

FORUM

Pondering the 21st century



Nigel Alston

Motivational Moments

"What you see is limited by how far you look."

—Unknown

I can't believe how quickly the time has flown.

It has been 25 years since I graduated from college. That year marked one of the darkest in the nation's history, not because I graduated of course. That fateful year, urged by his own party to give up the ghost, Richard Nixon became the first president to resign from office.

It was also a year of highs. The Chronicle published its first edition and began a legacy that reverberates through the community.

What a difference two decades can make.

But you don't have to live a score to prove that times do change.

A mere five years, half a decade, can make a world of difference.

Do you remember the year 1994?

A lot has changed since then.

An act of terrorism claimed the life of a spectator during the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta. Sextuplets were born to a black family in Washington, D.C. We lost two more Kennedys.

And Michael Jackson is still searching for the answer to the musical question about whether he's black or white. A million black men gathered for a peaceful show of unity in Washington, D.C.

The Republican Party signed a very short-term contract with America. Community, social and national

leaders have come and gone. The five years have made a difference not only in the life of the nation, but in mine as well.

I now write a weekly column and host a weekly radio talk show.

How I communicate with my friends, family and co-workers has changed as well.

I finally have a grasp of technology.

I have e-mail and voice mail. Everyone has a cell phone in his or her car.

We've finally proven that you can't escape technology, and it changes every day.

Thinking back on the numerous changes five years have wrought, I can't help but wonder what the world will be like in the year 2004?

Are you confident about the new millennium?

Let's assume we have navigated successfully the Y2K scare and challenge.

What one good idea might you have that could prepare people for the 21st century?

Fast Company Magazine recently asked 21 "thought leaders" for their ideas to prepare people for the new millennium.

I completed my survey of local "thought leaders" on the issue as well. Their thoughts range from having "people fests" to "you can't take it with you."

"I would offer three words of advice," said a friend.

A former college professor, he is now a black mountain man and believes in shaking things up a bit.

"It is what Frederick Douglass admonished people to do at the end of the 19th century: agitate, agitate, agitate," he said wryly.

Said another friend, "My one good idea is an old one: You can't

take it with you."

He believes material wealth is a false god and that the best things in life, while not free, aren't found in a discount store.

"Learn to love, and if there's a heaven, you're there."

Peter Drucker, a celebrated business thinker and author of more than 30 books, thinks that for the first time in human history, people can expect to outlive the organizations they work for.

Living longer allows us to work more years, and we risk becoming "too good" at what we do.

He suggests we find new ways to manage the "second half" of our work lives. That could mean retraining, developing a "parallel career" or doing the same job in a different setting.

But that's not all. Within the next year, experts believe scientists will have sequenced the complete 80,000 genes that make each one of us an individual.

Researchers think they have isolated three genes that cause colon cancer. In a few years, tests will be available to determine the risks of getting the disease. People will then be tested earlier in life and often to screen for the disease.

Specialized foods will be one of the biggest growth markets of the future.

Medicine and agriculture will join together to give people the kinds of foods that their specific genetic codes call for.

People will be living longer and that changes the demographics, according to Laura D'Andrea Tyson, dean of the Walter Haas School of Business at the University of California-Berkeley. People will retire later, Internet usage will increase among older people and lifetime learning

will become more important.

One group that can expect to be most affected by long life spans — children.

"Many of them can expect to live to age 90 or more," Tyson said. "So one task for the 21st century will be to get our early-education systems right, in order to give our children a foundation for lifelong learning."

A former co-worker suggests we hold quarterly "people fests," in the next century.

"People need to learn to trust and believe in themselves. We need to reflect on what we actually do bring to the table and alleviate the feeling that we must stay tethered to a job or a lifestyle," she said.

She is an outplacement counselor and sees this firsthand. She understands what Drucker means to learn to manage the "second half" of a career.

We stay in a job too long, rot away, and things begin to turn gray. Your confidence erodes and you question whether or not you really are any good. That is where the "people fest" comes in. You gather friends and acquaintances and reinforce the qualities of those around you.

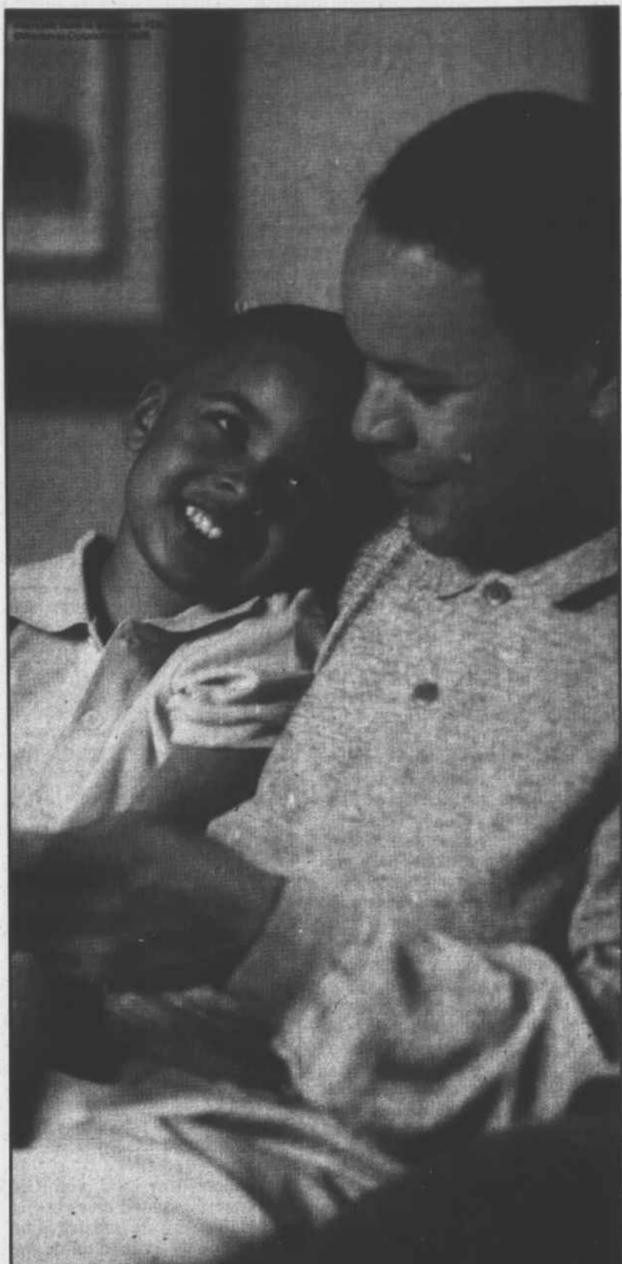
"We would get back to the belief we had in ourselves as children," she said. "I am unique, I am important, and wherever I go I bring gifts."

I also consulted a futurist to get his idea for the new millennium.

"Seek the thing that is seeking you..." he said.

Five years from now, when you look back at 1999, what will you say about it?

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Let's get started.

Making choices: work or family



Daryl and Estrelletta Green

Family Vision

The phone rings.

"OK, Honey, I'll be home by 5 p.m. — after I finish a deadline for my supervisor...uhm, hüh, I'll go by the day care and pick the kids up and start cooking dinner. You can come by after your meeting with the Salvation Army...I know, Honey, but can't someone else do it? You are always so community-minded. Never mind we'll talk about it later."

"Take Nicole to soccer practice. I have choir practice at 6 p.m. and I'll pick up your dry-cleaning when I'm finished....Practice starts at 5:15 and you know how upset the coaches get when she's late."

"You need to drop Mario off at football practice by 6 p.m....I told his coach we need to leave by 7:30 because Mario has a lot of homework. The coach didn't seem to understand why we are always late. I mean, we have to travel 30 miles between practices."

"Oh well, I don't want you and Mario to stay up until midnight doing social studies because we need to discuss Dwayne's birthday party right after I finish balancing our books."

How do you balance work and family?

Probably with difficulty. The pressing urgency of our lives has forced us to realize that our families need help. America is being destroyed from the inside. People are getting downsized. Children are running wild. Churches are missing out on their responsibility to help. The government's trying to regulate morali-

ty. And, there are parents more selfish than their children.

If our country is to be healed, we need to fix the problem at the very core...the family. It won't be done by the government or private industry alone. The problem is a moral and spiritual one.

There is a war raging in the minds of workers — what is more important, work or family?

In most companies, loyalty only goes one way. This is evident in the first comprehensive study of work-sponsored programs, which recently reported that many companies lack basic family policies, don't make real efforts to inform workers of available help, and fail to hold managers accountable for sensitivity to family needs. Only nine percent of companies surveyed offer child care at or near the workplace, while just 33 percent offer maternity leave of more than 13 weeks. When times get hard for most businesses, employees realize that the CEO looks at their paychecks as a way of cutting costs.

Most businesses don't value employees; it's a fatal mistake by management. Employee revenge comes in many different ways. Some employers are losing millions of dollars from unplanned absences, which have reached their highest levels in the past 11 years. Family issues are the most often cited reason for employee absenteeism.

So, what steps can we take to help manage family priorities?

First, we must recognize that there are no perfect families. Life is about making choices.

Unlike companies, many families constantly struggle to make group decisions without a clear method for reaching their goals. Here are some areas that we are going to focus on in future columns:

- Completing a family self-assessment.



File photo

Families have to make an effort to spend time together.

- Identifying a family model.
- Setting priorities.
- Writing a family mission statement.
- Developing family goals.
- Developing a family plan.
- Reviewing your family progress.

After many scheduled conflicts and misunderstandings, our family came to the conclusion that we could not continue to segment our life as if the other parts did not exist.

You may find this strange, but when you are managing your time, you probably don't think about how your church involvement relates to your time with your family or how your work schedule conflicts with the time with your husband. No, we try to give 100 percent to all that

we do, and while some actually manage this for a while, they soon become burnt-out or frustrated with the situation.

Remember: The home is the basic foundation for our society and strong communities are built by strong families.

Daryl and Estrelletta Green, "thirtysomethings" with children, are national speakers and family advisers. They apply a logical family process sprinkled with common sense and spirituality. Daryl is the author of the book "My Cup Runneth Over: Setting Goals for Single Parents and Working Couples." If you have any questions, please write: P.O. Box 32733, Knoxville, Tenn. 37930 or visit them at www.afamilyvision.com.

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