

Remarks by the Vice President at
June 14th Task Force on Youth Motivation meeting

*June 14, 1966
Mayflower Hotel*

Mrs. Smith, Mr. Harris, Mr. Collymore, I want
to thank you for your three fine reports.

I am impressed. They tell us what we hoped --
that our message of hope, inspiration and opportunity
is getting across to a lot of young people.

It is obvious from your reports that you did,
as one of you said, talk with the students and not at them.

Each member of the task force could make a similar
report. I have seen the general summary prepared by Gene
Mattison and the task force staff. And I want to thank each
of you for your time, energy and skill in carrying forward
this important program of youth motivation.

It is clear that most of you made the kind of straight-
forward, no -nonsense talks we recommended.

I particularly liked this paragraph from one talk:

"I'm not here to tell you that if you enter the race
barefoot, you'll end up with alligator shoes on. I'm here
to tell you that opportunities are available in industry --
beyond your imagination."

That same speaker went on to urge the young people
to do their utmost to grow while in school -- to whet their
abilities -- to engage themselves in community activities --

in short, to test themselves in every way possible in order to prepare for the reality of life after school.

He stressed that if you want the rewards of a successful business career, you are going to have to jump into the middle of the competition with both feet and be willing to match yourself with anyone.

He emphasized that you probably will meet frustration and disappointment and occasionally even defeat. But who doesn't?

Now that's telling it like it is.

I hope this message will be included in every talk by a task force member: There is only one ladder of success. The ones who reach the top are the ones who hauled themselves up one rung at a time.

Excellence knows no color line in this country -- or anywhere. And neither is there a color line at the bottom of the ladder. There's a crowd at the bottom -- but color is no distinguishing factor. The bottom belongs to the uneducated, the unskilled, the disadvantaged of all colors, all religion, all regions.

Now we also know that Negro Americans and other minorities have experienced more than their share of discrimination and deprivation -- so a disproportionate share of those at the bottom are non-white. We are striving

to eliminate this opportunity gap as rapidly as possible. Our task force can play a vital role in reducing the crowd at the bottom of the ladder. This fall we will be visiting in many high schools with youngsters who would likely drop out of school unless they see some concrete reason for continuing their education.

↳ Our job is simply this: to provide them with this reason. Now one speech or one conversation may not change a person's life -- but you can begin the process.

In October 1965, the task force sponsored an extensive motivational program in the Cleveland public schools. We reached 21,000 young people of minority background. And almost every one of them reported subsequently of their determination to work harder after listening to the "living witnesses" who were the participating task force members.

Last week I received a report on a youth motivation program at Nathaniel Macon Junior High School in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of New York. They reported a similar reaction there -- and we plan a much more extensive visit by the task force to the New York public schools this fall.

We know these programs can work. And, with your help, we will sponsor task force programs this fall in over 15 cities with large high school populations of youngsters from minority backgrounds.

And remember: you don't have to make a formal appearance as a member of this task force. You don't have to leave your home city -- or your home community.

Carry your message wherever you are. Every city has thousands of dropouts -- or push-outs -- who need your help. So be alert to your opportunities. Do your good work wherever and whenever you can.

← Today you will be exchanging facts and opinions about your work this past spring. Our program is good -- but it can be much better. After today's sessions are over, we hope to have identified a number of ways to improve the operations of the task force in the fall visits.

Be candid. Be honest. And be specific in your suggestions. This is the only way we can bring this vital message to the young Americans who should hear it.



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