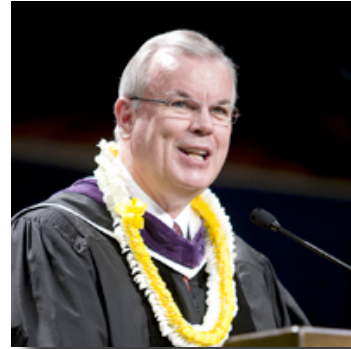


Observations on Leadership

Commencement Address at BYU–Hawaii
June 6, 2009



Elder Steven E. Snow (Key Speaker)

*Presidency of the Seventy
North America Central Area*

Brothers and sisters and friends, Aloha! It's a true privilege to be once again on campus after so many years. This is a wonderful place and I'm honored to participate this morning in this commencement exercise.

President Wheelwright, esteemed members of the faculty, honored guests, family, friends, and especially you, the graduates we gather to honor this day, I am grateful to share this celebration with you and extend my heartfelt congratulations to the graduating class.

While I am honored to be here, I am well-enough acquainted with commencement exercises to understand few of you will recall what I say today. That may not be altogether bad. I do hope you will remember, however, the importance of this day, as it is a landmark in your lives.

This university has blessed the lives of many who have gone before you. They in turn have blessed the lives of countless others. And so it will be with you. You see, with your education comes a responsibility. You have not labored these past years simply to ensure greater lifetime earnings. What you have learned here can and should bless the lives of others. You will be the leaders of tomorrow, and it is about leadership I would like to speak briefly today.

The following is a list of some of my own observations as to what makes a good leader.

First, be responsible. In today's world if you show up on time and stay until the task is completed, you have a great leg up on the competition. Be dependable and reliable in all you do. It is a choice blessing to be someone people can count on. Such an honor does not come easily or quickly. It is earned. But if you achieve it, it will bring great dividends.

Secondly, work hard. There is absolutely no substitute for hard work.

One of my favorite stories is about a dreamer whose name was Henry Comstock. Now, Henry was a miner of precious metals whose story took place in the American west in the mid 1800s. Henry found a mine, staked his claim, and dug until he found his treasure. He unearthed a little bit of ore, but he knew there was more to be found in that mine. So he picked and scratched, always convinced that somewhere there had to be the mother lode. He was determined to find it. He was really going to make it big. The days turned to weeks, the weeks to months, the months to years, and finally he gave up in 1859 when someone offered him \$11,000 for his claim. In those days, and particularly to Henry, that was a lot of money.

Henry Comstock looked at the buyer and said, “You’ve made yourself a deal and you’ve got yourself a mine.” And the person who bought it dug a little deeper—just a few feet deeper—and the mother lode was found. Within a short period of time, the Comstock mine produced \$340 million worth of silver!

Dreams take work, they take practice, they take patience, and, sometimes, they require us to dig just a little deeper.

By completing your education you have proven you understand the importance of hard work. Your studies will also help you work smarter. You see, it’s not always enough to just work hard. Price Prichett wrote the following brief essay to demonstrate it is important to work harder and smarter:

“Early on we discovered people get locked into a rut of trying harder without trying smarter. Trying harder doesn’t always work. Sometimes we need to do something radically different to achieve greater levels of success. We need to break out of our paradigm prisons, our habit patterns and our comfort zones.

“I’m sitting in a quiet room at the Milcroft Inn, a peaceful little place hidden back among the pine trees about an hour out of Toronto. It’s just past noon, late July, and I’m listening to the desperate sounds of a life-or-death struggle going on a few feet away.

“There’s a small fly burning out the last of its short life’s energies in a futile attempt to fly through the glass of the window pane. The whining wings tell the poignant story of the fly’s strategy: *Try harder*.

“But it’s not working. The frenzied effort offers no hope for survival. Ironically, the struggle is part of the trap. It is impossible for the fly to try hard enough to succeed at breaking through the glass. Nevertheless, this little insect has staked its life on reaching its goal through raw effort and determination.

“The fly is doomed. It will die there on the windowsill.

“Across the room, ten steps away, the door is open. Ten seconds of flying time and this small creature could reach the outside world it seeks. With only a fraction of the effort now being wasted, it could be free of this self-imposed trap. The breakthrough possibility is there. It would be so easy. Why doesn’t the fly try another approach, something dramatically different? How did it get so locked in on the idea that this particular route and determined effort offer the most promise for success? What logic is there in continuing until death to seek a breakthrough with more of the same?

“No doubt this approach makes sense to the fly. Regrettably it’s an idea that will kill.

“*Trying harder* isn’t necessarily the solution to achieving more. It may not offer any real promise for getting what you want out of life. Sometimes, in fact, it’s a big part of the problem.

“If you stake your hopes for a breakthrough on trying harder than ever, you may kill your chances for success.”

That's why in your education, we ask you not only to work hard but to work smart as you move through life.

Third, have a vision of the future. Project ahead in your mind one year, three years, ten years into the future. Visualize what you can accomplish and then take the necessary steps to make that happen.

Roger Bannister was a pre-med student in Cambridge, England, when he broke the world record for the mile run. On a cloudy, windless day in May of 1954, Bannister ran the first sub—four-minute mile. Now for decades, sports enthusiasts had speculated if the four-minute barrier would ever be broken. Some medical experts opined that it was physiologically impossible for a human to run that fast. Roger Bannister proved them wrong. Amazingly, Bannister's record was broken within four months and three runners ran sub—four-minute miles within that very year.

See what happens when you have vision!

Fourth, don't be afraid to fail. If you do make a mistake, accept blame, make things right, and move on. If you are completely averse to risk, you will have a miserable life.

Theodore Roosevelt wrote: "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood . . . who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcomings, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who at the best knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

Fifth, be quick to say thank you and be generous in praise. I have never heard anyone complain for having been thanked too much. Remember, people thrive on praise and recognition.

Sixth, live a balanced life. Balance hard work with play. Do not take your young health for granted. If you do it will let you down. Exercise and eat right. Follow the counsel of the Word of Wisdom in section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants and you too "shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint." Treasure your family. If you are not yet married, plan for that day. Cherish, strengthen, and support one another as husband and wife. As the children come, give them your time. Be diligent in holding family prayer, family home evening, family gospel study, and wholesome family activities together. Above all, remember that true happiness comes from obedience to the commandments. Be fully engaged in Church worship and service. There is no such thing as a vacation from Church. Steady, dedicated worship and service will bring balance and happiness to your lives. How wise was Alma when he instructed his son Helaman:

"O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God" (Alma 37:35).

Seventh, don't take yourself too seriously. Life can be very funny indeed. Humor is the balm of life, so apply it liberally.

Finally, your lives will be very busy, but always find time to give back, not just in Church service, but community service as well. There are many, many worthwhile causes to support. There are many choices.

A minister put out the following message on the sign in front of his church: “If you are tired of sin,” it said, “come on in!” Someone wrote underneath: “If not, call 987-6543.”

There are many choices and I hope you will choose to serve. My grandfather taught me “community service is the rent we pay for our place on earth.”

Do not stand on the sidelines: get involved. In answering a questionnaire, “What is the greatest public problem—ignorance or apathy?” one respondent wrote, “I don’t know and I don’t care!”

Don’t fall in such a trap. Enter the fray and make a difference.

I close with a thought from Nathan C. Shaefer:

“At the close of life, the question will be not, how much have you got, but how much have you given; not how much you have won, but how much have you done; not how much you have saved, but how much you have sacrificed; how much you have loved and served, not how much you were honored.”

Congratulations, graduates, and best wishes to you as you take the next important steps in your lives, and I ask the Lord’s choicest blessings to be with you as you now go forth. It is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.