

**“Managing Fear:
Finding the Energy to Move Forward”**

**Dinner Keynote Address
2010 International Low-Carbon Development Forum**

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I thought that I would begin my comments tonight by saying a few private words directly to Dean Geng Xu. I ask that all of you forgive me for speaking only to Dean Geng. I promise I will be brief, and then I will speak to all of you together.

“Dean Geng, I have two things to say to you privately. First, I want to thank you for giving me the great honor of asking me to present a keynote speech this evening. The participants in your forum are exceptionally distinguished, and I cherish the symbolism of being asked to play this role, and I also cherish the opportunity to speak directly to them.

“And Dean Geng, the second thing I want to say is that I am afraid. You have asked me to speak about low carbon development to some of the most important figures in the world in the field of low carbon development. I am a lawyer, a law professor, and an academic administrator. I am not an expert on low carbon development. And so, your very kind invitation has also made me afraid.”

Now that I have completed my private comments to Dean Geng, I am ready to speak to all of you, directly.

The title of my remarks this evening is this: “Managing Fear: Finding the Energy to Move Forward.”

I have chosen this title because I believe that, in interesting ways, one of the key challenges we as a global society face on the path to low-carbon development is identical to the key challenge I faced in preparing these remarks this evening.

As a society, we need new approaches to energy. We understand that our current modes of energy production and consumption are not sustainable for much longer – they create increasing dangers for human life in the forms of pollution and climate change, and they depend upon fossil fuels, the supply of which we are in the process of exhausting. We need new alternative sources of energy, and we need new approaches to energy consumption that will slow the rate of fossil fuel depletion. We need to find the energy to move forward.

But as we search for that energy, we must acknowledge that one of the greatest barriers to innovation is fear.

Fear of what? Fear of failure. In 2010 the whole world understands something that many fewer people understood in 2000. We understand that if we fail to make a successful transition to a relatively low carbon environment, life for human beings fifty years from now could be much worse than it is today.

Our physical environment could evolve in ways that overwhelm us with climatic disasters, food and water shortages, and unmanageable diseases. Our economic and political environments could evolve through periods of resource scarcity into periods of rapidly declining wealth and ultimately military conflict.

As we consider the possibility of failure, it is completely natural for us to feel fear.

My first point is that fear itself is a barrier to success. Fear reduces creativity. Fear makes it more difficult to find the solutions to our difficulties. Fear can leave us paralyzed.

My second point is that one of the ways fear can leave us paralyzed is by persuading us that attempts to move forward are futile. If we are afraid of the consequences of failure, it is easy for us to tell ourselves that there is no point in even trying. A sense that effort is futile can take

away the energy we need to move forward. Not the oil or gas energy, not the solar or wind energy, but the human spark of creativity that fuels innovation.

And so, as we come together to think about low-carbon development, it is important for us to ask ourselves, “What are the strategies that we should be employing to make sure that we are not paralyzed by fear?” “What do we need to do to keep ourselves from being distracted by a sense that this project is too big for us, that all our efforts are futile?”

To begin to answer that question, I would like first to describe four guidelines that helped me to overcome my fears that I might embarrass myself and Dean Geng in speaking with you tonight. And then I would like to explain how those guidelines might be relevant to our efforts to migrate to a relatively low-carbon economy. In particular, I want to emphasize how the design of this forum offers an outstanding example of those guidelines in practice.

These four guidelines are not especially deep or surprising. I expect that when you hear them you will say that they are all quite obviously correct. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that these guidelines can provide some modest, practical assistance to us as we confront the very real challenge of managing fear.

What are the four guidelines?

- 1) Break the problem down.
- 2) Know yourself.
- 3) Keep an optimistic heart.
- 4) Work collaboratively.

The first guideline is to break the problem down. When we state a problem generally and abstractly, it seems more frightening, more impossible. Breaking it into pieces makes it more manageable.

When I first started my career as a professor, one of the best pieces of advice I received came from my next door neighbor in Michigan, Professor Bill Miller. Bill told me that as a young professor he had almost quit

because of writer's block. He had been unable to write because of fear that he would write something bad.

I was amazed when he said this because Bill was one of the most prolific writers I knew. He published a new book every two years.

Bill explained that early in his career he had been unable to write because the idea of a book was overwhelming. How could anyone write two hundred pages? It was too much!

But he had overcome that challenge by persuading himself that he never had to write a book. All he had to do was write 3 pages. Every day, he had to write 3 pages. That was all. That was manageable.

And so he did. And after 67 days, or just a little more than two months, he had written a first draft of a two hundred page book.

I thought about Bill Miller as I prepared this talk. The idea of making a 30 minute speech to an audience of brilliant experts whom I have never met was truly frightening. Two minutes, however, was not so bad. I wrote a two minute speech. And then I did it again. Fifteen times.

The second guideline is to know yourself. I am not a scientist, an engineer, a businessman, or a government official. It would be silly for me to pretend that I am any of those things.

But Dean Geng was not asking me to be any of those things. He was asking me to speak to you honestly and authentically. My assignment was to find an aspect of my own experience that would be relevant to what you are doing at this forum. I did not need to try to do your work; I needed to think about how what I do might be relevant to you, helpful to you, as you carry out your responsibilities.

The third guideline is to keep an optimistic heart. Many tasks that require creativity call for us to use more than just our brains. An imaginative breakthrough often requires more than logic, more than rationality.

Logic and rationality are necessary, but they are not sufficient. We also need something that is more emotional – something like faith, something like hope. We need the creative energy that comes from optimism.

Over the course of my life, I have come to believe in the power of optimism. Every day I see miraculous things, people accomplishing tasks that other people doubted they could do. Whenever I find myself with a difficult challenge, I focus on what I have seen and tell myself to remain hopeful. Most of the time, my hope is rewarded. And even when things do not work out exactly as I had hoped, I am rarely worse off for having believed that it might.

In preparing tonight's speech I relied upon my optimistic heart. It, as much as logic, helped me to manage my fears.

The fourth and final guideline is to work collaboratively. When I was younger, I tended to believe that the idea of "teamwork" was a silly excuse for people who could not solve problems on their own. Today I think very differently.

Every day, I see people brainstorming together and producing ideas that no one individual could have discovered alone. In my own work, including preparing to speak to you tonight, I now make it a point to seek advice and inspiration from others.

So now that I have elaborated on the content of these four guidelines – break the problem down, know yourself, have faith, and collaborate – I can describe how I see them applying to the challenge of managing our fears and moving to a low-carbon global economy. And I can explain how this weekend's remarkable forum is a perfect demonstration of how, when these guidelines are followed, enormous progress is possible.

Indeed, I believe that one can clearly see the value of these guidelines when one contrasts the disappointment of Copenhagen with the success of this weekend's forum.

After Copenhagen failed to produce the hoped-for results, many people tried to decide who should be blamed for the disappointment. But I do not think that this is a situation that requires us to assign blame.

As I mentioned at the outset, the challenge of moving to a low carbon society is especially difficult because we are all afraid. We fear that even our best efforts might be futile and we might be destined for a cata-

strophic failure. This is precisely the kind of situation where I would apply my four guidelines.

Consider the first guideline: “break the problem down.” I am not an expert here, but it looks to me as though, in the lead-up to Copenhagen, we made a mistake by getting locked into the notion that we needed a comprehensive legal agreement on a path to 2 degrees Centigrade. That does not feel like writing 3 pages a day. It seems to me as though we let ourselves become obsessed with the paralyzing thought that we had to finish writing a very long book – the book of two degrees centigrade – before the end of 2009.

The conveners of this forum have not repeated that mistake. They did not say that we would be spending a weekend on 2 degrees centigrade. They broke the problem down. Transportation. Lighting. Urban design. Bioenergy. Measurement. Three pages a day

Second, the conveners of this forum have shown how much can be accomplished when we each know ourselves. The forum presenters were not asked to design comprehensive strategies for the low carbon future. Each expert was asked to focus on how his or her expertise might make a difference.

Third, the conveners of this forum focused on giving us concrete reasons to restore the optimism in our hearts. After Copenhagen, we needed to renew our belief that progress towards a low-carbon future is possible. We needed specific deliverables to tell us, “Yes, we can.”

Yes, we can make “low-carbon development” a household term. We can build a sense of positive momentum by bringing several initiatives to fruition at the same time: a new dialogue platform, new research centers, and a new low carbon industries alliance.

And with respect to my fourth guideline, the conveners of this forum have demonstrated the power of working collaboratively. My first three guidelines – breaking problems down, knowing ourselves, and being optimistic – speak to us about how we might manage individual fears. They help us, as individuals, to sustain an attitude that says, “I believe we can make progress as a planet if I do what I can to contribute.” But

with a truly global challenge, that attitude will not last unless we show that we can work collaboratively to sustain it.

To be sure, the collaborative effort does not have to be worldwide. US-China collaboration is more than enough. So let us look once again at how the forum conveners structured the deliverables that are being provided this weekend. A collaborative dialogue platform. Collaborative research centers. A US-China Low-Carbon Industries Alliance.

The message of this weekend is that a low-carbon future is possible. The message of this weekend is that we have within ourselves the power to manage our fears. We really can find the energy we need to move forward into a more sustainable, low-carbon era.

It has truly been an honor for me to be able to participate in this weekend, and to speak with you tonight. Thank you, Dean Geng.