

Making One Life Count

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Carl Garrott, Professor of Foreign Languages, delivered the Spring Convocation Address on January 16 in Helms Center, which was also Martin Luther King Day. Dr. Garrott's challenging address has universal appeal, and is reproduced here.

How Does One Make Life Count For Something?

I am very grateful for the invitation to be with you this morning. I am grateful also because this invitation has forced me to sort out my thoughts in a puzzling area. The questions are: How does one really improve one's life? How does one make life count for something?

Now, I am sure each of you is thinking to yourself: How does one really improve one's life? . . . how does one make life count for something? . . . what is this guy talking about? . . . so let me explain.

For many years, I have observed the seasons and the years rush by, especially after the age of eighteen. As I quickly scanned the years and those memories, I became increasingly aware that it was just yesterday that I walked in the shoes of many of you in this audience today. Believe it or not, I was a freshman and a sophomore. I blinked and I was suddenly thirty-something. In about four to ten years many of you may ask yourselves about all the opportunities of life that slipped by. You may ask yourself: Did I do enough? Did I reach my potential? Did I fight hard enough? Did I take that bold chance? Did I throw myself into every task?

If I could wave a magic wand and suddenly become wise, I think I know what I might say to those who are about to launch their careers: *Take control of your life and live it with purpose...live it with excitement and zest...live it by throwing yourself into each new day, each new assignment, each new adventure.*

I can tell you that there is something special about the person whose life has been vibrant and who has made a difference. There is something special about those who have grappled with the challenges of life and, at least, have left the world a little better. Today is a memorial to such a person, Dr. Martin Luther King. These people must have taken chances. Let's face it, risk is the essence of life. If you have a passionate cause, a specific vision, a distinct cause of action, that's living.

I believe as each of you move through the seasons, the years, you may have to engage your imagination, your energy, your abilities.

Let's face it, every life has its ups and downs, its moments of foolishness and failure. There is really no disgrace in failure. The failure of never looking beyond the present, of never trying to achieve, of never having ambition, of never having dreamed, of never being comfortable with the *status quo*, of never taking calculated risks, life becomes devoid of quality; you are simply not living. In a nation admired all over the world, think what would have happened if our scientists had let failure deter them from taking risks in our space program, if Steve Jobs had not taken risks with the Apple Computer, if bankers did not take calculated risks with the new homeowner, if colleges did not take risks with students. Life cannot be totally predicated upon the way things have been, it must be also predicated upon the way things might be, can be. You may see many angry, frustrated, and distraught people whose ultimate failure was never giving in to a dream . . . to some ambition.

I would not presume, however, to dictate how to live your lives and I will be true to that promise. But, here are a few universals, a few positive statements in which I believe that seem to stand up over time:

1. Never be concerned about short-term achievement but the long-term contribution.
2. Learn to compromise and to negotiate especially when you know there is some principle you honestly believe in.
3. Use your imagination to create things that may be: do not become trapped by the way things have been.
4. It is better to do things than merely to have things. Money is not everything.
5. Ethical behavior and morals are not ideals, but codes of conduct. Do not be afraid to do the right thing and do not be afraid to warn others about unethical behavior.
6. Success requires integrity, honor, stamina, intellect, drive, conscience and enthusiasm. Never confuse happiness with success, comfort and fame. Success, comfort and fame come and go. Happiness remains as long as you have enjoyable work and peace of mind.
7. Develop a sense of humor: learn to laugh at yourself; avoid laughing at others. Cynism only hides fear and self-hate.
8. Learn to listen to friends, parents, teachers and others; but realize, in the final analysis, there is only one

you. You are the one who is responsible; you must ultimately solve your own problems. Learn to think for yourself.

9. Remember that indifference and apathy may result in a world in which you may not want to live. Your first line of defense is the vote.

10. Take risks, dream and act, accept adventure, make decisions.

11. Accept some sacrifice. Show some concern for others: you cannot trample, destroy other lives and maintain your self-esteem.

Also, I believe that hard work is necessary to get from point A to point B. I believe in work . . . I do not worship it. All work and no play is as horrible as not work at all. There are so many wonderful things in our world: poetry, nature, math and science, art, history, music and theology. Learn to cultivate a little of each of these disciplines: that is what a liberal arts education means. Your professional and your personal life will be richer, fuller. You can have a professional life and some hobbies.

Finally, if you want people of this world to use you correctly, show them that you care about good work. Show them that you have integrity, loyalty, good sense, stamina and a good sense of humor.

If you agree with the idea that the world does not care, well, you are not likely to change anything. You have your work cut out for you. Do not waste too much of the time you have left. Make some piece of this world care. Be responsible for your own future and your own destiny.

At this point, I would like to offer you a short stanza often used by Dr. Martin Luther King in many of his speeches. This stanza by Longfellow is for every student who has to spend some extra time polishing a composition in English 101-102, for the student who has to spend a little extra time reading U. S. History or Western Civilization, for those who have to work through a few extra algebra problems, for the future scientist in the chemistry laboratory, for the business student wrestling with accounting problems:

"The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight.
But they, while their companions slept
Were toiling upward in the night."

Thank you for the privilege of sharing with you this day in your lives.



Learning to assist fellow students

Chowan resident assistants recently received certificates for completing a non-credit course in "Learning to be a Resident Assistant, Part I." The course included such topics as Leadership Styles, Conflict Resolution, Managing Emotions, Problem Solving, Promoting Personal Development, the Impact of Residence Hall Living, the College Experience, and the Educational Process. Above, Elizabeth A. Stark, resident director of Jenkins Hall, presents certificates to Karen Jo Howard of Virginia Beach, Va., and Arthur Shavit.