As President of Bakersfield College, I have the profound privilege of seeing teamwork contribute to making dreams come true. It is the investment of time, energy, and resources that we give to one another that truly makes incredible things happen. Kern County is an incredible place. So much of what we’ve accomplished and where we are today started as a shared challenge, a shared goal, and a shared promise.

We are a community of local traditions, rich history, family and friends, incredible partnership and synergy. There is no shortage of creative ideas and good intention. We are a community with a true love for high school football, Smith’s smiley face cookies, Dewar’s chews, and Woolgrowers, good music, like Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, strong faith, good friends and so much more.

We are a community which loves our people. Ask anyone who has relocated or moved away and they’ll tell you, Bakersfield just has a way of convincing people to come home. They’ll follow up by telling you, they came back because of the people.

Kern County is a place for dreamers. We have no shortage of ideas and makers, and our progress thus far and going forward really is about working as a team to accomplish the things we need to create a brighter future. So much depends on how we determine to create our city. Not only environmentally, but rather our social wellbeing, economic vitality, our core sense of connectedness and purpose for the future depend on our choices today.

In many ways, Bakersfield College captures and this sentiment. We are a campus of hope and empowerment to spur transformation.

As a community, It is up to us, right here, right now to ensure that each child, teacher, future business, and local industry for generations to come, is given the light and resources so they, too can create positive ripples in the sea of our world.

We are a community of leaders and a new you starts today.

My Personal Journey
In August of 1988, I boarded a Singapore Airlines flight from India to Los Angeles to start my graduate work at USC. As a young girl in India, I would have never imagined my path, purpose, and gift to teach would lead me to Bakersfield - the place I love; the community I call home. I found my way to BC because the 6th President of the College at the time, President Rick Wright, invested in me to make a difference in the lives of students in Kern County through BC.

The responsibility to teach mathematics to the future workforce of this community was vital. Not only was I (in a small way) contributing to the development of science and engineering for local industry, but an education encourages the personal growth of responsible citizens who can learn and think creatively and critically. Each semester was a new batch of students (some eager to learn and some not so visibly excited), but each new semester was also the opening of small world of
opportunities. There was “a new you” in me each semester as I grew wiser, and better through new implementing new strategies because of the connections and needs of my students.

My students inspired me to become a new, better version of myself and every time I was nudged to change, I said yes. With the support of my colleagues and the inspiration from every person I encountered, I knew I had to say yes.

In 1960, local Assemblywoman Dorothy Donahoe said yes too. From humble beginnings working as a secretary and registrar at Bakersfield High School, she ran for and won the election for state assemblywoman 38th district and went on to hold the position until her passing. Her purpose for the yes was to provide educational equality for all underrepresented citizens in order to elevate California’s economy. Her work was voted into law and its legacy continues to inspire leadership today.

We know that planning and innovation is important, but ultimately it is the “yes” from our humble neighbors, coworkers, people just like Dorothy, you, and me which makes big things happen. Saying yes is what stirs the heart and creates the power to propel our community forward.

**When was the last time you said yes? And where in your life can you say yes right now?**

Each of us have a unique story which has brought us, or kept us in Bakersfield. Whether it be our culture and history, some were born and raised here, others moved here as children or maybe it’s our family, friends, or careers. But, there is a common thread among us, we’ve all been encouraged by inspirational people who believed in us and kept us on our path to where we are today and we said yes.

My path and story is education. What is yours?

I love Bakersfield because we are a city of leaders and we are a small reflection of the great big, tiny world we live in. It’s vital that we say yes, and we must band together in community, so our united efforts can amplify the power of our hearts.

**We are the World**

Over thirty years ago, gifted musicians like Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Billy Joel, Diana Ross, Tina Turner, and Cyndi Lauper used gifts to make a change. Their many united voices said yes.

“We Are the World” motivated millions upon millions of people throughout the world to speak up, say yes, and become activists in their own way. Because of this artistic creation, lives were transformed forever through new access to food, education, health care, and peace.

Within 4 months of the songs release, USA for Africa had noted that 10.8 million had been raised for the humanitarian fund. Organizer, Ken Kragen announced the organization would not be distributing all of the money at once and instead, the foundation would be looking to long term solutions that offer healing for Africa’s situation. At the time, experts predicted that it would take at least 10 to 20 years to make even a slight difference to the existing problems, so even though the results were not immediate, that does not diminish the purpose of our efforts.

Choice, Commitment for the long term, Compassionate leadership, and a sense of connectedness to your community – these are the 4 C’s I’ll focus on today.

These are the keys to a new you and they open the door for a brighter tomorrow.
“We are the world, we are the children, we are the ones who make a brighter day so let's start giving. There's a choice we're making we're saving our own lives... It's true we'll make a better day just you and me...”

Choosing Commitment
Throughout our lives, we must make choices and I'm often reminded of one of my favorite poems by Goethe, “What you can do, or dream you can, begin it, boldness has genius power, and magic in it.”

Choosing boldness in our commitment is what defines and elevates our accomplishments. Without commitment, Amelia Earhart wouldn't have become the first woman to fly solo across the ocean. Without commitment, Rosa Parks wouldn't have sparked a milestone in the progress of American civil rights.

There are small commitments and there are big ones, but our bold choices launch and propel our action to overcome hesitation and pursue it. I think our hesitation is just a natural part of our humanity. But, when we take the transformative step through the “commitment portal,” we take off, sprinting with determination and focus to reach our goals.

The hesitation is only natural. It’s when we wake up at 3AM with a sense of anxiety for juggling one too many responsibilities in the limited time we have. Where do I place my focus? Where do I make my commitments when I just can’t make all of them?

I believe we can learn a lot from animals and my one year old golden retriever teaches me a lot about determination and just going for it. Every morning, he is committed to his morning walk. He is standing by out of a committed routine and he’s ready to take over the world! Once he knows we're ready to go, he springs into action like nothing else. His muscles are ready to go, he is agile and happy, and his eyes are set forward with laser focus ahead of him. He’s determined to stay the course (with the occasional distraction, of course)... but he always wants to keep going.

What makes a story great is commitment more so than simply goal. The commitment to make the goal a reality is what defines the greatness within. When I look back over the past few years, I can identify no better example of collective commitment then the work of Measure J. It has been my greatest pledge and privilege to dedicate my time, energy, and resources to make a difference for our future generations... but it too, didn’t come without hesitancy.

When the idea was first proposed to renovate our campus, the uncertainty was great. The lack of knowing was intimidating. We’d have to re-configure learning spaces for a campus growing each and every semester with inconveniences of construction, while ensuring the operations did not halt our work. We’d have to dedicate uncountable hours to sharing the story, sharing the need, and conveying why we knew it was important. It was all intimidating.

The intimidation was an experience which shaped me and I know I wasn’t the only who felt it. An incredible team rallied behind supporting this effort. When the commitment was made, I envision little one-year old Neo on his morning walk with his quick, determined moving muscles. Nothing could stop the delighted, yet strong march forward.

Our core team was acting with discipline and integrity, building relationships and earning support everywhere. We were responding to the responsibility to ensure the college which was founded in
1913 could continue its legacy to provide opportunities for future generations. We were reaching out with both hands to mold a stronger, healthier community. We were marching, delighted and happily towards a responsible, sustainable future for our College and community.

It was the bold choice and commitment which brought us to today. Sometimes, the difficult task is remaining steadfast in the pursuit of your goals. Detours along the way can and most likely will happen. They do not need to be seen as deterrents, but welcomed as a necessary part of our journey to the goal.

My daughter, for example, was an excellent academic student at Highland High School and Bakersfield College. Much to my delight, she always wanted to be a doctor and I can still remember the first time she told me. Eisha transferred to UC San Diego, where she was surrounded by the beautiful beaches, the college culture, tourism, bustling cityscape and all the distractions that come with her school of choice. It was during this time, she began to question the commitment she’d made thus far. The exploration, however, did not mean a lack of commitment. Instead, this was a time of strengthening, through question and exploration, her commitments and identify formation. There was sleepless nights for me, of course, and she decided to attend law school her junior year. After months and months of studying to prepare for the LSAT exams, the day finally arrived for her to take the test. As you guessed it, Mom had the rosary going and the phone rang, “Mom, guess what? I’m going to Medical School.” Today, Eisha is a Neurosurgeon, committed to what she’s doing. She has a heart for babies, and small children, and she loves every day that she can transform and improve lives.

Along the way, there was questioning and there may have been doubt, but a core part of her remained committed to discovering where she was supposed to be and how she was supposed to get there. Life will continuously test your resolve to see how much you desire your goal, but exploration is never an obstacle. It’s all an integral part of teaching us where we’re supposed to be committed, so we can make the right choice.

So we can be take the leap with no regrets...

So we can be like my one year old golden retriever, Neo... laser focused on what’s ahead, strong, steadfast, with a wagging tail.

The journey, including exploration is part of the commitment process, and it’s our choices that count the most.

“There’s a choice we’re making we’re saving our own lives...
It’s true we’ll make a better day just you and me...”

At Bakersfield College, individual commitment is strong. You can see it in the face of every student committed to their studies and you can sense it from every faculty and staff member committed to their students. As a community, we are committed to our core values and our mission to provide academic excellence so that graduates can contribute to the intellectual, cultural, and economic vitality of the communities in which they live.

We are BC. We are Bakersfield, and we are the world.
Compassionate Leadership

Research has shown that early childhood experiences play an important role in our personal, emotional, and cognitive development. The simple, every day interactions and moments mean something greater in that they shape who we are, who we want to be, and how we are encouraged to ripple effect hope back into the world.

In every metamorphosis of who we are, and in every new you and me throughout the course of our lives, our experiences develop, grow, and nurture our minds and hearts. These foundational moments with friends in school, difficult times with siblings or parents, the ambiance we remember, the feelings we had deep within our bones can have a lasting effect. These are the moments which have indented our hearts, shaped our souls, defined who we strive to be, and created our compassionate thinking, behavior, and actions.

I can recall distinctly the sights and the sounds of my formative childhood years. If you haven’t been to the southern tip of India, it’s very much like Hawaii, dense with coconut trees, guavas, and mangos, and when the temperature is very cold, it’s only about 78 degrees. As a young girl, I attended a Catholic Carmelite convent school with rigorous standards and as children, we were lovingly encouraged to surpass any expectations set forth for us. I have rich and fond memories of the Principal, Sr. Mary Patricia, and her tender way of being a strong leader. My classmates were children from many religions and we were very much the same, while also unique.

I will always remember Sr. Collette’s class and our weekly exercise to keep tally for our random acts of kindness towards others. With each tally mark, a compassionate trait developed and grew within me so that compassionate awareness was second nature. It became instinctive to act compassionately.

Growing up, I had an incredible example of a compassionate and committed leader. My father, Paul Christian had the kind of twinkling smile and big laugh that brought so much happiness. No matter where he was, he would elevate the environment to one that was strong, warm and loving. He enjoyed hiking outdoors in the early morning and I always wanted to tag along with my dog, Binky. Dad would try to convince me to stay home, but he always agreed and within just a few minutes, he was right. Little Binky and I would get tired so dad would lift me up on his shoulders and carry me the rest of the way, while I carried Binky.

Compassionate behavior is almost infectious and it has so much power to transform lives. In 1993, there was a Business professor at Bakersfield College who heard yet another news report of a “random act of senseless violence” and decided that these negative actions could be countered if we – as a society – could shift our focus towards actions that were the opposite. Like Sr. Collete, he assigned his students to commit one random act of kindness, write about it, and analyze their experience and that of the recipient. The random acts of kindness movement, founded by Dr. Chuck Wall at BC became an international movement resulting in countless acts of senseless kindness worldwide.

Compassionate awareness leads to compassionate leadership and if we pay it forward, the cycle is powerful. A compassionate leader knows the importance of community, like Bakersfield Mayor Karen Goh who often says, “We are Bakersfield!”

She attributed this associated this statement to a campus motto, “We are BC!” but expanded on it, because Bakersfield College is integral to every part of our community. There is no part of our city
untouched by BC. Renegades are future industry leaders, community leaders, nurses, teachers, law enforcement, auto technicians, journalists, firefighters, welders, engineers, researchers... We are BC!

In 1989, Bakersfield College professor, Phyllis Hullett started the Bakersfield Business Women's Conference merely out of an idea during the International Year of the Woman. She gathered friends, coworkers and out of a single meeting, twelve women and one brave man, Pat Shaffer, Dean of Development at Bakersfield College, agreed to serve on the executive board. The Bakersfield Women's Business Conference was born.

We are a community making bold choices, acting with commitment, and compassion to make a difference for a better, brighter tomorrow.

We are the Future

Mahatma Gandhi famously said, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.”

In many ways, I am the happiest and luckiest college president ever because I get to see these transformations happen beginning with our young people, now empowered to change tomorrow.

Today, we are a community where we can choose commitment and compassion to be our guide. We can shape the future. We can inspire tomorrow’s leaders to continue our commit in education and empowerment. We can lead compassionately, recognizing that we must say yes with a full heart and it may not always be easy, but it is worth it.

And we can dream. We should dream! It is through dreaming and working hard to achieve those dreams that society progresses.

We are a community of hope and empowerment to spur transformation.

We are Bakersfield and we are the world.

Spring is here, with new life bursting forth around us, and in the same way, we are capable of creating a new life for ourselves through transformation in each and every moment. It’s about growth of the heart, the soul, and the mind, into a new you.

Let it be a better version of you through choice, compassion, commitment, and collaboration.

Let this be the choice we’re making

“There’s a choice we’re making we’re saving our own lives... 
It’s true we’ll make a better day just you and me”

“We are the world, we are the children
We are the ones who make a brighter day
So lets start giving
There’s a choice we’re making
We’re saving our own lives
It’s true we’ll make a better day
Just you and me”