

FORUM

Make today a great day



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

"You must have long-range goals to keep you from being frustrated by short-range failures."

— Charles C. Noble

It is early afternoon, Jan. 1, 2004. Another new year has been ushered in under the cover of night as people around the world joined the countdown, seconds before midnight. There were secular and spiritual parties, toasts to good health, hugs and kisses to celebrate the new year.

It is a clear, cool day, a day I would describe as, like each one I witness, another good day above ground (AGDAYAG). We have one more opportunity to enjoy and appreciate life — to live, learn, grow and share with others. And, as the old folks would say, I have a reasonable portion of health and strength.

I used to wonder what that statement meant. Now, I know firsthand. I truly have nothing to complain about (what about you?), even though I do fall into that state from time to time. That's human nature, I suppose. I come out of it rather quickly when I think

about people, like the seven teenagers who lost their lives in a tragic car accident recently, who don't have the opportunity of another day.

I am sitting in front of my computer writing and reflecting on the past year, thinking about the lessons learned over time, while listening to smooth-contemporary jazz. I can hear a football game on television in another room and a book is sitting on the computer desk demanding my attention: Read me!

The holiday has been a good one. I have enjoyed time with family and friends. I have laughed often and eaten some good food (too much!). I have given and received gifts, opened cards and exchanged holiday greetings. I have read a few thought-provoking books and others that were entertaining, full of suspense and intrigue.

Ready or not a new year is here. Wherever you are, you have made an appointment to be there. Confusing? Yes, we — you and I — have made prior arrangements to be at our current destination. Through our actions, or maybe we didn't act, we have arrived where we are today.

I have been thinking about that today. There is value in pausing to reflect; to stop for a moment to think, understand and adjust; to appreciate the

journey and the lessons learned; to refocus and move on.

While I don't always follow my own advice — there is a gap between what we know and what we do at times — I have learned I should ask for help when needed. I have found that people are willing to assist you.

I have learned the value of developing relationships and that doing so is a function, I believe, of personal contact and time. The more we come together over time, the better we know each other and our relationships take root.

I have learned the value of listening and the importance of following instructions.

I have learned to take action toward what I want in life — to live intentionally, in other words, to live on purpose. In doing so, you will develop a degree of flexibility and a willingness to be coachable.

I have learned to take risks. Get out of the familiar, the comfort zone, the rut, if you want to continue to grow and develop. Like the turtle, to get anywhere, you have to stick your head out from underneath your shell of protection and take a chance. Nothing ventured nothing gained.

I have learned and recognize the value of reading a wide range of material and

how it contributes to your growth, your depth of understanding and making connections in this rapidly-changing world.

Learning can be selfish, however, a professor recently told me. "Life is too short not to share what we know or think we know," she went on to say.

I have learned that procrastination contributes to stress and worry. Improve the quality of your life and take action on what needs to be done today. You will not be as anxious, you will minimize stress and worry, and you will sleep better.

While it might not guarantee success, experience also has taught me the value of making good choices and exercising good judgment. A poor decision, to steal a car, which led to a high-speed chase, has resulted in the loss of seven young lives, whose potential will never be realized.

You and I have another chance. Make today a great day, unless you have other plans. If you do, I have learned, the year will take care of itself.

Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. Visit his Web site at www.motivational-moments.com.

Students can't pay skyrocketing college costs



Adolph Reed Jr.
Guest Columnist

Higher education ought to be a right, available to every student who makes the grade, without regard to that student's ability to pay.

But it's increasingly a privilege for the rich — and an impossible burden for the poor.

There is a spiraling crisis of affordability in higher education today.

As almost every state reels from the effects of tax cuts, legislatures slash funding for higher education. Colleges respond with hefty tuition increases, reduced financial assistance and new fees.

According to the College Board, over the last decade, average tuition and fees at public four-year colleges increased 40 percent and private four-year tuition increased 33 percent.

Community colleges, the gateway to advanced studies for many, also increased charges. Tuition and fees rose in all but two states, with 10 states mandating increases of more than 10 percent, according to the National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education. Some community college officials in California estimate an enrollment decline of about 200,000 students due to tuition fee increases.

These measures put an extra burden on the average family, whose net worth has declined over the last two years for the first time in half a century.

Budget cuts and tuition increases ripple throughout the academic community. They result in more hiring freezes and



early retirements among full-time faculty. Replacing them are poorly paid and overworked contingent instructors. Meanwhile, students have fewer courses to choose from, and their classes are overcrowded.

Many universities are retreating from their commitments to provide low-cost education for state residents, as they shift the balance of admissions more toward out-of-state applicants, who pay substantially higher tuition.

State schools have traditionally been the ladders to good jobs for students from working and middle-class families. But that ladder is no longer standing.

In fact, the Congressional Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance reports that by the end of this decade, as many as 4.4 million college-qualified high-school graduates will be unable to enroll in a four-year college, and 2 million will not go to college at all because they can't afford it.

Financial aid is not picking up the slack. Three decades ago, Pell grants helped guarantee

access to public colleges for primarily low and moderate-income students. Millions of Americans earned college degrees as a result. In 1975, the maximum Pell grant covered 84 percent of costs at a four-year public college. Now, the grant covers only 42 percent of costs at four-year public colleges and only 16 percent of costs at four-year private colleges.

As a result of an increasing reliance on loans, the majority of students (64 percent) graduate with an average debt of almost \$17,000. This is up significantly from \$8,200 in 1989.

Skyrocketing tuition and reliance on interest-carrying loans force some students to forgo college altogether; while others drop out or delay graduation because they sacrifice the time for their studies in order to work. Fifty-three percent of low-income freshmen who work more than 35 hours per week drop out and do not receive a degree. Contrast this with low-income freshmen who work one to 14 hours per week. Only 20 percent of them do not receive a degree.

Higher education is a public good, and the public should insist on free access to the academy.

Fortunately, there's a campaign to push for such access. Initiated by the Debs-Jones-Douglass Institute, a nonprofit educational organization based in Washington, D.C., the campaign calls for the federal government to pay all tuition and fees for all students attending two-year and four-year public colleges and universities.

This proposal isn't costly. The total bill for all students currently enrolled in public institutions is less than \$27 billion — a little more than 1 percent of current federal budgets, and less than one-third of Bush's \$87 billion request for Iraq and Afghanistan.

The idea is catching on. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recently announced a plan to cover the full costs of an education for poor students without forcing them to take on loans. Students will have to work in state and federal work-study programs at a manageable 10 to 12 hours per week.

Free college education has a clear precedent. The GI Bill paid full tuition and fees, as well as a stipend, for nearly 8 million returning World War II veterans. That investment had a broadly positive effect on the economy and society as a whole.

We've done it before. We can do it again — this time for everyone.

Adolph L. Reed Jr. is professor of political science on the graduate faculty of social and political science at the New School for Social Research and national co-chair of the campaign for Free Higher Education (www.freehighered.org). He can be reached at pmproj@progressive.org.

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