

Find joy in the journey



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance towards the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point.

- Harold B. Melchart

I was young, right out of college with a business administration degree and didn't fully understand the point behind a comment a coworker made to me. Based on our interactions, he saw something in me that I didn't know about myself. He was surprised that I was continuing to work in a position that involved being behind a desk, in a cubicle all day long. It didn't fit with what he thought were my strengths and personality based on his observations. He was right.

Earlier this year a friend gave me a book, "Now, Discover Your Strengths" by

Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton. The book is based on a Gallup Study of over two million people and helps you leverage your talents, strengths and effectiveness. He encouraged me to take the StrengthsFinder Profile online Internet test associated with it. I did. The results reinforced what I now know about myself after years of experience, training and other similar testing.

According to the authors, "to excel in your chosen field and to find lasting satisfaction in doing so, you will need to understand your unique patterns. You will need to become an expert at finding and describing and applying and practicing and refining your strengths." In doing so, you might also find your "sweet spot."

"What engineers give sports equipment, God gave you. A zone, a region, a life precinct in which you were made to dwell," Max Lucado writes in his book, "Cure for the Common Life, Living in Your Sweet Spot." According to him, "life makes sense when you find your spot." It is hard to disagree with that point, isn't it?

Each one of us has a bag of skills, according to Lucado. We are prepackaged for a purpose specifically suited for us. The challenge is to recognize our unique talents and as he suggests, make a careful exploration of who we are, and then sink ourselves in it.

Why is that important? According to one job-placement firm, only one percent of its clients have made a serious study of their skills. And too many people dread Mondays, can't wait for Fridays and manage to get through the days in between with little enthusiasm for life. We suffer as a result from poor health, weak relationships, and ineffectiveness at work. The cure, "Unpack your bags," says Lucado. "You exited the womb uniquely equipped."

"You didn't exit the womb with your purpose tattooed on your chest," he goes on to write, as he asks the reader to consider a new reality television show. You are a contestant and you and others must travel to a specific destination, find a prescribed neighborhood and assume a particular role when you get there. His fictitious show would be

called "Find Your Place." Here is the catch. No one tells you where to go or what to do. You must determine your destination by the use of one tool, your bag of supplies. When you leave for your journey, you are given supplies that provide the clues to your destination. You will not get a printout of your skills. However, according to Lucado, as your life progresses, you begin noticing your gifts, your skills are revealed to you and you discover your purpose and the place to do your work.

As 2007 approaches, get ready for the journey. Everyday is an interview with life. Show up. Unpack your bags. Discover your gifts. "God tailored the curves of your life to fit an empty space in his jigsaw puzzle," writes Lucado. "And life makes sweet sense when you find your spot."

Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. He is a member of the Winston-Salem State University Board of Trustees. Visit his Web site at www.motivationalmoments.com.

Run, Obama, Run

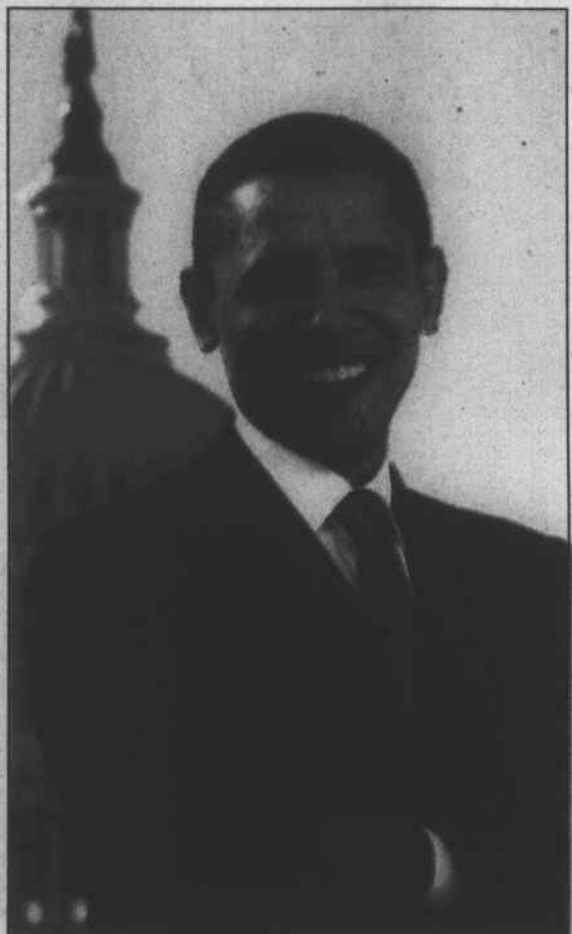


Ron Walters
Guest Columnist

The specter grows that finds Senator Barack Obama being turned into a national phenomenon, drawing huge crowds of people wanting to touch the hem of his garment and catch the verbal morsels that fall from his lips wherever he goes. So massive has been this response that it has sparked a political culture of speculation about his chances of running for president in 2008, especially as he travels to places like the testing ground of New Hampshire.

What people find attractive about Barack is first, his background, a white mother and Kenyan father, his early residences in Hawaii, Indonesia, Kansas - all giving off the scent of a multiculturalism in his growing up. Then, there is his degree from Harvard Law School and his role as the first black editor of the Harvard Law Review, traditionally suggesting high intelligence, that he used in establishing a political career in state level politics, making a sound record of accomplishment. Finally, there are the intangibles of charisma, the earnestness in his voice, the self-deprecating, even folksy style and easily likable smile. These are telegenic qualities that fit well in a media where personal appeal is the stuff of political allure. It may even trump concerns about his limited political experience.

So, Barack has attracted the curious, selling out halls in a rock star fashion, eliciting the "run-Barack-run" chant heard then Rev. Jesse Jackson was also making up his mind about getting into the race for president in 1984. But this chant is not coming from blacks. Therein is the difference. Race and politics are in this equation, covered up right now by the hype, but positioned to bolt to the surface at the right moment. That is why



Barack Campaign Photo

Sen. Barack Obama is getting a lot of attention.

the savvy Obama began his speech in New Hampshire recently saying that he was "suspicious of the hype."

Obama is as aware of any one of the lingering fictitiousness of public opinion polls when it comes to assessing white support for black candidates. When Tom Bradley, the black mayor of Los Angeles, barely lost a race for governor in 1982, a pattern was observed: he received high poll numbers, but a low final vote from whites. The same thing happened to David Dinkins when he ran for mayor of New York City, and Doug Wilder when he ran for governor of Virginia, creating a belief among analysts that the true level of support by white

voters for black candidates is much less than believed.

What political scientists know is that context is important in judging white support for blacks. This was seen in the recent election where Deval Patrick was elected governor of Massachusetts, an overwhelmingly white state. But in the background, as in every state, was an explosive vote against the current administration, amounting to more than 60 percent in some national polls, for its handling of the war in Iraq. Context may also configure the politics of 2008.

In my most recent book, "Freedom Is Not Enough," I create a "Jackson Model" for black candidates running for

president and compare it to the campaigns of Carol Moseley Braun and Rev. Al Sharpton in the 2004 elections. But there is a distinct difference when black candidates run from a progressive base of black, women, low-income, civil rights challenged, etc. voters or whether he or she positions the campaign toward a moderate electorate. As a potential candidate already favored by the white mainstream and running second in polls to Hilary Clinton at this writing, the prospect is great that Obama would run toward the main body of the electorate that is to the right of blacks.

This raises the question of where his base will be. He may well attract black voters as a base, who will give him some issue slack because of the view that he may just be the first genuine black candidate to win the presidency. But there is great resentment among some blacks over the rightward drift of the Democratic Party, and if he adds to that, he could be in trouble with black voters.

I think that Barack Obama should run for president, especially since he doesn't loose politically. Even if he loses the nomination fight, it heightens his leadership profile in national politics and virtually ensures his Senate re-election in 2010. Right now, Obama's true political value is unknown because of the curiosity factor. In the 2000 election, Alan Keyes, Obama's 2004 opponent for his Senate seat in Illinois, drew large crowds to hear him speak, but he attracted few votes. Separating the entertainment factor from a political judgment may well be Obama's most trying chore in making up his mind. Of course, if he finds a creative way to use it, that will be all to the good.

Ron Walters is the distinguished leadership scholar, director of government and politics at the University of Maryland College Park. His latest books are: "White Nationalism, Black Interests" and "Freedom Is Not Enough."

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