

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/keeping-your-internal-compass>

UCSF Chancellor Susan Desmond-Hellmann describes how she keeps her internal compass in the face of external commentary she receives as a public figure. She explains that when you represent an organization larger than yourself, you cannot be controlled by what is said about your public persona, and that you must realize the stakes are higher for what you do and say.



Transcript

When you take on a role like this particularly at a public university, you're like the mayor in many ways.. There's a lot of rules that govern what I do and don't do.. There's the Public Records Act, that anybody who wants can ask for my emails and my trip reports and things like that, and my stockholdings, and gift, and travel and so forth.. How do I deal with that? Well, what I try to do is two things.. One is, I've always had a wish to make sure that having worked in a highly regulated industry and with patience for so much of my life, my most important compass is inside.. Not the newspaper, not what people say about me and it is very possible for me to disappoint myself and nobody knew it.. I like that saying "I'm my own harshest critic." I am so my own harshest critic.. So, one is, to make sure that in being a public figure, I don't turn towards avoiding what the paper says about me or the union say about me or whatever as my metric and keep my internal compass of what I expect from myself, but also to understand that in this role, I represent the university.. So the stakes are different.. It isn't me, Sue Hellman, private citizen..

It's me as representing the university and what we stand for and what we do.. So it takes a lot of self-coaching...