

A Tribute to Terrance Keenan

1924 – 2009

Throughout his long career in philanthropy, Terrance Keenan had a profound impact on the field, as well as on generations of individuals who have been inspired by his wisdom, values, and respect toward every colleague and grantee. Terry was one of the founders of Grantmakers In Health (GIH), and his vision of what this organization could become still guides and motivates us to set our standards high. GIH established The Terrance Keenan Leadership Award in Health Philanthropy (TK Award) in 1993 to provide a lasting tribute to Terry who, by example and instruction during his more than 40 years of service to health philanthropy, charged grantmakers with exercising the freedom to invest in leadership and develop new institutions and systems to confront major social needs. He encouraged those in the field to embrace both the freedom to fail and the freedom to persist. He also challenged grantmakers to make “their self-concept as public trusts...the overriding article of faith and the guiding force of their behavior.” Terry was a generous and consummate craftsman of the trade, reminding grantmakers that “creativity...is a cultivated skill, attainable only through continuous effort.” He will be missed greatly by all who knew him, but his legacy will live on as new generations of grantmakers find inspiration in the words and deeds he left behind.

IN THE WORDS OF TK AWARD RECIPIENTS*

My first day at RWJF marked a change in my career; indeed, my life. It began in a most innocent way. Taped to my desktop that day was a yellow sheet of paper. The simple note read: “John: Off to Bermuda for a few days to write a report on medical education. Start reading, and we’ll talk when I get back next week. Terry.”

– John W. Murphy

Native Americans refer to elders who are the transmitters of knowledge to succeeding generations as wisdom keepers. Terry is unquestionably one of the wisdom keepers of our field. I had the opportunity to spend some time with him almost 10 years ago and that meeting has had a lasting influence on the way I do my work.

I was one of many pilgrims who have knocked on his door over the years, and he not only made the time to meet with me, but he received me as a colleague, even though I was a relative novice. He exemplifies not only a thoughtful big-picture approach to our work, but he is also a wonderful role model who sees philanthropy as a vocation, a true calling. His insightful writing sets a standard for all of us, and his graciousness is legendary.

– Tom David

So to each of you, join me in inspiring hope and, in the words of Terrance Keenan, “Seek greatness.”

– Mario Gutierrez

I believe that the values Terry Keenan has championed so well have become embedded in the best of health care grantmaking:

- a conviction that change is necessary and that it is possible;
- the understanding that change requires hard, and often selfless, work;
- a belief in the benefits of partnership and collaboration – among foundations and between foundations and grantees;
- a willingness to take risks, combined with the need to thoughtfully manage those risks; and
- an unwavering commitment to the grantee.

– David A. Gould

(As director of public relations for the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions) I walked my guest on what may have been the most extensive tour of the Hopkins complex that has ever been conducted. Six hours later, my tongue was hanging out, but my guest was still going strong. He could not have been more attentive – gentle in manner and soft of voice, but nonstop with questions, relentlessly probing. He learned everything I knew and some things that I made up about the Hopkins Medical Institutions, all but filling his spiral-bound notebook with the constantly moving pencil in his left hand. It was an amazing day. He was very willing to answer my questions about what a foundation is and what a program officer does...tilting his head to one side and replying in long, perfectly formed paragraphs. That was how Terry Keenan and I began a 40-year friendship.

– Frank Karel

* excerpted from their acceptance remarks

Terry Keenan was a consummate professional in everything he did and one of the best and most caring listeners I have ever met. I had the opportunity to work with Terry in the early days of the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program. Every time you made a site visit with Terry, you would find him

I was fortunate to have learned the craft of grantmaking from Terry, for he is the master.

– Frank Karel

bringing up the rear. This was not for lack of interest, far from it. Instead, you would find that Terry had stopped to talk to people. He was engaged in conversations with everyone at the site visit: staff, patients, family members, local funders, the van driver, anyone he could talk to. He valued everyone he met and, in turn, I always valued the time I spent with him and how much I learned from him.

– Robert E. Eckardt

Terrance Keenan was someone whose legacy in this field has been an inspiration to us all. In 1992 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation published a short booklet titled *The Promise at Hand*, which was based on a series of lectures given by Terrance Keenan on the occasion of the foundation's 20th anniversary. Keenan sought to answer the question: What makes a great foundation? He listed 10 attributes. As I reread them recently, I was struck by how deeply his words have stuck with me over the years. They have been an inspiration and a moral guide. Given the theme of this year's annual conference, it is fitting that we reflect on and highlight his insights as we move forward together to chart a path for health philanthropy for the 21st century.

– Mario Gutierrez

In 1988 I was sitting in my office, trying to figure out what a program officer did, and I got a call. "Ms. Langston, I am Terrance Keenan, vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and I need your help." He went on to explain his work on school-based health clinics. There was one in Washington Heights, New York City, in – well, as Terry said – a "difficult" neighborhood. Terry could not fund the \$51,000 needed for the renovations...[H]e had his heart set on this. I went to Washington Heights, took the request to our board, and Terry Keenan got his clinic. I pulled the

Foundation arrogance was never acceptable to Terry – not toward each other and certainly not toward grantees.

– Terri Langston

file out of the archives the other day and read my comments: "This was a good example of how foundations can work together. Terrance Keenan was particularly happy...the grant provided health and family planning services to young people, among whom poverty, drugs, and teenage pregnancy run rampant."

– Terri Langston

IN TERRY'S OWN WORDS

In my judgment, the unique institutional attributes of foundations have been validated by the historical experience of these entities and are likely to continue as signal elements of their future potential...On the other hand, I believe that the actual content of our historical experience will serve us less well as a resource for charting our course for the decades ahead. The past is not prologue for the era we are entering. The lessons learned are not a scripture in which we can have much faith.

This is not simply a pessimistic assumption – a way of saying, once more, that the pace of change has become so rapid and the problems so different that we cannot predict future events with any confidence, much less equip ourselves to confront them. In my judgment, the period ahead will not be that chaotic.

Forecasting and related contingency planning will still be possible. In fact, it will be essential if, as a society, we are to have any control over our destiny. However, the ability to anticipate the future will continue to remain a vaporous claim of astrologers and self-proclaimed seers unless much more work is done in advancing the science of probability assessment – not only in the statistical and mathematical domain of economics, but in the more speculative area of public opinion and the related thrust of public consensus and public policy.

While our ability to exercise probabilistic thinking may be primitive, certain phenomena already loom large in our field of vision and do not require sophisticated forecasting. Significant among them are:

- the emergence of a permanent and divisive social class structure in American life,
- the emergence of a large population of Americans surviving into their advanced years,
- the tragic epidemic of HIV infection,
- the scourge of substance abuse and dependency, and
- the frightening prevalence of domestic violence.

Added to these problems is the seemingly universal failure of our system of public education. These and other problems of similar magnitude are occurring at a time when our resources for dealing with them are diminishing...

With the problems and needs confronting society less predictable than they were and with resources beginning to contract, what will be the future role of foundations?...The most positive

answer is that these conditions provide philanthropic foundations with a fresh and unparalleled opportunity to become a full and visible partner in the American social contract.

– Excerpted from: Terrance Keenan, *The Promise at Hand: Prospects for Foundation Leadership in the 1990s*, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 1992.