

David Lawrence, Jr.

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Ladies and gentlemen, if you want to know the truth – and I am sure you do – you deserve to know that I was planning to do just a little talk this evening, working from a few notes, more or less scribbled...let you go early to drink or talk or just go to bed and be ready for the morning. But then...

A few days ago, in comes an e mail from Val Johnson of my very favorite foundation. (I say this first part so seriously because we truly feel privileged to work with Greg Taylor and Val and all in Kellogg; we couldn't ask for better partners for our work.) Anyhow, Val's e mail showed up at 10:19 p.m., furnishing technological proof that either (a) Val is working too hard and has, like me, not enough life of her own, or (b) she finds that one of life's joys is intimidating other people. Anyhow, she wanted me to have some guidelines for speaking this evening: "I see you giving one of the best if not THE BEST, speech of your life! I see a crowd that has been inspired to move forward in their work because you have reminded us of why we're doing this work and because you have shared your personal passion! I see teams from four states across our nation excited to go back home and change the world, or at least take their work to the next level! I see your grandchildren one day reading about this great speech that their grandfather gave!" (My friend Val put an exclamation point at the end of every single sentence. That should not surprise you.)

So, my friends, prepare for a letdown.

Who could live up to that? Perhaps only some combination of Barack Obama, Cicero, Golda Meir, Mario Cuomo, Jane Addams, Pope John Paul II, Fannie Lou Hamer and Abraham Lincoln.

Unsurprisingly, you will have neither Cicero or Lincoln this evening, but rather Lawrence – who will do the best he can.

You have my commitment not to go on too long, especially in this Abraham Lincoln birth bicentennial year when I remember the lesson left by our greatest President, who speaking at Gettysburg in the fall of 1863, followed the greatest American orator of his time, a fellow named Edward Everett. Mr. Everett used 13,607 words in his two hours. Mr. Lincoln used just 172 words and fewer than three minutes to make his points. It turns out that we only remember what Mr. Lincoln had to say. (You deserve to know that so far I have used 428 words, almost 2 ½ times what Mr. Lincoln did. And I am just getting wound up!)

You have before you an unreconstructed optimist. A lifelong idealist. Someone who believes that the joys of life are embedded in moments of higher purpose. ("We were born,"

said Nelson Mandela, “to make manifest the glory of God within us.”) You have before you someone who is not embarrassed to be naïve about some things. You also have someone who believes in constructive outrage; indeed, believes that society’s progress depends on such outrage. Someone who believes that none of us ought to be permitted to use tough times – these times, for example – to excuse doing less than what is minimally fair and decent. All children are entitled to high-quality basics. The very future of the republic depends on carrying out that commitment. Should any of us rest in good conscience when 11 million American children (almost 800,000 of them in Florida) have no health insurance? How can any of us live with ourselves in the richest country on the face of this earth when one in every six of our children live in poverty? Surely we are a better people.

Tonight we talk about leadership – what Teddy Roosevelt called “to dare mighty things.” Tonight we talk about what is within each of us -- for within each of us is great power (if only we will exercise it). I do not normally quote the first Henry Ford – one of history’s noxious figures in some ways – but it is worth sharing a bit of his homespun wisdom: “If you think you can do a thing, or think you cannot do a thing, you are right.” And he was right.

What is there for each of us to learn from history? So very much. Goodwill is not the central driver of progress, though people of goodwill are central to vision and problem-solving. But real progress requires pushing and shoving and urging and cajoling and coaxing – and then pushing some more (courteously when you can, not so mannerly if the former doesn’t work). If you think that suffrage and Social Security and Medicare and the civil rights and feminist movements came to pass mostly because good people came to their senses and decided to do the right thing by humankind, then I would encourage you to read a lot more history. Do not forget that once seemed “radical” to so many people in this ever-evolving country became, over time and after real struggle, what we have come to see as basic and decent and fundamental to an America of genuine justice.

It is worth your knowing that my father, who would have been 92 this very day, used to warn me, and my eight siblings, about trying to save the world. He was right in a way; none of us will. But I also learned from my parents that each of us is obliged to set a good and giving example. That is about the best any of us can do.

You might think it easy to be up here preaching, acting as though I “have it made,” have it all figured out, but then you would have guessed awfully wrong about me. I have as many insecurities as most of you, maybe more than some of you. My energy and drive are fueled by those insecurities – wondering whether I can actually do something, but “secure” enough in my willingness to try. You and I will not complete what must be done, but we can make stronger a foundation of equity for all children. Others, then, will build upon what we achieve.

You see before you a man who blends a little humor with a lot of passion. If any of you perceive any smugness here, you would misread me. Come to know me, really know me, and discover that I am so frequently uptight about what is I and we haven’t yet done. My good friend and colleague Modesto Abety, in the wake of an extraordinary victory

for children last August, said surely I must be savoring the moment. I only wish I had a personality that could savor and rest. I do not. I can not. I will not.

Our mission in Miami is to build a movement and, in so doing, perhaps show others what can be done and how it might be done. A movement, by definition, is about everyone. The Civil Rights Movement, for one example, was ultimately not about African Americans or what we call “minorities,” but rather at its heart about an American sense of equity for everyone. So, too, is a movement for early learning.

All children deserve an honorable blend of high-quality basics of health and education and nurturing and love. Thus, it is coming to pass that in Miami-Dade, larger than 16 states and the most diverse urban area in these United States, people are coming together to work toward a nurturing, learning environment for every child. Have we arrived at that “promised land”? Far from it, but we are much closer than we were a decade ago. I give you just the briefest outline of what is going on hereabouts, knowing that you will learn more when you are on your site visits:

We have programs to support pregnant mothers before they ever have babies. We offer home visits to each first-time and all teen moms. We are working to improve the quality of early childhood programs through a massive new Quality Rating Improvement System that will have 40% of our early childhood programs involved by the end of this year. We are including not only child care centers and family child care homes, but we also have all Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and a growing number of public schools with early childhood programs – the only QRIS in the nation to our knowledge to cut across all early childhood silos with a unified set of standards. We are launching a curriculum training initiative to improve the teaching skills of early childhood teachers, thus beginning to align curriculum across early childhood and schools.

We’re well on our way to improving teacher professional development in our 237 elementary schools. This year, we’ve implemented our job-embedded professional development approach in 67 schools and we will add another 70 elementary schools per year. So far, we have a hundred teachers enrolled in a job-embedded master’s program that is offered free to educators who agree to remain in their schools for five years. Think of the difference this makes in genuine best practice and engaged and empowered teachers who want to stay in the profession because they can do more teaching, and have to do less managing, controlling and triaging.

(Just days ago, Don Pemberton and I met with Governor Charlie Crist, Education Commissioner Eric Smith and Senate President Jeff Atwater to discuss a proposal to offer the job-embedded master’s program to 10,000 teachers in Florida. As we say in Miami, “Vamos a ver.” We shall see.)

Meanwhile, we have created 165 health teams in schools through an initiative called Health Connect in our Schools. We are providing thousands of developmental screenings, and more than 15,000 children received services this past year for identified special needs. We are developing strategies to build parent and family skills to ensure children’s first and most important teachers are knowledgeable about what children need to thrive

and are equipped to provide these experiences for them. We are maximizing technology through our on-line master's program and a comprehensive database that is making our QRIS more efficient, effective, and quality controlled than any other we have seen.

All that I tell you, and I haven't yet mentioned the reauthorization last August, as the economy began to tumble, of The Children's Trust. The people of this community voted, by an 85.4 percent margin, to tax themselves in perpetuity for early intervention and prevention – and this year The Trust will invest considerably more than \$100 million in life-changing programs for children. As you depart, you will have a copy of a Kellogg Foundation-commissioned case study on all this, written by a superb journalist, Martin Merzer, who is with us this evening. What happened here could happen anywhere. You could make that come to pass.

We never, by the nature of things, have enough resources. So we work incessantly to gather and maximize every available public and private dollar so as to help every single child and family in Miami-Dade to be as prepared as possible.

I say, "We," and you wonder what that means. "We" means together. "We" means collaboration. "We" means all of us: The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Miami-Dade Public Schools, The Children's Trust, the Early Learning Coalition, the University of Florida's Laster Center for Learning, United Way, the Healthy Start Coalition, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, and many more. "We" means Ana Sejeck and Don Pemberton and Millie Fornell and Valtena Brown and Judy Schaechter and Betty Key and Mo Abety and Evelio Torres and Abby Thorman and Jesse Leinfelder and Harve Mogul and Gladys Montes and Blythe Robinson and Andy Brickman and Emily Cardenas...so many others unmentioned, all of whom deserve a community's appreciation.

"We" – all of us – are building a movement, a movement that requires a central vision – which we have – and at least semi-regular achievements because we all need a sense of good things happening for children. Building a movement is opportunistic – ideas of six months ago that we carry out today, and ideas tomorrow that we had never thought of heretofore.

I am a perpetually frustrated fellow, and will be until my last breath. I'm always wondering what we should be doing, what we haven't done. We know full well that children are developing while we are sitting in meetings, while we are writing reports, while we are thinking about this work. We are never satisfied that we are working hard enough or fast enough...because we know that there are many children in our community who are not getting their needs met and, thus, will not develop to their full potential. That can never be acceptable to us. We cannot be satisfied until every child has what my children and my grandchildren, and your children and grandchildren, enjoy – that is, the fullest opportunity to achieve all that is within them. That is our work. That is our joyful mission, fully in the spirit of the Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, who told us a century ago: "I slept, and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and, behold, service was joy."

Finally, you will remember that I spoke earlier of the great orator and Whig Party politician Edward Everett, who gave the speech just before Lincoln, and only Lincoln's speech is

remembered. So let me give another member of Mr. Everett's family - his nephew - my almost-final words. Here's what the author Edward Everett Hale had to say in just six short lines:

"I am only one,

"But still I am one.

"I cannot do everything.

"But still I can do something.

"And because I cannot do everything,

"I will not refuse to do the something that I can do."

Let us remember that. Let us remember that children are entitled to victories. Let us remember that within each of us is great power to give them victories. Let us remember that while you and we have done a lot, we have so much more to do. Let us remember our mutual obligation to the future of children and the future of an America that lives up to the special commitment of Abraham Lincoln's words of almost a century and a half ago: "Of the people, by the people, for the people." And, I would say, "most especially for our children, for all our children."

God bless the children. God bless our important work.

Thank you.