



January 13, 2025

Welcome to 2025, and welcome back to campus. I hope your winter break was relaxing and refreshing and that you're ready to embark on another transformative year.

The start of a new year is always a natural moment for reflection — a chance to pause, reset, and realign with our priorities and purpose. It reminds me of a recent moment when, amid a whirlwind of responsibilities, I had to hit the “reset button” in more ways than one.

I was conducting a frenetic orchestra of projects, each one vying for dominance in the concert of my mind. My primary computer screen was overflowing with documents, each filled with half-formed ideas and hastily scribbled notes. On another screen, I was deep into research, grappling with the challenge of making sense of it all. My brain buzzed with the complexity of Excel spreadsheets, and just as I was beginning to hit my stride, another task barged in, taking me off course. To top it all off, I had squeezed in a frantic 15-minute Zoom call, struggling to tether my scattered focus. Just 10 minutes later, I received two personal calls and needed to shift my attention again.

In the middle of this digital chaos, a notification about a long-forgotten bill flashed across my computer. Without thinking, I clicked it and suddenly found myself spiraling down an endless rabbit hole of distractions. The weight of my negligence crashed over me like a ton of bricks; I realized my carefully crafted report had been abandoned in haste and had vanished. Just when I thought the situation couldn't get worse, my computer froze, leaving me stranded.

In a burst of exasperation, I instinctively reached for the keyboard and hit Control-Alt-Delete. That wasn't just a lifeline for my unresponsive machine; it became my own personal reset button, a pivotal step to clear the mental fog that shrouded my thoughts. I took a deep breath — my own little reset amid the chaos.

This simple yet profound act of resetting gave me the opportunity to focus on what truly matters: meaningful, purposeful work and the people with whom I share this journey.

All of this reminds me of a story about two lumberjacks who were competing to see who could cut down the most trees in a single day.

The first lumberjack was relentless. He chopped and chopped, determined not to waste a single moment. He barely paused to eat or drink, convinced that constant effort was the key to victory.

The second lumberjack, however, took a different approach. He would chop for a while and then stop to rest. Each time he rested, he also took a few moments to sharpen his axe.

At the end of the day, the first lumberjack was stunned to see that his competitor had cut down many more trees. Frustrated and confused, he asked, "How is that possible? I worked harder than you! I never stopped!"

The second lumberjack replied, "You worked hard, but you never stopped to sharpen your axe."

This story reminds us of the importance of hitting pause and taking the time to reset. Whether it's sharpening our tools, clearing our minds, or reflecting on our priorities, these moments of renewal allow us to work smarter and approach life with clarity and purpose.

In our fast-paced world, we often feel pressured to keep going, to do more, and to push harder. But sometimes, the most productive thing we can do is to step back, breathe, and prepare ourselves for what lies ahead.

As we begin this new year together, there will be many opportunities for you to reset. Whether it's through reflection, connecting with loved ones, or recommitting to your goals, taking this time allows us to better show up for ourselves and each other.

Here at USC Upstate, our shared mission to empower students, transform lives, and elevate our community remains at the heart of everything we do. In the new year, let's take the opportunity to start fresh, focus on our well-being, and continue to lead with purpose.

I look forward to seeing the incredible strides we'll make in 2025.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris
Chancellor