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**Theme: “Diversity: A Prescription for Change”  
Chief Diversity Officer Lecture Series**

**The Johnnetta B. Cole Global Diversity and Inclusion Institute  
Bennett College for Women**

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Thank you, Dr. Julianne Malveaux. I'll do my best to live up to that kind introduction.

Thank you also Dr. Johnnetta Cole. I am deeply honored to address the women at Bennett College and to be part of the Diversity Lecture Series, an important initiative to expand the impact of the Johnnetta B. Cole Diversity and Inclusion Institute.

**(Short Pause)**

I can't think of a better place to deliver a message on the need for inclusion than before an audience of Bennett Belles, in Greensboro, where Nathaniel Green fought the British ... Quakers, opposing slavery, built an Underground Railway station ... and four young brave men sat down together at Woolworth's, at a time Jim Crow forbid them to eat a meal.

**(Short Pause)**

While in earlier remarks, chief diversity officers did a splendid job sharing their organizational and personal "best practices," today, I'll take a slightly different path.

Many of the lessons I've learned concerning diversity have come from my 34 years at Georgia Power.

The leaders of my company are actively committed to a positive shift of culture and have provided considerable resources to make that difficult journey a reality.

I am also blessed to have unwavering support and confidence from our company's president and CEO. His support and confidence inspire me.

While our progress and successes have been significant, and there is much more work to be done, I won't be speaking to the specifics of our programs today.

Instead, I'll focus on why these initiatives are required, the barriers to sustaining their progress, and the challenges – and opportunities – for personal and professional growth in the workplace for the Bennett Belles present today.

**(Short Pause)**

My first order of the day is personal. I believe I **cannot** have credibility with you unless I first reconcile with you.

Let me first state the obvious. I represent the part of American population who often is the primary target of diversity and inclusion strategies: Corporate America's white, heterosexual, Christian male.

As I acknowledge the past, I am personally and sincerely sorry for the pain of racism, hate, fear and bigotry that have impacted lives. I am sorry for anything I personally have done knowingly or unknowingly to add to that pain.

It would be at best disingenuous, and a worst a lie, to say I have not benefited from the privilege I gained because of my complexion and gender.

Yet, I can't turn back the clock and wipe away the affects of the introduction of slavery to Jamestown or when Plessey v. Ferguson made segregation the law of the land.

I do, however, completely dedicate my existence to work with you to transform America's places of work into venues of inclusion, conducive to professional and personal growth.

**(Short Pause)**

At this moment, there's much said about diversity being strategic and aiding the bottom line. But in many, if not most companies, it still seems to me that diversity **is not seen as a core item**. Rather, it's something that must be done by public companies, a check-off on the corporate to-do list, with a kind of compliance mentality.

What is missing is the collective hearts and minds of those who reside in corporate America, who breathe life, or not, into our strategies ... that this really matters.

For too many, our diversity strategies still feel like, "I have to give something up in order to be inclusive ... zero sum."

At Georgia Power, like many other companies across North America, we've made a lot of progress, actually wonderful progress when you consider where we were less than a decade ago.

The senior leadership of our company has gone from "less than a handful of women and minorities" to about 35-40 percent of our board of directors, management council and the top 27 officers.

We're still not where we want to be with inclusiveness, but we're committed to getting there.

More importantly, I think making sustained improvements is not only increasing representation at all levels, but it's also about all of us – at all levels – learning the hard stuff about soft skills.

There will always be a need for well-grounded justifications of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Senior management will continually have to be convinced there is a return on investment.

So, even though there have been enough diversity business case studies to fill a moderate-size library, we ask for just one more to prove the value of what we're doing. It

seems we are asking for a silver-bullet business case that will make something that appears illogical to the dominant group as ... more logical.

The fact is without a single business case for diversity, we must sustain and expand these initiatives. But why do we have to justify having every employee feeling valued, respected and included?

We should be doing this because it's **the right thing to do! And there is not a moment to lose.**

**(Short Pause)**

Now more than ever, having all of our current and future work force prepared and fully engaged in productive, meaningful work is critical if the United States is to keep up with the momentum of global competition.

Whether it comes from Asia, the European Union or Latin America, American dominance in every industry is or will soon be under siege.

With the retirement of the Baby Boomers, there is a predicted shortfall of over 11 million workers beginning in 2010. Within the next 30 years, that shortfall is expected to reach 30 million.

As the need grows for people with strong math and science backgrounds to fill these vacancies, there is an under-representation of African-American and Hispanic population receiving college and science and technology degrees. Additionally, there is an over-representation of African-American and Hispanic populations with respect to poverty levels.

I think it's important to note, that even though both African Americans and Hispanics are underrepresented in college, the overall number of Hispanic graduates is greater than African Americans. That will have huge implications for you as educated African-American women in the workplace and in life at large.

What picture I see forming is a need for corporate America to redefine what a healthy community is. The educational and economic divide across racial and ethnic lines – especially for African-American women – is becoming a threat to sustaining corporate America's future business models.

This is why creating more inclusive, win-win environments for all employees is critical. Inclusiveness has to begin inside the walls of corporate America if we are to strengthen the outside communities and educational institutions that ultimately support our workforce and business success.

**(Short Pause)**

If you read my bio, you may wonder how a white male with a degree in industrial management could end up as vice president of diversity at a major corporation in a city that many see as at the cutting-edge of diversity in the heart of the New South.

After being educated at both Marist School and Georgia Tech in Atlanta, I followed a career within the operational side of Georgia Power. As I began to understand that my life experiences and realities were significantly different than those of people of color and women, learning about diversity became my passion, my calling.

In addition to the influence of my wife and two daughters, no one event played a greater role in my personal growth than a shared experience with black and white leaders. The occasion occurred through Leadership Atlanta, which brings together corporate, community and nonprofit leaders for a year-long experience to understand Atlanta's diverse communities. The centerpiece of the experience is called Race Day.

In 1995, C.T. Vivian, a confidant of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and a living legend of the Civil Rights Movement, directed the Race Day program in which I participated.

*For me it was a powerful, cathartic experience.*

It punctured the cocoon of white privilege that had surrounded, blinded and protected me since birth and opened the door to a personal journey that's far from ended.

For two days, roles were reversed. For whites, nothing we said was right ... everything we uttered was wrong. Hearing the personal stories of hurt, prejudice and discrimination experienced by the blacks in the room on a daily basis was profound and disturbing.

**(Short Pause)**

Toward the end of the first day, C.T. asked the white participants, 'What would you do or say to your children if they brought home a person of color to marry?'

I had no problem with that. I worked with people of color daily. I sat on boards devoted to civil rights. I thought I was at ease and comfortable in a multi-racial environment.

I was *a good man*. Each night, I went to sleep knowing I was a responsible Catholic, serious about doing the right thing. So, with no trepidation, I went home and asked our two daughters the question. And what was their response?

**(Say their response loud and slow)**

*"Daddy, we couldn't do that. You'd go nuts."*

**(Short Pause)**

While not calling me a racist, they delivered a jolting reality check. In my heart, I realized I was.

No, I wasn't standing around our home spouting bigotry, or denying them access to minority friends. But my daily actions, not words, propagated a message of exclusion.

**(Maybe use hands to emphasize quotes)**

Our family had moved into an all-white suburb to get "*a better return on our real estate investment.*"

We sent our daughters to overwhelmingly white public schools so they could get, quote "*a better education.*"

When entertaining at our home, it was always with whites, and *everyone* in my inner circle of friends was white.

What's interesting is I now recognize that my parents lived a similar life. I never heard them say anything derogatory about African Americans. However, I was unintentionally teaching our daughters the same things I learned growing up ... unknowingly.

**(Short Pause)**

At about this same time, I bumped into my former Georgia Tech football teammate, Eddie McShan, and we had a conversation that never took place when we were in school in the early 1970s.

Eddie was the first African American to play quarterback for a major Southern university. From slurs and threats in public to at times isolation from his teammates, it was a very tough time for him.

We played together for three years, but the blunt truth was I didn't see what was going on in our small world. We were both there, but only Eddie saw and experienced the ugly, overt prejudice and discounting of that era. Because of my skin color, I was living a different life.

Looking back, I wonder even if I had understood what was happening, would I have stood up for Eddie? Or would I have backed down because of possible consequences from friends, teammates and family.

To the best of my knowledge, no teammate overtly directed bias at Eddie. But he knew it was there, unstated, below the surface.

Since 99 percent of the team was white, we never had to think about our whiteness. We never understood how difficult it was for someone who was different to exist in our environment.

Interestingly, I see this same state of unconscious incompetence today, in any organization or group when the majority is white (male or female) ... or male (white or

black) ... or heterosexual (white, black, male or female) ... or Christian faith (white, black, male or female) ... or ... hopefully, you understand the point I'm trying to make.

All of us, everyone today in this chapel, are part of some majority or dominant group, and we might not recognize it. As a result, we may be unintentionally, unknowingly, discounting someone who is different than us.

What does one have to do to understand life from another perspective? For me personally, since it seems I am part of most majority categories, I intentionally look for ways to be out of the power position ... to become vulnerable, afraid and then open my heart and mind to learn. This is how my greatest learnings have come ... along with opportunities to form many of my closest relationships.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that only those in dominant roles have blind spots. Even those who are oppressed have bias. It's important for all of us to figure out what frightens us the most and not allow that fear to discriminate.

**(Short Pause)**

The responsibility I have gives me – *and every other diversity officer across America* – the opportunity for new levels of understanding.

I wonder if there is an opportunity for us to teach employees about what I just described, dominant culture, before focusing on the –isms – racism, sexism or homophobia and religious differences.

In my opinion, the way we are teaching understanding of diversity and inclusion unintentionally reinforces the zero-sum conclusion. I believe we are teaching the right things. It's just that we have to create a broader framework and understanding of dominance for all the other trainings to have greater impact.

I also believe providing a broader context of dominant culture in all forms will move us away from what it feels like our diversity strategies are doing ... fixing white folks, especially white men.

No one group needs to be fixed. Rather, we all have personal work to confront our individual biases. We must be advocates for everyone. We will never sustain our inclusion initiatives unless they truly include and benefit everyone.

**(Short Pause)**

As it stands now, it appears that only women and people of color should coordinate or direct diversity programs.

Many well-meaning, intelligent people say this is the best and perhaps only approach. Get someone who's experienced prejudice, who's sensitive and aware to do this job.

After five years as Georgia Power's chief diversity officer, I can't buy into that formula.

In filling any corporate position, including chief diversity officer, CEOs must look at a broad criterion when evaluating candidates. Racial and gender profiling of any variety should not be acceptable for this position or any other job in a corporation.

We must focus on skill-sets required for the job such as operational credibility ... interpersonal and communication effectiveness ... knowing how to influence culture change ... and having the courage to deliver uncomfortable messages to executive leaders and employees. If we don't stop sending the message that white men are not qualified and need not apply for the chief diversity officer position, we will never make the progress we all want.

**(Short Pause)**

I've been focusing on the structure and methods of diversity. Now let's take a look at the realities of the emerging workplace in relation to the women here today.

Let me offer my congratulations to those of you who'll be graduating soon and joining the workforce, fulltime.

As African American women, you will face many unique and difficult opportunities and challenges in corporate America.

Every organization is a cooperative venture, made up of thousands of people who will be different than you. People from the past have imbedded their beliefs and intellectual DNA in the company. This is how organizational culture is created, and it is most comfortable for those who look like the past employees who made and evolved the organization.

As the new workforce enters corporate America looking dramatically different than the organizational founders, be prepared to face subtle forms of discounting, discrimination and harassment that don't meet legal definitions. If and when you recognize and experience it, understand it is the organization's way of trying to remain comfortable.

When you begin work, immediately start gathering intelligence on how that company's organizational culture works ... what gets rewarded and not. Learn the unspoken rules, the invisible forces that must become visible in your mind in order to succeed.

Don't assume you know a culture ... find out about it. This is where formal and informal mentoring becomes invaluable. I cannot overemphasize how important it will be for you to have mentors with men and women of every color throughout the organization. If affinity groups are available, join and become active in them.

Do this type of research and then decide if the organizational culture is the right fit for you, worthy of your skills and prepared to fully benefit from your talent.

Changing organizational comfort is the key to successful diversity and inclusion strategies. Always remember you sit in the driver's seat. Try and work for companies that not



only reflect your values but are also dedicated to creating a culture that values everyone. That is where your future success lies.

**(Short Pause)**

My next point must be very clear. Quality performance in any job is required. It will be extremely important for you to receive frequent and direct feedback on your performance.

Additionally, you will need to build relationships and alliances with men and women of every color and status throughout the organization. Always treat and influence others with respect, fairness, care, knowledge and with confidence, no matter who they are.

As your career progresses, pull others up with you. When you do reach the top, you won't be so alone. You'll have allies who trust and respect your ability. Also be prepared to hear from colleagues, by people of your affinity, that you've assimilated or even sold out ... welcome to my neighborhood.

At some point, even by doing all the right things, you may find you're spending lots of energy on stuff that has nothing to do with work. It could directly be the result of someone not being comfortable working with you because of your race and gender. If you can positively influence that person's reality box and in turn improve your work situation, that's ideal.

Never allow yourself to reach a point where you feel powerless, frustration saps your energy and anger impacts your life. Before that happens, make a deliberate decision to get out and act on it. Maintain a positive attitude ... as difficult as that might be.

Never forget you bring much to the table. Don't doubt yourself. Just go sit at another table.

**(Long Pause)**

Along the way, if you embrace differences, you will get more than a few surprises.

Not long ago, an African-American female pulled me aside and said, "Frank, I've never trusted a white male. I've never admitted that before, and I'm saying this to you because you intrigue me.

"I don't know how to figure you out, and I'm really afraid that you are going to betray me at some point. I hear all these nice words, and I have no doubt you are well meaning, but maybe I've heard this before, and I've been betrayed before. And you know, we've been betrayed generation, after generation."

*How do you answer that?*

For me, the best answer was to keep going forward, doing my best, trying to earn trust while being true to who I am. It's interesting, the more I learn, understand and appreciate life experiences of those different from me, the more comfortable I become with

who I am. In that development, I become a better advocate for all, and I hope, a better human being.

A few weeks ago, I was among Catholic and Jewish congregants who met for a daylong discussion on the reconciliation process for Catholics with Jews. Our discussion took us back thousands of years and more recently to the Holocaust.

That evening, at the Temple in Atlanta, as we listened to a joint Jewish-Catholic choir, my mind wandered to the Bennett Belles and Dr. Cole. What could I say of value to this beloved community?

I even thought of Dr. Cole's words about "differences no longer making a difference." At that exact moment, I opened a Jewish prayer book and found this poem written by Judy Chicago.

It's called "Merge," and the first lines read:

And then all that has divided us will merge...  
And then compassion will be wedded to power...  
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind...  
And then both men and women will be gentle...  
And then both women and men will be strong ...  
And then no person will be subject to another's will...  
*And then all will be rich and varied ....*

To me, that last verse gets to the heart of what we're trying to achieve with inclusion. In ending all forms of discounting, we unleash each of our potentials. We deepen our humanity in the process.

Along those same lines, the great writer Chaim Potok wrote in his marvelous first novel, The Chosen:

"A man is born into this world with only a tiny spark of goodness in him. The spark is God; it is the soul; the rest is ugliness and evil, a shell. The spark must be guarded like a treasure; it must be nurtured; it must be fanned into flame. It must learn to seek out other sparks, it must dominate the shell."

### >>>About One Minute to Go>>>

Each of us has the ability to find that goodness, that spark within ourselves and others. By working together, we promote connectivity, a synergy of brains, spirits and energy that we use to enhance our communities, workplaces and individual lives.

The more I understand and open myself to interacting with and learning from those who are different from me, the more I realize that there is so much more in common between than different.

Recognizing our connectedness is going to be even more important as the globe shrinks, as techno-communication and rapid transportation pull us closer together.

If we don't recognize and embrace this fact, we put our communities and our families' futures at risk. *We put humankind at risk.*

So, we have choices to make. In each interaction we have with those that differ in ways that are important for us, we often have a choice.

We can refuse an opportunity to more fully understand one another, or we can *choose to be a beacon of hope* and make this world better for those coming behind us.

The choice is ours to make. I trust you will make the right one.

Thank you for listening ... and allowing me to be with you.

**###Bennett-College###**