

Alexander Hamilton Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Public Relations  
Remarks of Acceptance by Jack Felton  
November 10, 2004

Thank you. You are very kind. Of all the awards, I can tell you that I do cherish this award more than any because it comes from all of you in this room who have been such great supporters of the Institute and me.

I also am most proud of it because I understand all it stands for. This Hamilton Medal is like receiving Olympic Gold to me. Let me tell you why. Forty-two years ago at one of our first lectures the podium belonged to the renowned historian Dr. Allen Nevins of Cornell, Columbia and Oxford Universities and twice a Pulitzer Prize winner for American biography.

His address began with the question: "What is the ablest work ever done in America in Public Relations?" Most of the audience expected him to say the Declaration of Independence or the Boston Tea Party or the "shot heard round the world."

Instead, Dr. Nevin's answer was to quote another noted historian who declared that "By enlisting the support for the Constitution the authors of the Federalist Papers did the best job in public relations in history!

Two thirds of those 85 papers which championed the shaky cause for a strong constitutional form of central government were written brilliantly by young Alexander Hamilton. Most of the rest were by James Madison.

By carefully tailoring each message with sound reasoning about precisely the issues of most concern to each of the colonies and by timing the delivery of each of these papers to arrive at exactly the proper time to be considered just before each assembly met. Hamilton is considered the first real genius in American public relations.

But the Federalist Papers were only part of Hamilton's and Madison's plans. They knew they had to carry three colonies Massachusetts, New York and Virginia. They knew it would be tough to get all three. Lee, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Adams and Hancock were all afraid of a strong central government.

They were afraid of too much power held by any single person or group. In Massachusetts they convinced Hancock he could be a great national hero if he would deliver a speech they would write for him.

This appeal to his ego worked. He agreed. But on the day he was to deliver the speech, Hancock was in bed with a painful bout of gout. That didn't stop Hamilton. He persuaded Hancock it would be even more dramatic if he delivered the speech from his bed of pain. So they carried Hancock bed, bed clothes and all into the assembly. Hancock delivered the speech. That worked.

For Adams they staged a debate at Green's Tavern and attracted a huge crowd. So big it even overflowed out of the tavern and into the streets. Hamilton debated and the crowd cheered and cheered and cheered. Then they rushed to tell Adams who like Jefferson was an "of the people, by the people person." When Adams heard how big the cheering crowds were he agreed. They had won in Massachusetts.

For New York, Hamilton staged some forty debates all over town. In addition to being a financial genius, he must have been a great debater because he won every one of the forty debates. New York finally voted "Yes."

Virginia was the hardest but luckily Jefferson was away in France and they had the great hero George Washington on their side. The speeches and articles they wrote for George saved the day and Virginia voted "Yes" 89 to 79 - the Constitution was safe.

Historian Nevins said Hamilton and Madison taught the world lessons not only in public relations but they also taught an important moral lesson to everyone:

"For men of courage, determination, reason and tact no sound public task whatever the odds is impossible."

That's what this medal is all about and I proudly accept it but I also accept on behalf for my wife, Ann. We just celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June. Without her support I would never be standing here. She says I've flunked retirement three times and she doesn't think it looks good for a college professor to keep flunking things so she has booked us on a long cruise in February.

And I also accept it on behalf of the best and most talented associate I have ever known, Michelle Hinson. She really is the Institute.

And I accept it on behalf of all of you in this room who are the kind of good friends I knew I could call on for help. And I have called on many times and you have always responded.

It's your encouragement coupled with your superb support and not what I have done but what we have done together that made the Institute such a remarkable success. And I'm sure it will continue under Frank's talented leadership.

I know the best acceptance speeches are short and you are hungry but let me close with this quote. No one knows it's origin but authorities believe it is part of our American Indian heritage. It says:

“I have drunk from wells I did not dig. I have been warmed by fires, I did not kindle.”

That's my challenge for all of us to keep digging the wells of truth for our profession and to kindle the fires of courage and creativity for those who follow in our footprints so they can nudge the world to be a better place for everyone.

Thank you again for all you have done for the Institute and for me and God Bless.

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