GRIT, GROWTH and THE GREATER GOOD

Message to Chamber Membership

The following is a condensed version of Sherry’s address at the Chamber’s 166th Annual Membership Luncheon, attended by over 800 members of the business community.

It is my honor to address you after serving my third year as your President & CEO.

At last year’s membership luncheon, we outlined a B R I G G E R, R O L D E R and B E T T E R agenda, focused on strengthening our initiatives. This year, we are continuing these efforts under the banner of the 4 Gs...GRIT, GROWTH and the GREATER GOOD.

GRIT is showing courage, resolve and a strong sense of character. Jimmy Chan, of Hawaiian Chip Company, like all people from my hometown of Hilo and Waiakea High School, you have GRIT. You had the courage to take an idea inspired by watching the Emeril Lagasse show and turn it into reality. You’ve grown the small business you started in your garage into an enterprise that exports your chips and Kilauea Fire Hot Sauce beyond the shores of Hawaii.

Kauai Kookie Company...now there’s a family-run business with GRIT. If you’ve ever met the Founder and matriarch of the company, Mabel Hashisaka, you would agree that she has GRIT. She and her family are celebrating their 50th year in business.

GRIT, for me, began at home with my own mom. As someone born and raised in Japan, she calls it, another G word, Gambatte! She opened the doors of her small travel agency more than 30 years ago and is still operating it in a highly competitive and ever-changing market. I know, first-hand, what she went through and continues to go through, running a small business. I know that there are hundreds of similar stories in this room today.

Without GRIT, we cannot Grow.

And we are definitely Growing. We recently partnered with the Hawaii Food Manufacturing Association to oversee the administration of HFMA, which came about because both organizations believed it was necessary to work together...in partnership with Innovation Hawaii...if we wanted to Grow the manufacturing industry.

We have also been Growing and strengthening our relationship with the DOE and UH, collaborating to improve our educational system and preparing the talent pipeline for our future workforce.

Our partnership with members like Torkildson Katz Moore Heberhing Harris also continues to Grow, with our annual Employment Law Seminar going on 23 years. This partnership has kept companies up to speed on the latest laws and regulations so that they, too, can continue to Grow and expand their workforce.

In order to Grow as a state and accomplish our goals, we must have a clear, predictable process. Those investing in our state must not be subject to political or special interest intrusions that stop projects midstream. Or, jeopardize investments once the process has already started.

While we need to be thoughtful and deliberate in our planning, we need to embrace new ideas and technologies that create positive change. Our traditions and cultures define us, but we must not see every change as a threat to their existence. They are not static. They all evolve as times and people change. They must not be used as a reason to halt or avoid beneficial developments that are in our long-term best interests.

With that said, we cannot stay silent. We must be actively engaged. We cannot let the social media firestorm, the anonymous blogger and the irrational disrupters intimidate us or undermine our efforts to do the right thing. Fear will only stifle our efforts to advance growth. Our state cannot afford to remain at status quo.

And, Growth done with care and respect will be in the interest of the Greater Good. We are facing and tackling many difficult issues...rail, homelessness, the economy, housing...We may not all share the same position on these issues. Conflicting views are inevitable.

But if we keep our focus on the long-term Greater Good, we can find ways to work collectively to overcome our differences and arrive at what’s best for the people of Hawaii.

Working together with respect and humility, will enable us to grow our economy and improve our quality of life. We must continue collaborating with all stakeholders, including the legislature; county administrations; neighbor island, Oahu, regional and ethnic chambers; and other business organizations, including labor and the diversity of interests represented by our members.

So, Chamber ohana, let’s make the decision to move forward with GRIT, working to GROW our businesses – and the State of Hawaii – all for the GREATER GOOD for generations to come.

In the words of John Wayne, My True Grit himself, “True Grit is making a decision and standing by it, doing what must be done.” Mahalo.