

**NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY INDUCTION CEREMONY
PERRY HIGH SCHOOL
Wednesday, April 9, 2008, 7:00 P.M.**

***Creating a Code to Live by:
Navigating Life through Character, Service,
Leadership, and Scholarship***

**Judge Eugene A. Lucci
Lake County Common Pleas Court**

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for asking me to speak at this Perry High School National Honor Society induction ceremony. I am honored and privileged to help you celebrate this wonderful occasion.

The purpose of the National Honor Society is to create enthusiasm for scholarship, to stimulate a desire to render service, to promote leadership, and to develop character in the students of secondary schools.

You are being honored tonight for your achievement in character, service, leadership, and scholarship.

These four traits or virtues – character, service, leadership, and scholarship – were not selected at random. They are closely interrelated, build upon one another, and form the core of a sound individual, family, society, nation, and world. They are like the four wheels on a car – all four must be functioning properly in order for the car to go anywhere.

CHARACTER

Each one of us was born into this world lacking the ability, by ourselves, to navigate life successfully. We needed the help of other people, beginning with our parents, to help form within us the character we need to make wise decisions.

Our character defines much of who we are, how we think, why we act, and what we say or do. Our character is shown by what we do when we think nobody else is around. Our character determines what we say “yes” to, and it determines what we say “no” to. It also often determines

how we identify where we are going, and whether we have any sense of direction, purpose, and destiny.

Our character gives us a sense of right and wrong, an understanding that right is right, even if everyone is against it, and that wrong is wrong, even if everyone is for it, and the fortitude to choose and do what is right. A person of character does not take polls to determine the right course of action.

A person's character shows who she is by what she does with what she has. Her ability may get her to the pinnacle, but it takes character to keep her there.

Your character started forming years ago, and it is being molded and fine-tuned as we speak.

Character is the trait that is at the core of the other three traits – it is the genesis of service, leadership, and scholarship. A nation composed of individuals of fine character stands as a beacon on the hill of the world. Some say knowledge – scholarship – is power; but the power really is in character. The power in an individual is contained in her character.

Henry Clay said, "A nation's character is the sum of its splendid deeds; they constitute one common patrimony, the nation's inheritance. They awe foreign powers, they arouse and animate our own people."

SERVICE

There are two basic kinds of character – two basic kinds of individuals. There are those who seek primarily to serve themselves, and there are those who seek primarily to serve others. Of course, we are all, to some extent, a mixture of these impulses, but there is a big difference between someone who is actively seeking to serve others 90% of the time, and someone who is actively seeking to serve himself 90% of the time. It is much easier to live near or with someone who has the heart of a servant.

Service to others lies at the foundation of positive change; it makes life worthwhile. When we serve others, extraordinary things begin to happen; it makes the servant rich by what he gives up.

You students need not wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. You can serve others, your community, your nation, and the world right now. Start serving now, and you will begin to develop the kind of trajectory to your life that will make all the difference – to you and to those around you.

Woodrow Wilson said: “If you will think about what you ought to do for other people, your character will take care of itself. Character is a by-product, and any man who devotes himself to its cultivation in his own case will become a selfish pig.” Service develops character, if the service is motivated by altruism.

Confucius said: “To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.” It all starts with the individual with a servant heart.

Servanthood is at the core of a well-ordered individual, family, society, nation and world.

LEADERSHIP

The person who has the kind of character that seeks to serve others usually also develops a sense of purpose for her life and the lives of the people she serves. She cares. And because she cares, she tends to be aware of the conditions around her. Out of that awareness of how things are – both the good and the bad – often comes a desire to lead. She wants people around her to join together with her to help solve problems and to improve the conditions in which other people live. A leader seeks the best for those she serves.

Leadership is not so much about techniques and methods as it is about opening the heart. Leadership is about inspiration – of oneself and of others. A **good** leader inspires others with

confidence in *her*; a *great* leader inspires them with confidence in *themselves*. Great leadership is about human experiences, not processes. Leadership is participative and active, not passive, or a title or position. Leadership is not a routine, a formula, or a program; it is an attitude, a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the hearts of others. Leadership is not directive, dictatorial, or forceful, but rather invitational, enabling, and upbuilding. Leaders understand the needs of those who are served by the leader.

John F. Kennedy said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience.

SCHOLARSHIP

Out of that desire to lead often comes both the awareness and the willingness to engage in long periods of study in order to be as effective as possible as a leader in the community. Your scholarship and training must have a purpose to be fulfilling; it is useless unless you have a purpose, the purpose being to make you a better leader and to execute change for the better.

You should yearn not so much to be taught, but rather you should wish to learn. The more you learn, the more you find out how much you do not know. If you think you know it all, then your learning has ceased. You should attempt things that you cannot do, so that you can learn how to do them. You should never stop questioning.

Scholarship does not end with simply knowing pieces of information. It naturally and necessarily requires valuing that knowledge and applying it wisely to lead others.

ALL FOUR QUALITIES ARE NECESSARY

But what happens when these four qualities fail to develop properly in an individual, or a family, or a community, or a nation? In other words, what happens when one or more of the "tires" on the car goes flat? Since all four qualities are interconnected and interdependent, shortcomings in one area will always adversely affect the others.

The Leadership Wheel

For instance, what happens when the *leadership* wheel goes flat? One possible definition of leadership is “the ability to get other people to follow you.” But that definition is faulty and incomplete. Tyrants and dictators are able to get other people to follow them. If leadership were merely the ability to get others to follow, then Adolf Hitler was a great leader because so many people followed him. Obviously, Hitler was not a great leader. His “leadership” was essentially a selfish quest for power that ended in needless death and destruction for millions of people and for himself.

A great leader is someone whose ability to get other people to follow is linked to the desire to serve others, the knowledge of *which direction* should be pursued, and the willingness to put the interests of others first. In other words, a great leader is someone whose character, scholarship, and service combine with the ability to get others to follow. Without this kind of leadership, families, communities, cities, and nations all stumble as they try to figure out which way to go, how to get there, and what to do when they arrive.

The Scholarship Wheel

Similarly, what happens when the *scholarship* wheel goes flat? One possible definition of scholarship is the “study and acquisition of information or knowledge.” But again, that definition is incomplete because it fails to include a proper purpose for acquiring that information.

The proper purpose of scholarship is not merely to create suitable contestants for games like Trivial Pursuit or Jeopardy. It’s not even just to enable people to make lots of money. The world is filled with intelligent people who never linked their academic training to anything other than furthering their own selfishness or curiosity. One of the essential purposes of true scholarship is to acquire information and knowledge in order to put it to work to help others. Without this kind of scholarship, education fails to fulfill its ultimate purpose: the advancement and improvement of the community.

The Service Wheel

If the **service** wheel has a flat tire, nothing of lasting value actually gets done. The most sincere person in the world may want to serve others with every fiber of her being, but that desire – by itself – is not sufficient. Effective service requires diligent study and preparation. The one who seeks to serve must understand what needs to be done and must acquire the skills required to do it. Effective service also requires the ability to enlist the help of others and to train those who have been enlisted to help. Without these things, the desire to serve is merely a futile exercise in well-intentioned ineptitude.

The Character Wheel

If the **character** wheel goes flat, it has a way of deflating all of the other wheels at once. Character is not just knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is doing what is right even when pressured to do what is wrong.

When a smart, well-educated person, who is in a position of leadership, and who has the responsibility of serving others, experiences a breakdown in the area of character, what happens? What are the consequences when someone like that chooses to do what is wrong? Often, the consequences of such a character failure are far-reaching and touch the lives of many people in painful and costly ways. Those who followed the now-fallen leader are frequently left jaded and bitter. Community relationships that took years to cultivate can be shattered forever. When your character breaks down, it really doesn't matter how educated you are, how many people were following you, or how worthy your attempts at service might have been. It all comes to a screeching halt without character.

Four Flat Tires

So,

★ If our **leaders** are trying to get other people to follow them merely so they can acquire power and influence;

★ If our ***scholars*** are merely acquiring information so they can become walking encyclopedias, or to prove how smart they are, or just to make more money for themselves;

★ If those who are attempting to ***serve*** others are inept because they have never invested the time and effort to get the education and training they needed to be effective; or

★ If each individual has not developed the ***character*** necessary to endure various trials and testings, and to practice the “Golden Rule” of treating others as they themselves would want to be treated,

then our community and our nation will be unable to move forward. We will be like a car with four flat tires.

CONCLUSION

Individuals with truly fine character seek to serve others. Servanthood is the first step to leadership, for a leader serves first those whom she leads. Leadership and scholarship are indispensable. Scholarship develops leadership, service, and character. These four virtues – character, service, leadership, and scholarship – are the core of a fulfilled and fulfilling life and are part of the bedrock of a healthy individual, family, society, nation, and world.

FINAL REMARKS

Congratulations to you and your parents for your achievements in the four virtues I have spoken about and your induction into the National Honor Society. Your parents have good reason to be most proud of you students. Do not rest on your laurels, but strive to develop and be individuals of great character, who desire to serve others as leaders, always seeking to gain valued knowledge to make changes to better the society and world around you. Good luck!