**SDITE President’s Address**

*Delivered by Becky White, SDITE President, at the SDITE/GLDITE Annual Meeting in Lexington, KY, April 17, 2012.*

It seems to me that my tenure as a Southern District President is proof that God has a sense of humor. I might best be described as the ‘accidental transportation planner’, because transportation was not in my plan as a young person. My scholastic training was in the arts, and I drifted into this field by way of a drafting table. It was through the mentorship of several distinguished traffic engineers, now former ITE and SDITE Presidents that I was persuaded to take up transportation planning as a permanent career. I owe ITE a great debt of gratitude for providing the technical training that has been absolutely crucial to my ability to function in this industry. I also owe a lot of people in ITE a personal thank you for the investment they have made in me.

My story might be a cautionary tale to young people about the risks of fixating on where your career will be in 20 or 30 years. The people and events that come into your life on a yearly basis may change your trajectory. Like me, you may find yourself with a different end result --- one that is far more challenging and rewarding than the one you had in mind. To live that way requires us to adopt an attitude of trust and faith that living according to a set of core values today will naturally lead us in the correct path for tomorrow. That’s a scary proposition for folks who like to plan everything! But to release the future from the illusion of our control may indeed release its potential to be better than we imagined.

So what has this art major turned transportation planner learned while climbing the career ladder?

* I’ve learned there is always something new to learn . . . and that I’m best prepared by knowing where to find the most reliable sources for help. ITE is my number one, go-to resource.
* Somewhere along the way I learned to ask “why” multiple times. It usually helps me get to the bottom of things and is a good test for my own preconceived notions.
* I’ve learned to choose my battles carefully. Some things aren’t worth fighting for, and others will demand every ounce of energy we can muster. I don’t want to go through my life fighting about every little thing --- some stuff just needs to float on by.
* I continue to learn to listen more attentively to others. Sometimes the most significant thing I can do is give my full attention to another person. It is the gift of self, a most precious thing.
* Through some experiences with doing public involvement with road safety projects, I learned that people can hide a lot of brokenness behind their anger. As professionals we must learn how to communicate facts with sensitivity and compassion for the feelings that others carry. Truth cannot help people if they block it because we tried to beat them over the head with it.
* I’ve learned there is no substitute for good communication skills.
* Some bad experiences have taught me that there is no substitute for character. Character flaws are fixed by the Almighty, not by well meaning bosses.
* Many folks in ITE have taught me that to be mentored by another is a gift that lasts a lifetime and yields multiple dividends.
* Some recent personal crises with coworkers at my office have re-focused my understanding that workplaces are critical areas of support in people’s lives. The office is not just about work. It’s about community and strengthening each other to live better lives and have courage through adversity.
* I’ve learned that I need lots of friends that I can call on when I need help. There is no shame in asking for help. The shame is in failing because you would not ask.
* After age 40, I learned to trust my intuition. For those of you under the middle age mark, tuck that away as a bright spot to look toward.
* As a working wife and mother, I’ve learned to juggle a lot of demands. Sometimes I needed to be reminded that work is important, but family is forever. Keeping things in proper priority has been critical for me and my experiences have created opportunities to help my employer create a more family friendly workplace.

Looking back, this is a pretty generic list of life lessons, but they are common denominators that we all share. Some of these lessons came to me with a substantial amount of pain and anxiety. At many points during my work life I have found myself saying “I can’t do this. I’m not prepared for this. This is way too hard for me.” A great help has come from a scripture verse. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 the apostle Paul quotes Christ as saying to him “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” This verse has been an encouragement to me to keep going with the assurance that a power beyond my own is at work, reconciling all things and guiding my path. We all have the opportunity to tap into that life-giving power, one that strengthens, guides, and encourages us.

No matter what our daily tasks, we all are called to live lives that respect others, dignify our professions and personal lives, and build community in our work places, organizations, and public settings. If we did all those things, couldn’t we all say life had been successful? My hope for our organization is that we will encourage and mentor each other to be transformational in our families and communities. May we act with courage, compassion, wisdom, and a servant’s heart to leave a legacy worthy of the one who gave us life.