

~~Only copy~~

March 1964

THAT NEEDED INGREDIENT - BOUNCE

by

William T. Jerome III

A commencement talk is always a fearsome responsibility. Thus in approximately twenty minutes one is expected to resolve some burning current issue, such as the South Vietnam situation or civil rights or President Johnson's war on poverty.

And yet when the commencement speaker analyzes his audience - not to mention his own limitations - he quickly recognizes the practical impossibility of assaying such heights:

The graduating class - those to whom we are paying deference today - are necessarily blissfully indifferent, believing, not without some truth, that after four or more years of exposure to the academic world little can be added to their store of knowledge at this last ditch moment.

The faculty, the speaker knows, will be attentive, but only to count the clichés which they have long grown accustomed to expect at commencement time.

The president - oh, yes, he will listen, although in a worried sort of a way - worried first as to whether or not his choice will prove a bust, worried next as to whether the grandness of the occasion will prove an irresistible invitation to talk too long.

This leaves the speaker, then, only the parents - so it is to them that I will address my remarks - inviting anyone else to eavesdrop if he chooses. And accordingly for you, the parents, I shall try to analyze this sometime stranger, this soon-to-be graduate, this son or daughter whom we are returning to your hearthside.

To talk to you of today's graduate, to try to analyze him for you, is not a particularly easy assignment. Moreover, by my scheme of things, to talk to you of today's graduate is in actuality to analyze those very affairs of both national and international import that I indicated earlier should be the stuff of a commencement speech.

Why do I say this - why, in other words, do I equate an understanding of the characteristics of the graduate with an understanding of many of our nation's current problems? I say this because the longer I live the more convinced I become that there is a direct correlation between the major issues of the world and our country's moral fiber. These major issues simply won't get solved by any magic formula. These problems and, in the final analysis, their solution relate directly to the kind of individuals that we are - and therefore to the kind of nation that we both are and can be.

To express this thought - and thereby the principal point of my address - somewhat differently, I am more and more of a mind that there is one essential criteria that must be used in appraising the potential for long range success of any individual or organized group. This criteria or needed ingredient has to do with what I call the bounce or vitality of the individual or group. Wherever there is bounce or vitality, success will be found there, too. Then what about the bounce in our nation, in our universities, in our graduates? Do we have it?

In a series of lectures, later published under the caption of Mission of the University, Jose Ortega y Gasset in 1930 answered a similar question in terms of his native Spain as follows:

The root of Spain's troubles, whether in the state or the university, may be given the most various names; but if you seek the very tip of the root, out of which all the rest arises and emerges, you encounter a fact which only one word can adequately

describe: slovenliness, It penetrates our whole national life from top to bottom, directing, inspiring its actions.<sup>1</sup>

In order to make his meaning clear, to show what must be done to overcome slovenliness, Ortega explained to his students that:

Every idea has its antagonist; in the combat between the two, their profile is delineated. What is the opposite of slovenliness? I shall use a word with which you are very familiar, since it belongs to the vocabulary of sports. The opposite of slovenliness is to be in form. You people well know the tremendous difference there is between an athlete when he is in form, and the same man when he is out of form. The difference in what he is able to do is every bit as striking as if he were two entirely different people. But this form is a thing that has to be acquired.

. . . . Briefly, to be in form means never indulging in any dissipation whatever. And that indulgence of oneself - your "let it go anyhow", "it's all the same", "a bit more or less", "what of it?" - that is slovenliness. Just as individuals, groups too may be in form or out of form, and it is evident in history that the only groups which have ever done anything are those which have achieved form.

. . . . But a group does not acquire this form unless it has disciplined itself, and continues to discipline itself; unless it sees with perfect clarity what it proposes to do.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Gasset, Jose Ortega Y, Mission of the University, Lund Humphries, London, 1963, pg. 31 and 32

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg. 33

Well, what do you think about our own country? Have we got "form" (to use Ortega's word) or "Bounce" and "vitality" (to use mine)? Has the graduate of today got the necessary characteristics, the necessary self-discipline to provide bounce?

Frankly I must give you a qualified answer. As nations go we are good. As graduates go, these here today measure up well. And yet, and yet they and we fall far short of the potential that is in us.

Let us see if we can figure out why - why, in other words, you and I might conclude that we have the stuff that it takes to distinguish ourselves as individuals and as a nation even while we still fall short of our potential. Let us look specifically at today's graduate and through him look at the University, at society, in short, at ourselves.

Thus I can name four characteristics of today's graduate that represent potential strengths for this nation - leading to bounce and vitality - or that conversely can be aborted, leading to slovenliness and decay.

Now before I discuss these characteristics, I challenge you to make your own mental listing in order that you may compare your pet ideas with mine. In challenging you to do this, I recognize that I am being quite indelicate - for most of you have come here as guests - to be entertained, not to be put to work. And believe me any mental listing such as the one I am asking you to prepare is hard work.

But no matter - here is my listing, my listing of the characteristics that today's graduate, your sons and daughters, have within them to use for good or ill as they leave the halls of academe to enter the wonderful Barnum and Bailey world that is twentieth century America.

Characteristic One is a command of facts - some would call this Knowledge - greater than any generation has ever possessed before. Here in this command is a plus factor for today's graduate. The negative side, however, of this command of facts is the relative lack of wisdom (intuitive judgment I like to call it when women comprise my audience) to serve as the warranty that knowledge will be properly employed.

The point I am making here was once delightfully expressed in the New Yorker under the caption of "Overheard at Cherio's" where one bright young thing was heard to say to another bright young thing: "Oh, I know he is smart, but how is he wisdom-wise?"

Of course, in fairness it should be emphasized that only experience and maturity can season a command of facts or knowledge to the point where such a command becomes wisdom. Thus, you the parents must recognize as you appraise your progeny that the classroom is no real substitute for the demanding work of the world that you know - for the work that must be done in the fields or in the factories, in the office cubicle or in the panoramic home.

Characteristic Two is an ability to reason - that is to use words and ideas and concepts. This ability to reason is the plus aspect of Characteristic Two. The negative aspect, in President Kennedy's words, is to "enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought." Your progeny, in brief, will tend to resort to words rather than deeds, to exalt the man of reason at the expense of the man of action, the decision maker. Sometimes I feel that the greatest curse of our nation today is a kind of paralysis

by analysis - a fear to act until all the facts are in (which never can be), a fear to make a mistake - which can best be allayed by doing nothing, a fear even of believing in something, of being committed.

Characteristic Three is exposure to culture. The graduate of today has had traffic with the works of the masters - the great artists, the musicians, the writers, the poets. On the negative side, however, I see no evidence that your progeny has as yet cultivated a taste for the beautiful. But a new appreciation for aesthetics - yes, even a passion for the beautiful - must come if we as a nation are to achieve any lasting greatness. If this love for the beautiful does not come, tell me then what is the point of all our added leisure time, or our longer life span, of the marvels of telestar and of other visual and auditory media.

The last characteristic, namely Characteristic Four, is the attitude of today's graduate toward work, toward his total role as a contributing member of society. As suggested above, the Bachelor's graduate has the necessary background in terms of factual knowledge, conceptual skill, and cultural persuasion to learn any job well. The graduate with the advanced degree has even better equipment to handle the job of his choice. The one ingredient, however, that our universities have not provided is the desire, the drive, the gumption to take a job and, if necessary, to perform what might seem to be menial tasks. The graduate today prefers to learn the tricks of the trade rather than the trade, to accept a position rather than to take a job, to look for security rather than to take risks.

A society that is security oriented rather than risk-motivated certainly will lack bounce - especially when changing technology calls for new attitudes and outlooks and opens for all of us fantastic new vistas. At the same time, the fact of change with its many implications for the world of work, certainly calls for imagination on the part of all of us in inventing new and different ways of governing ourselves and of managing our technology. Without some reasonable guarantees of an opportunity to work, matched by an honest desire to work, technological change can only breed fear in our society and become a divisive and destructive force rather than an influence for untold good. In brief, the attitude of today's graduate toward the world of work is clearly the most single important factor that will determine the shape of the world of tomorrow.

And this world, ladies and gentlemen, that is waiting to be created can take almost any shape willed by the graduates here today. They have the intellectual equipment and the technological means to build magnificently or to build meanly. But what I as an educator cannot foretell for you or for them is whether they have the bounce and the form required to cushion their intellects and to control their technology.

Hark again to Ortega as he advised his students in the talk that was earlier quoted:

To exert influence upon a mass, you must be something other than a mass yourselves: a live force, or in other words, a group in form.

If I could see in you the determination to put yourselves in form - ah! - then, my friends, I should not be afflicted with this deficiency of faith.

I should believe it all to be possible, indeed imminent. Contrary to a general belief, history may advance by jumps, and not always by gradual change . . . . These jumps, in which tremendous

distances may be covered, are called generations. A generation in form can accomplish what centuries failed to achieve without form. And there, my young friends, lies a challenge.<sup>3</sup>

Need more be said? I think not. My role in this colorful ceremony is done - except for a parting wish that you who are graduating today may prove a generation in form.

33  
12  
52

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pg. 34 and 35