but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.* How do you conquer that? Choose faith over fear. Choose hope. Every single day. Choose confidence over arrogance & gratefulness over everything else.

And today...come on up here when your name is called, grab the diploma, do your little dance & celebrate. Be proud of yourself - then go show the world what you're made of.

And remember, don't let anyone else define you. I don't care where you've been or what burdens you might still carry. *This is the day to let go of everything that no longer serves you.* And when times get tough remember; *At any given moment you have the power to say "This is not how my story is going to end".*

And that power comes from your relevance. And that, my friends, is already wholly intact within you.