



*"A Century of Education
for Business Leadership"*

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CLASS DAY EXERCISES
CAMPUS GREEN
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MR. JOSEPH S. DWYER '63

"OPEN YOURSELF WIDE AS THE SKY"

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Jacobs, honored guests, college officers, members of the administrative staff, faculty, parents, friends, and fellow classmates:

A small child touches a hot stove, screams, jumps back, and begins to cry. He feels pain and learns that heat can cause pain. That he has learned this has been a direct result of an experience. In childhood almost all our lessons are learned through experience - the trial and error method. It doesn't always end in pain, but it does always end in some additional knowledge. As we progress in years and develop the ability to read and reason, it is no longer necessary to rely solely on our experiences for knowledge. By reading, listening, and analyzing we develop our own sphere of knowledge. But there is still the dependency upon experience. Simultaneously we add to our storehouse of knowledge simply by opening ourselves to the myriad of new experiences.

We can carry this idea of experience a step further and project it into our educational experience. We obtain from reading and listening to lectures, not just a conglomeration of unrelated rules, principles, and ideas, but an insight into the experiences of others. There is nothing considered to be a "truth" until

it has passed the test of experience. Time and the concurrent generation of new experiences may even alter some aged principles and ideas. Lord Byron told a story that illustrates this very well, and I quote:

He saw it with his own eyes the moon was round,
Was also certain that the earth was square
Because he had journeyed fifty miles, and found
No sign that it was circular anywhere."

Time and improved methods of investigation have changed such "truths" into fallacies.

But we are about to become businessmen, not scientists. We have just progressed through years of preparation in our quest for the ability to deal successfully with the problems of the business world. In our field, as in all other fields, we must be aware of the virtues of experience. Was not the graphic account of pertinent anecdotes told by our professors here at Bryant an indication of the high esteem that experience is held in by them? These narratives exemplified some of the situations outlined in our texts and added that much more to our storehouse of knowledge.

There is one factor that has a habit of interfering with experience and should be treated cautiously - that is emotion. Emotion, like experience, is a virtue, but sometimes these forces do not blend. You will make your own decision as to which will reign. Samuel Johnson tells the story of a gentleman who had been very unhappy in marriage, and then married again immediately after his first wife died. Johnson concluded that this was the triumph of hope over experience.

We can never completely appreciate an experience until we participate in it ourselves. Try explaining to someone how an orange tastes, or what it is like

to go to college. How many times have you told a person about something funny that happened to you, only to have him stare blankly back at you. This is not to say that descriptions are worthless - quite the contrary! Even though, from your description, a person cannot completely comprehend what a food tastes like or what an emotion feels like, he will be better prepared for the sensation when it does occur. He will have an idea of what to expect. We can carry this idea of psychological preparation into our future; for if we watch and listen to the professionals in our chosen fields, we will be preparing ourselves for the moment when we will be "put to the test."

Our education here at Bryant is an integral part of our preparation, but it is in no way the conclusion. It is the research phase of our life: now we progress into the testing and applying phase. We must be prepared to accept the experience of others as a guiding light - a lighted path that basically we should trust and follow, but not a path that we should be afraid to leave in order to project our own personality and ideas. Sometimes we will venture into the darkness and be engulfed by it, but the guiding light will always be in the background. Sometimes our ventures in the realm of uniqueness will open up a new scope of ideas. We - each and every one of us - will decide how we will follow this guiding light of past experience. Some of us will tread our way along the path and will rarely stray; others will rarely tread on the path at all; but most of us will have faith in experience and, at the same time, have faith in our own ability.

What then is the correct weight to place on experience? Should we heed to it to the extent of inhibiting our own initiative? The answer to this question

is experience itself. Initiative and imagination have no substitutes, but experience is their guide. In this instance, however, our own experience must supersede the experience of others. If we feel we have a chance of succeeding, we should allow nothing to hinder our efforts. We should use logic and the wealth of our own previous experiences to help us decide on the worthiness of our ideas. Sometimes initiative travels beyond the realm of logic, and a goal is reached purely through the perseverance of the seeker. However, initiative cannot stand alone. It must be supported by all the other virtues necessary for success, such as patience, intelligence, and tact. We might consider initiative as the rim of a wheel with the several qualities of a success as the spokes, and experience as the hub.

Just as experience is the hub or pivotal point of success so is environment the hub of experience. Our parents, who protected us in childhood and guided us through adolescence, shaped us into individuals. Our wives and our loved ones, who instilled us with responsibility, provided us with initiative. Our College, which provided us with the opportunity, prepared us. To our parents, we say, "Thanks for the individuality." To our loved ones, we say, "Thanks for the push!" And to our college we say, "Thanks for the challenge!"

Some of the most beautiful parables and riddles ever written have been composed by the masters of Zen Buddhism. One of these parables emphasizes my theme and fits this occasion very well:

Joshu asked the teacher Nansen, "What is the true Way?"

Nansen answered, "Everyday way is the true Way."

Joshu asked, "Can I study it?"

Nansen answered, "The more you study, the further from the Way."

Joshu asked "If I don't study it, how can I know it?"

Nansen answers, "The Way does not belong to things seen: nor to things unseen. It does not belong to things known: nor to things unknown. Do not seek it, study it, or name it. To find yourself on it, open yourself wide as the sky."