

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

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The valedictory speech is by its name a farewell address. But before I say good-bye, I would like to share with you a few observations on life that have helped me, and might help you, to better grasp the problems of personal relationships, and to find a way to enjoy life despite these problems.

I recently walked into my home and found a motto placed on the desk for display. It was a verse from Proverbs which said:

Wisdom is the principal thing:
Therefore get wisdom: and with
All thy getting, get understanding.

Every success is built upon countless failures. But what has this to do with wisdom and understanding? Let Samuel Smiles, a noted Scottish author of the 1800's, explain:

We learn from failure much more than from success. We often discover what will do by finding out what will not do: and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery.

But what is understanding, and what is the difference between wisdom and understanding? Let us take a computer: a commonplace but extremely complicated machine. A computer with all its stores of tapes and memory banks is a center of knowledge. But that is all it is - a vast storehouse, a bunch of facts dumped together. Wisdom is like this computer. It takes a man with understanding - in other words, with the training and ability to visualize the problems and how to make the machine solve it - to derive an answer from the computer.

A computer is just like life. People stand around and gape and complain about problems, injustices, and faults of others in the world. They have isolated problems, but stand back saying, "I don't care" or "I don't want to get involved". Then the man with the ability to locate the problem, to visualize the solution method, and to make the computer work comes on the scene. This man is the most valuable. He takes the problem and applies his knowledge and understanding to make the wisdom stored in the computer solve it. This is "understanding".

How do we gain understanding? Perhaps the best way is to care simply care. Care enough to learn, care enough to put yourself in the other person's shoes honestly, care enough to search for the hidden gems as well as thorns in a person's character and personality. But remember this: people want to be understood, but rarely will they first want to understand.

So what should we do about this attitude? I feel there is only one respectable answer: even if no one else does, you should try to care and to understand. You reap what you sow - if you try to understand others, they eventually will come to understand you.

One hint toward deepening your understanding is to take life with a grain of salt. Whatever happens to you, whether great or small, beautiful or ugly, honorable or sad, it will be less so to others. This is where the rub comes - people can't appreciate what they don't understand. But you say, isn't this approach rather pessimistic or callous? No. We must be able to take both the pleasant and the not so pleasant in stride, and not allow whatever joy we may have found in life to be stifled unnecessarily. So, take life with a grain of salt. For you see, salt by itself is sharp and sickening, but used as a flavoring it brings out the best flavor. That little bit of "corrective allowance" as Webster defines it, will give life a much richer taste by serving as a buffer to injury, and by enabling you to stand a little way off to gain a better perspective.

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It is time to cut the ropes that have tied us to the dock and to set ourselves a course on the open sea of life. May God be gracious unto you and give you a heart to serve Him with good courage; send you peace; hear your prayers; and never forsake you.

On behalf of the graduating class of 1967, and to each of its members, I bid a deep-felt farewell.