

NICK FISH SWEARING-IN
Presented by
Governor Barbara Roberts
June 13, 2008
Portland, Oregon

I am so honored today to play a part in this special ceremony for my friend Nick Fish.

Nick and I volunteered together on several big events at Portland State University celebrating and recognizing what were labeled “Urban Pioneers”. The longer I worked with Nick the more I understood, I was volunteering with such a leader every time I worked beside Nick.

So appropriately (it seems to me), our newly elected Portland City Council member has asked today that I share some brief remarks on the subject of leadership.

Over many years I’ve read the editorials, listened to the political speeches, and heard our citizens lament the lack of leadership in Oregon and in this metropolitan area. Yet, maybe some of our whining could stand the examination of just how we view leadership.

I’ve taught leadership to hundreds of state and local government officials during my ten years at Harvard’s Kennedy school and the Hatfield School at PSU. I have certainly found that attempting to analyze and define leadership can prove to be an elusive process.

I have gradually “invented” my own short-hand definition based on 25 years in public service. It goes like this:

“Leadership means having the self-confidence to believe you can make a difference, the passion to believe it matters, and the courage to risk it all because you believe it matters.”

Leaders should not be defined simply by their popularity but by their willingness to take risks, by their ability to share credit, the strength to admit errors, and their willingness to pick themselves up and keep leading and motivating, and partnering for the broader good.

Leadership is not about quick-fixes, clever slogans, about dividing citizens, or about polling numbers.

Sometimes leadership in public office means telling citizens what they need to know rather than what they want to hear. Sometimes you must stand alone. But to

paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King...“It won’t always be easy. You won’t always be surrounded by supporters when it is time to stand and lead.”

But today, Nick, you are indeed surrounded by supporters because we and the voters of this city recognized the leadership you bring to our community and the council.

So before I close today, Nick, let me remind you of the ten rules of leadership you have heard me deliver before. You may hear them today with new intensity and meaning.

Here are my ten rules for public leadership:

- 1. Ethics and honesty matter from the beginning to the very end of your leadership path.**
- 2. Even visionaries must do the hard work. A dream is nothing without the details and elbow grease that make it a reality.**
- 3. The term “risk-taker” is not synonymous with kamikaze. If you are going out on a limb (and I believe leaders must) ask yourself these two leadership survival questions: Who has the net? And who has the saw?**
- 4. When an issue really matters to you and you believe strongly it is the right thing to do even when it may not be popular, ask yourself: “If I take this risk, what’s the worst that can happen?”**
- 5. Leaders can’t lead without followers. Your treatment and respect of those who work for you, believe in you, show you loyalty, and carry your water, that treatment is a demonstration of your leadership character.**
- 6. Understand and appreciate history – your own, your community’s, your state’s history. You will do a better job of making history if you know and acknowledge those who blazed the trails on which you now tread.**
- 7. Think and act long-term.**
- 8. Remember leadership is not a popularity contest.**
- 9. Work to bring everyone to the table but never be afraid to stand alone.**

Those are the standards by which I define and measure leadership. But I promised you a tenth rule. This one, however, applies to all of us not just to our leaders.

Rule #10 – Don’t expect more courage from your elected officials than you, as citizens, are willing to demonstrate yourself. For after all, we are all in this together. Democracy is not a spectator sport. These rules on ethics, courage, history, long-term thinking – they apply to both our leaders and to all of us as responsible citizens.

And today we watch as just such a leader assumes his position on the Portland City Council. Nick will meet these high standards. He will meet this community's high expectations. Nick Fish will lead. He will serve. He will make us proud.

Delivered by Barbara Roberts, Oregon Governor 1991-95