

Editorial and Opinion Page

The Way I See It Positive Changes in my Life

by Dr. Dean Chavers, President
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Albuquerque, NM

There have been four events in my life which changed me for the better (I won't mention the negative influences.) A couple of the changes were earthshaking for me.)

My best friend says I am the most aggressive person he ever met. That's not true; there is at least one other person who is more aggressive than I am. I am also not very sensitive to other people, and used to be a perfectionist. I am also a workaholic. To top off the list, I am a poor listener.

I had gone through life not thinking much about myself or my personality until I read an article in *Newsweek* about the children of alcoholics. This cover story in about 1979 hit home to me as nothing I had ever read before had done.

It told how these children are control freaks. This is especially true of the oldest children in alcoholic families. I am the oldest of six children. The oldest frequently have to take care of younger siblings, sometimes when they are no older than five or six years old. They get all kinds of other responsibilities.

My father was a confirmed alcoholic the first years of my life. He then went on the wagon and never took another drink. He knew it would have killed him. Encysted tuberculosis did kill him when I was 18. He had abused his body with alcohol, cigarettes, and bad diet for too many years.

The negative consequences of this need to control are spouses who want to kill you, friends who think you are crazy, and co-workers who say you are driving them nuts.

The day I read the article I started trying to deal with this need to control. But it still bothers me. If I misplace my

keys, or lose something, I sometimes still come unglued. It could be a file at work, and it will drive me crazy until we can find it and put it back where it belongs. Most of the time now I try to deal with this need to control by not letting other people know about it.

The second thing which changed me was a glass of milk. A couple of years after I had the *Newsweek* experience, I offered my wife Toni a glass of milk one day. By this time we had been married for over ten years—time enough for me to get to know her, one would think.

"You know I can't drink milk," she responded. "I've been telling you all these years I can't drink milk. I'm lactose intolerant."

That hit me like a ton of bricks. Only God knows why she stayed with me all those years. I was so insensitive that I didn't know she couldn't drink milk. That has to make me eligible for some sort of prize—the biggest lot, the most insensitive husband in history, or the world's loudest listener, etc.

Immediately I started working on trying to become a better listener. I am still bad, but back then I was horrible. I bought an audio tape "How to Listen" and played it several times, making notes (as I learned to do in college). I still need to do a lot of work on developing my listening skills just to reach the level of "poor." But I'm working on it.

I learned later that listening is what we do 85% of the time. The other 15% we spend reading, speaking, and writing. Listening is the only one we do not teach in school. Many of us really need it.

The third event was one which set

my path toward my present goal. It was a job announcement from UCLA for a person to teach Indian education policy. When I read the announcement, in 1986, I thought someone had read my resume and written a job description to fit it. I applied and held my breath.

But I did not make the cut and never got interviewed. Three people were interviewed, one was offered the position, and at the last minute turned it down. I was told by inside sources later that I had no chance for the position because I was a Lumbee.

A year or two later the university took the position back, and gave it to another department. So we still have no professorship in the U.S. which teaches Indian education policy, unfortunately.

Once I realized that I would never be able to get such a faculty position anywhere in the U.S., I decided to strike out on my own. Six of us founded the Native American Scholarship Fund (NASF). We are building NASF into a national Indian scholarship agency, an organization which also helps schools on reservations to improve. We plan to send thousands of Indian students on to college and help them be as successful in life as they can be.

I was still charging hard until a few weeks ago I got a speeding ticket on the Navajo Reservation. I had had lunch with the Superintendent of the Chinle School District, Dr. Ted Fidler, had met with some people at the high school and some others at the primary school, and started charging down to Ganado 40 miles south to try to catch some people there before school was out.

That's the way I have always worked. It was not enough for me to be teaching college, going to graduate school, and pulling duty in the Reserves on the weekends. I also had to be helping Indian tribes and organizations write grant proposals. I have always been burning the candle at both ends.

Ten miles south of Chinle I topped a hill and met a deputy coming the other way. It was a 55 m.p.h. zone, and he clocked me at 70. I pulled over immediately, and thanked him for the ticket. Deputy Sheriff B. M. Belman (I think that's what his signature said) never realized that I really meant my "thank you."

But I did. At my advanced age I have to slow down. I have to do less, focus on the important things, and let the rest go. That may be the hardest thing I have yet to learn. But I'm going to work on it.

I still remember a beautiful faculty member at Bicone College when I was President there in 1980 asking me "Why don't you slow down? You're already at the top, so you don't have to try so hard any more." I didn't listen to her until a few weeks ago. I could hear her voice when the deputy was writing out my ticket. I will listen to her now. She was the only faculty member there who had the nerve to tell me that. I wish some others had.

I'll always be the child of an alcoholic. But I can try to soften around the edges, and let some things go. I can learn to listen if I try hard enough. I can learn at least a little bit how not to be a perfectionist. And I can learn to slow down if I try for a few more decades.

Political Empowerment Speech Given by Public Defender at African American Summit

Angus B. Thompson II, the Public Defender for Robeson County, presented this speech to the Summit to focus on issues which face African Americans in Robeson County.

I want to congratulate the organizers of this Summit for bringing into focus issues which face African Americans in Robeson County. Thank you for providing a forum for the much needed dialog to set a Black Agenda for the 21st Century. In setting this agenda, I encourage you, my brothers and sisters, to always take the moral high ground. In whatever we say or do here today and hereafter, let's be honest and let's be fair. Let's be slow to accuse unless we are willing and able to substantiate our accusations. Let's be critical of ourselves in areas where we have blundered; let's be more resolute in those matters where there has been a lack of commitment. Unfortunately, there is no time to bask in our accomplishments. There is so much work to do, so many young lives to touch and save, so many obstacles to overcome. Remember that the struggle is not for the weak or fainthearted, but for the committed and the eternally vigilant.

Before I make some suggestions of items which I feel ought to be included on the agenda for political empowerment of African Americans, I would like to discuss the concept of "political empowerment." The American Heritage Dictionary (Second College Edition) defines the term political as "pertaining or dealing with the study, structure, affairs or government, politics, or the state; or having a definite or organized policy which resembles or is characteristic of the state or political parties." It also defines empower as "to invest with legal authority." However, I want to suggest to you that the concept of "legal authority" implies the legitimacy of that authority. Legal authority must be authentic, credible, and sustainable if it is to keep its legitimacy.

The problem with "legal author-

ity" is that even though it may be invested in a person or an institution, individuals and institutions sometimes lose their legitimacy. For example, this is an African American Summit sponsored by the Robeson County Black Caucus. The Black Caucus was founded and exists to represent the collective interests of African Americans in Robeson County. And that's one hell of a task, for this organization to try to represent the collective interests of Black people in this county.

There are three major reasons why it is such a difficult task. First, the Black Caucus is not the only organization in this county which purports to represent the interests of African Americans. There are several organizations, often competing to represent and speak for the African American community.

Second, the interests of African Americans can no longer be viewed as monolithic. Increasingly, there is more and more diversity even within the African American community. Our collective social, economic, and political interests can no longer be indexed to the single issue of race. Now, issues evolve from both race and economic interest, which complicates our ability to define, prioritize, and homogenize our interest into a common agenda.

The third reason it is difficult to represent the collective interest of African Americans is more academic. Our failure as individuals to participate on a meaningful level within our organizations, such as the Black Caucus, affects the legitimacy of the organization and the credibility of our leadership to speak and act on behalf of African Americans. Empowering someone (to invest with legal authority) to speak or act is not synonymous with legitimacy. Neither does the name of an organization purporting to represent a group necessarily confer legitimacy. One may be the King of a kingdom, but a pompous King who owns no arm and wears no clothes

will soon lose his legitimacy, and eventually his kingdom. An organization may have a fearless leader, but if its members are disorganized, the organization loses credibility.

Political empowerment of African Americans to me means, investing some authority in African Americans which allows them to participate in the policy-making and management level of government. Authority is power, and power is the ability to influence. Any agenda that we set for political empowerment then, should focus on developing a strategy which will promote the advancement of African Americans to positions where they can influence policy, manage the affairs of government, and politics.

Again, we must take the moral high ground. Our purpose and our goal should be to enhance our status and seek inclusion, to promote diversity; not to unfairly, hurt, punish, and exclude others. As long as we are just and fair, we will have the moral fortitude to push our agenda, while other fair-minded Native Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, Asians, and others will respect and support it also.

In closing, I would like to mention a few suggestions which I believe will foster political empowerment of African Americans in Robeson County, and which should be considered in deciding an agenda.

1. We must develop a comprehensive year round voter registration and voter turnout program. "A voteless people are a hopeless people."
2. Remember that "all politics are local." We must organize on the precinct level. Identify African Americans who are members of a political party, encourage them to learn party rules and to run for local precinct offices.
3. There are literally hundreds of local boards and commissions whose

members are appointed rather than elective. However, many of these local boards and commissions are more than advisory. They have real authority to set policy, budget money, and hire personnel. We should never underestimate the importance of non-electoral politics.

4. We need to re-establish an independent African American owned newspaper which serves primarily Robeson County. We must have some control over the editorial pen, which decides what is and is not newsworthy. I believe that the print media is the necessary medium to keep us focused and informed of the progress we make in implementing any agenda.

5. It is better to build multi-level coalitions around socio-economic and political interest rather than on race. African Americans simply don't have the numbers in Robeson County to win race baiting campaigns, which advocate voting for a candidate primarily because of his race. We can never overcome the nagging race issue unless we conduct well financed, issue oriented campaigns with credible candidates who enjoy broad-based support. No African American can win a county wide race in Robeson County by totally writing off any one race.

6. Politics is an expensive game to play. African Americans must be willing to pay to play. We have got to stop running African American candidates of our choice on the financial coat tails of others' campaigns. I get tired of Native Americans and whites telling me that they owe us nothing because they already paid us for our support.

7. We need to set goals, priorities, and time tables for whatever agenda we set.

8. We must find some way to encourage our youth who attend institutions of higher learning to return to Robeson County. This means that we must have jobs available in their areas of speciality, and some system of support which makes it attractive

In Loving Memory of Angelo Lowry

August 1955-June 1975
Someone Special

This is to someone special, someone who greatly influenced me through the years and I've never forgotten. We've all had friends to come and go, from childhood to those teenage years, right up until today, but this was someone special. It's been over twenty three years since you've been gone. Not a day passes without you walking through my mind. You taught me so much in such a short time. To speak of all that you taught me, where do I begin?

You showed me how to smile even through pain. You showed me nothing lost is nothing gained. I can still see your smile as we walked many a mile. Never complaining, what life handed you as you smiled. Angelo, others may have forgotten you, but not me. We were closer than cousins or best friends could be. We talked about our future and how it would be. I was to be best man at your wedding.

And you were to be at mine. And our families would have to learn to put up with one another, 'cause we did. We made a promise to each other that nothing or no one would ever come between us because we were friends. Not distance, nor time would destroy our friendship. But in June of 1975 your future was cut short. In less than twenty years, you were gone forever. I look back at it now and it's like a bad dream.

You loved your life and you touched so many people. I thought you would live forever. How was anyone to know? I'll never forget the last conversation we had. You were tired and wanted to come home. I told you that if you felt the same in the morning to get on a bus and I would

pick you up whenever. If I had known that was the last time we would have talked, I would have said so much more, my friend.

You were always telling me to do my best. You really encouraged me that life is what we make of it, and we must give it our best. Since you've been gone, I've tried to carry on just like you. Sometimes it is hard to smile when the world turns against you. Just like you, I try to bring joy to others, no matter where I go. As you said, "Leave them with a smile, if that's all you have." Angelo, my life has taken me many a mile and I've tried to leave them all with a smile. But you did it which such style!

As I go through life I try to remember all that you showed me and live my life with the style that you did so easy. Every now and then I go by a place where we hung out. And I think of what was and what will never be. I still hold my head up and carry on because I know that is what you would have done, if I were gone. It's just that every now and then I expect to see you right around the next corner, especially this time of year.

I've never been able to find another friend like you and maybe I'm not suppose to. Maybe I should be glad I had a friend. I've seen and done many things I never thought I would. But I can't help from thinking about my friend, Angelo. I can hear you saying, if I live right there will be a great celebration in heaven when we are all together and never have to say good by to anyone again. But you were someone special and so much more, you were my best friend I called "Ange." by Derek Lowry

Reflections

by Alta Nye Oxendine
DONNY

Sunday, June 14, was Flag Day. But to me it was a reminder of the morning 38 years before when my first baby entered the world. Because Donald Ray seemed like a big name for such a little boy, I decided to call him Donny. To my surprise, everyone else did the same. He lived a little over two decades. Even as he was turning 20, he still preferred to be called donny.

It's hard to believe that he would have turned 38 on Sunday! Even though my son-in-law was preaching at Branch St UMC, I chose to attend First Methodist, which holds so many memories of our Oxendine family.

James Locklear, whose Christian life and witness always inspire me, was thalay speaker there. He, in his message, and I during the earlier sharing time, expressed appreciation for the love we have found at First Methodist.

to come back home. Retention of our talented tenth would increase our pool of potential political leadership.

9. The presence of a majority owned African American Bank or other major financial institution would enable us to put our money in our own pockets. Economic empowerment is essential to political empowerment.

Again, I want to thank our president, Thomas Jones, and other officers of the Black Caucus for providing this much needed summit today, March 21. The struggle continues!

You hope no one in your family will ever need CPR. We hope you're right.

The American Red Cross Safe Family program teaches people skills they may need in an emergency. Like CPR, water safety and basic first aid. Quite simply, we help you take care of your family. And that's something we all want to do.

 Help Can't Wait

To find out about classes in your area, call your local chapter.

CHOOSE TRADITION NOT ADDICTION

Know the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse.

A message from DDTT and the National Institute on Drug Abuse

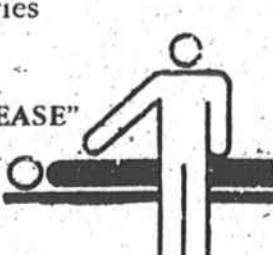
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