

Newry Chamber President's Banquet – 17 October 2025
Acceptance Comments by Feargal McCormack

I am very humbled, but honoured to receive the Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade, Edwina Flynn's President's Award, in recognition of my contribution, to developing the socio economic transformation of the Greater Newry Area, which we have all experienced over the past 35 years.

Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade, under the leadership of Edwina Flynn (who has been an exceptional, inspirational and charismatic President), CEO Michael Savage and their predecessors, has made a very significant contribution to the socio-economic transformation in the Greater Newry Area and its pivotal role, at the centre of the Belfast / Dublin Economic Corridor. Although, I believe much has been achieved, but there is no room for complacency in the current World we operate in, and more needs to be done.

From a personal perspective, my life has been a journey of learning and leadership experiences. Since I founded FPM, over 34 years ago, in August 1991, at 98 Hill Street, with a part-time secretary and no clients, my motivation in business, has been to create a legacy business. The private equity backed merger of FPM and the AAB Group in May 2022, has enhanced the legacy of the business, by facilitating succession and transition to existing and future generations. Indeed, I have full confidence in the future of the AAB Group, under its current leadership team.

I'm very conscious, that anything I have been fortunate to achieve in Business, or in promoting the socio/economic opportunity in the Greater Newry Area, has been the result of a passionate collective TEAM effort, and I express sincere thanks to all current and former FPM / AAB team members, who have helped me along the way, and also to all of those, who worked alongside me in a variety of Newry socio-economic initiatives, including: Enterprise Newry, the Newry Pittsburgh Partnership, securing City Status and the Newry Business Christmas Charity Lunch event.

On an occasion like this, you think of the many people who have assisted you, in the development of your values, vision and actions. In the context of family and experiences, they shape our lives. Growing-up, the youngest of four children, alongside Roisin, Donal and Ruairi, in my beloved Warrenpoint, I was very fortunate, to benefit from a happy and loving family environment, nurtured by my parents Terry and Moya McCormack.

For the past 38 years my wife Anne, has been my rock and a continuous source of wisdom and advice, and has played an integral role in any success I have achieved. I would like to thank her and my sons Ruairi, who is here today and our severely autistic son, Seamus for all their kindness and support. I am also conscious that our eldest child, daughter Eimer, who unfortunately died, after four days of life, has been a constant, throughout our lives.

There are many parallels between education, sport and business and therefore, it is appropriate that our Guest Speaker today is GAA President, Jarlath Burns, a person to whom, I have had the privilege to work closely with. Jarlath is a truly outstanding inspirational leader, born and living in this area, who we all, should be very proud of.

In the context of sport and business and the recent NFL match involving the Pittsburgh Steelers at Croke Park, I was inspired over the years by the half-time Chrysler commercial featuring Clint Eastwood at the 2012 Super Bowl Final.

It's half-time for the Greater Newry Area, in terms of its socio-economic fortunes, and its community, people and businesses are finding it difficult and challenging, perhaps due exceptional economic volatility and global political uncertainty. But the Greater Newry Area and this island, can't be knocked down by one punch, or by geo-political and economic uncertainty, because, we'll get right back-up again, and when we do, the world is going to hear, and experience our engines roar.

Before concluding, I celebrated my 65th birthday earlier this year, and following discussion with Chamber President, Edwina Flynn, I thought that today was an appropriate occasion to share with you, the Ten Guiding Principles of advice, I would give my younger self, or future generations.

1. I don't care how much you know, until I know how much you care. Life and indeed business, is all about people and trusting relationships and people must be treated with respect and dignity;
2. Our current circumstances don't determine where we go, they merely determine where we start. Looking back in anger, achieves nothing, we should encourage people to disengage from negativity, and approach the present and the future with a positive attitude to build bridges and consensus, and to embrace reconciliation and inclusiveness. Persistence beats resistance;
3. We must seek to attract, develop and retain the best people to surround ourselves with a diverse and inclusive talented team, who are not "yes" people. We must listen well, consider and move forward with inspiration and passion, to inspire a collective team effort, which can achieve sustainable superior performance;
4. Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection. Let's get started and improve as we go along. We should learn from others, because the success of others, should be a source of inspiration, not a source of fear - its about humility, how we can do things better? Identifying OFIs (Opportunities for Improvement);
5. Innovate or evaporate. Intelligent failure must be allowed in a mature society. We need to hustle and adapt a growth accountability mindset; to embrace agility, change, technology, digitalisation, data and scalability;
6. Culture is central to behaviour, it is the glue between the present and the future and the key determinant in the performance of an organisation, Encourage team colleagues to empower each other, because, if you cannot delegate, you are a nuisance and will restrict the growth and competency of your organisation;
7. Rather than work-life balance, perhaps we should promote and believe in work-life harmony, the idea being, that with smart planning and time management, we might be able to embrace both life and work at the same time, to do everything at once;
8. As St Francis said, It is in giving we receive, the door to happiness opens outwards. Encouraging a sense of community, volunteerism and Corporate Social Responsibility should be central to any business or organisation strategy, in order to make a lasting and positive impact on the communities we live in, and serve;
9. We can analyse the past, but we must design the future to deliver market differentiation. If you don't have a vision or destination, you will never get there. We need to work smarter to ensure future sustainability, by endeavoring to create a "better normal" and satisfying today's needs, without endangering future generations; and finally

10. Looking to the future, ethics must be embedded at the heart of the community and business landscape.

Yes it's half-time. In the recent past, we have demonstrated a resilience and an ability to overcome political instability and "The Troubles". The second-half is about to begin, let's ensure our engines start roaring, and catch the rising technology & Artificial Intelligence tide, from this world class Greater Newry location, at the centre of the exciting Dublin / Belfast Economic Corridor.

Go forward with confidence, have fun, embrace and enjoy the journey. Onwards and Upwards.

Thank you

Feargal McCormack