



In Pursuit of Excellence

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In Pursuit of Excellence

It makes little difference what profession, trade, or business you finally enter, your college education will serve you well. It will help you as much to handle tools and equipment as to render services to your fellow men. A **good** education is not just a learning experience; it is also the development of the powers of the mind, the formation of character, and instruction in all matters moral.

In the eyes of the world, a college degree has become a prerequisite for high achievement and the passport to success. College attendance is seen as the unique key to personal development, yea, even to self-respect and inner confidence. Unfortunately, this popular view confuses individual success with human dignity and worth, which are qualities of the mind and spirit of every individual. Every human being, regardless of education and success, may have poise and integrity in his or her comportment worthy of respect.

Contrary to popular belief, a college education is **not** the only passport to success; in a free economy you may rise to fame and fortune through **entrepreneurship**, which is the creation and operation of business ventures. A school dropout may become the founder of an enterprise, the president of his company, and a captain of in-

dustry by exploring new avenues of service. In fact, disparaged, even shunned, by educated society, he may become an inventor and innovator who, in the end, surpassed his "educated" competitors. Few eminent merchants and industrialists of the nineteenth century had a college degree, but several founded and endowed great universities.

Men who attained such excellence usually spent their lives in a single pursuit, for excellence cannot be achieved upon easier terms. They had the intellectual ability, the will to apply it, and the perseverance in habits of industry which together led to phenomenal success. Excellence does not suddenly descend on a person. It must be attained through hard work, great discipline, and tenacity of purpose; it cannot be attained by doing what comes naturally or playfully. **Excellence grows from the desire to excel, from perseverance in the face of obstacles, and zeal and devotion in pursuit of a goal.**

At all times, in each trade and profession, each walk of life, there are men and women of excellence whose performance merits the admiration of their fellow men: excellent instructors and excellent students, excellent physicians and excellent house painters, excellent mechanics and excellent homemakers. Some kinds of excellence are apparent to all; some are known only to

the achiever.

Individuals who attain such great merit are few at best. Many people lack the talent, the will, and drive to make it their goal, or to achieve it, should they make it their goal. Yet, although not everyone can achieve it, everyone who pursues it is likely to benefit just from trying. In fact, all members of society tend to benefit from the pursuit of excellence by any one member.

The most powerful ingredient in excellence is motivation. The greatest talent without motivation is likely to remain useless. Motivation is what gives life zeal and zest. It separates the leaders of tomorrow from those who are likely to be frustrated and disappointed.

Motivation is the incentive or inspiration for acting. It may spring from simple biological needs and stimuli, or from social origins such as the family, religion, and culture. Economic conditions, too, may influence motives and values as, indeed, may more personal circumstances. Yet, in the final analysis, we do not know why some individuals react to certain needs and stimuli and why others do not. A man may struggle fiercely out of poverty and humble beginnings to get to the top, but many others, even his own siblings, laboring under identical conditions, may not be stimulated at all.

Motivation is not inherited, which ex-

plains the wide differences in performance by successive generations of the same family. One generation starting under modest circumstances may be motivated rather strongly, struggle, and succeed. But the sons and daughters thus "born with silver spoons in their mouths" may lack the parents' drive and, being accustomed to rather easy conditions of living, turn out to be too weak to work and achieve. This explains the example of many American families rising from rags to riches and returning to rags in just three generations.

The circumstance of family wealth, however, does not always weaken and debilitate the children. Surely, they do not feel the pinch of poverty and deprivation to spur them on, but they usually have a model to emulate. Growing up in an atmosphere of high standards of performance and high expectations, they may turn out to be as motivated as their forebears. Some families manage to create a tradition of high performance which guides its members throughout its generations. They constitute what may be called the natural nobility in every social order.

A sense of purpose, personal drive, and personal indomitability are not hereditary characteristics which can be passed on to children; however, the values of parents with a religious background do influence their attitudes toward child rearing, which,

in turn, affect children's motives. Such values may lead to early schooling and training, higher achievement aspiration, and greater and more successful entrepreneurial activity. Children who learn that they must not covet anything that is their neighbor's and must not steal, not even by political machination, enjoy a moral advantage over all others. Such training, together with parental attitudes and example, does influence their motivation.

Finally, individual differences in incentives may be attributed to traditional and cultural influences. Certain groups may enjoy a high level of motivation under certain conditions and at certain periods of time, but soon thereafter may return to a lower level when conditions change. In many countries, some immigrants and their children are known to surpass their native competitors in many fields of activity; their grandchildren are likely to be indistinguishable in achievement. Cultural differences in motivation do exist, but they must not be attributed to heredity nor to racial characteristics. They may vary with changing economic, social, and religious conditions in each culture.

The main avenue by which we may aspire to excellence is education. A good college seeks to instill in its students the desire for learning and excellence. It points them toward meaningful goals, raises their

sights, and prepares them for a life-long endeavor to realize the best that is in them. It is a severe taskmaster, inflicting much pain in a relentless sorting-out process which opens the doors to professional training for some students and closes them for others. In a way, **colleges and professional schools assign to most students their eventual status in life, which is very difficult to improve later.**

The sorting-out process usually begins with the selection of a school and its relative standing in the field of higher education. Some colleges insist on the highest possible standards, admitting only exceptional students with S.A.T. scores well above twelve hundred or even thirteen hundred. Other colleges are colleges by name only; they are lower academically than some of our high schools, admitting anyone with a high school diploma and demanding very little in performance and deportment. Between the best and the worst, there is a heterogeneous lot with higher relative standings, quietly but effectively sorting out their charges and sending them off into different paths.

Education is the path by which the brightest and most strongly motivated youngsters may climb to the top. The best-educated individuals usually take the key positions; all others are relegated to lesser positions. It cannot be by any

other path in a free society which rejects classifications according to social class and hereditary rank. Where individual performance is the primary determinant of success and social position, education points the way and opens the doors.

Many bright young people, unfortunately, do not avail themselves of the great opportunities. Lacking proper motivation, they prefer to roam the world, seeking adventure and pleasure. Many are in college to please a father or mother, or because it beats the alternative: working for a living. With no real interest in becoming educated, they are the problem students of instructors and administrators, needing continuous counseling, encouragement, guidance, and assistance. They must be coerced, threatened, and trapped into learning. To impart knowledge to them is an arduous and costly task.

Most of these young people who are bored, even pained, by college instruction are convinced that they are "late bloomers" who will find their success later somewhere else. Surely, there are a few late-sleepers who wake up some day, get going, and never look back, but they are rare exceptions. Most apathetic students are likely to be aimless throughout life. For them, the learning process is coming to an end very early; pained by it all, they may not crack another book after graduation. To

advance in age is not to grow automatically in knowledge and performance, to which fact many elderly illiterate and aimless people clearly attest.

High morale is an essential ingredient of excellence. Indifferent students who "don't care" usually are demoralized, hopeless individuals, lacking self-confidence and self-assurance in their own ability and performance. A college which accepts and tolerates the presence of many such students cannot possibly achieve the excellence that is within its reach. The "don't care" laggards have a corrosive influence, not only on fellow students, but also on instructors and administrators. They make it virtually certain that the college will never achieve any kind of distinction.

A college of excellence makes challenging demands on students and instructors. It sets lofty goals and demands the great effort necessary to achieve them. It stretches the individual to the limit of his or her potential, and honors demonstrated excellence in all its forms. It provides the discipline requisite for an enriching experience, instilling life-long pride and self-confidence in its graduates. A college of excellence encourages the pursuit of the highest standards in every area of life and individual excellence in all walks of life. In short, it raises the sights toward noble ends.

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