

CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you all for a thoughtful and engaging discussion. Your energy throughout this weekend has been remarkable, and I know I speak for the whole board when I say that I hope you feel as excited and optimistic as I do.

I want to take this moment to thank our speakers and our board members for organizing and facilitating such an affirming weekend. Special thanks belong, of course, to Michelle Gonçalves, the architect of this program. Michelle, you do so much for all of us, and it's an honor to work with you and call you a mentor.

As we leave this workshop, I want to comment briefly on three ideas that I have been reflecting on this weekend. I'll preface this conversation by saying that I personally have always been curious about the English language. It is sometimes ungainly and sometimes elegant, and therefore, for me, thought provoking.

But the element of the language that I find most curious is how one word can have multiple meanings and, moreover, how these meanings are sometimes in tension. The three ideas I am about to share with you are examples of such words. The dual meanings behind each idea have manifest themselves in each of you this weekend; my hope for you is that they will continue to do so throughout your careers.

First, I want to discuss with you the word "poise." Poise connotes grace and elegance; more specifically, being "poised" refers to having composure and self-assuredness. Watching all of you navigate networking events and panels as confident, sophisticated individuals has been inspiring.

But being "poised" also means to be *ready* to do something; to be in the process of preparing oneself for action. This room is full of women poised to take on the world. To roll your sleeves up, to stand up, to meet challenges, and to make change – however change looks to each of you.

Moreover, you are going to do all of these things not by stumbling through, but instead with poise. This isn't to say you will be perfect in every moment – you're human, after all – but you have excitement to prove yourself equal to these challenges. You therefore have the preparedness to handle such times – when they arise – with composure.

Second, I want to talk about "character." Character refers to one's personality or nature, one's disposition or moral qualities, and perhaps one's very ethos. As you have demonstrated consistently this weekend, the caliber of woman in this room is outstanding. You are all so many positive things – articulate, engaging, intelligent, curious – but above all, you have outstanding character. You are, fundamentally, good people.

But the word "character" has a second meaning that almost contradicts its first. Character can also refer to a *persona*, a role, or, in Latin, *dramatis personae*. While the definition of character I alluded to earlier connotes something genuine, this alternative definition refers to something constructed.

However, creating a character is not necessarily a bad thing. A number of you played a character this weekend. For some of you, that character was a woman unafraid to walk up and speak with anyone and everyone despite fundamental shyness. You challenged yourselves to move beyond your nature, and you alone created the space for yourselves to do so.

In the future, you will face circumstances where you may have to play a character again. You may struggle, occasionally, in a new situation. Channel the poise you have, and create for yourself a commanding, respectable character. Because in the moment you are building yourself up, though it might not seem it, you are tapping your true character – one of greatness, one worthy of every opportunity you will have.

I'll end with a brief conversation about strength. Strength – be it physical, emotional, or mental – can be a highly individual quality. Your own intensity, your cogency, your influence, and your power. Never forget that all of this resides within you in times where you face challenges alone. You are all of the tools you will need.

Strength, like character, also refers to a beneficial quality or attribute. Each of you has different strengths – different skills, different talents, and different abilities – that have made themselves known this weekend. This diversity is essential for creating change. Every individual has a strength – be that strength quiet or loud – to contribute.

Finally, strength also refers to magnitude and size, but especially to the number of people that comprise a group. Strength is therefore also inherently pluralistic. Strength is coexistence and coordination. As individuals, you are all strong and ready. As individuals, you are powerful. But as a group – as a collection of women, of colleagues, of peers, and of friends – you are a force of nature. Never forget the tremendous strength you will derive from each other, and remember that no one woman need always be an island.

It's been my pleasure sharing this experience with you. Now, go get to work.