Funny thing happened on my way to retirement. I’m busier now than at any point in my career. Just ask my son Grant who is with us tonight. He’ll confirm that my family thought I was retiring from Sears eight years ago and we soon bought a home in Florida. I sort of dabbled in retirement for a few weeks again last year when I left my full-time perch at Ketchum and thought I’d spend a lot more time in the Sunshine State. Instead, we sold the big house in River Forest last year, moved into a condo in River North and next week we close on the sale of that home in Florida.

So what happened? After 40 years in the trenches and command posts of public relations, I fell into a life-changing new career as a consultant and faculty member at DePaul. My more academically disciplined colleagues fondly refer to me as a *“pracademic.”* But y*ou may call me “professor*.”

Sharing real-world experience in the classroom has been one of the high points of my life as I help develop future talent of this great profession. While the financial largess of academe might leave something to be desired, the psychic rewards are immeasurable. (Letters) In my previous nine jobs, I worked for some great bosses but I never got performance reviews like these.

Between DePaul and my PR career blog which I’ve been writing for the past five years, I feel -- as the late, beloved Betsy Plank would say -- that I’m answering to a *“higher calling”.* As you know, Betsy was the grand dame of PRSA, and she also founded the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations to build bridges between academics and practitioners so as to benefit training of future talent and leaders of our profession. I know Betsy is smiling proudly tonight as one of her many acolytes humbly accepts this special award from his peers.

Tonight is yet another reason I love Chicago and our amazing PR community. Thank you for this honor.