

Teamwork

Booker T. Washington

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EVERY large and successful business, or other organization, has been built up by what is called "teamwork," not by one individual, but by a number of individuals working together. In what I shall attempt to say tonight, I want to emphasize the importance, in an institution like this, of people working together with a common end in view. That is teamwork.

In the Panama Canal, which has been completed at so large an expense, we have an illustration in the business world of what can be accomplished by teamwork. Perhaps there has never been in history an illustration which represents so perfectly how it is possible for a number of individuals to accomplish, simply by working together, what seemed to be an impossible task a few years ago. They learned how to do teamwork.

Then, though I do not wish to speak too much in praise of this institution, Tuskegee Institute has been built up and been sustained largely through the cooperation of a number of individuals who have been willing to stand by it, who have been willing to sacrifice their all, nearly; who have pinned their faith to it, who have worked in season and out of season in order that it might succeed. It is most important that this teamwork continue if we are to hold our own, if we are to continue to grow.

Let me illustrate by a few hasty and rude sketches what we can accomplish through teamwork. I very much wish that there might exist throughout the institution a spirit that would make it impossible for any person not to be on time in keeping an engagement on time at his class, on time at drill, on time at any stated appointment.

At West Point, where I was a few weeks ago, the Adjutant told me the thing they strove most for was to bring about teamwork in the matter of promptness, to let it be felt when a student enters that institution that it is most disgraceful for him to be tardy. You will find that spirit running all through that institution, and you will find it in other successful institutions.

I wish we might have it exhibited here more and more each year in our sports. If we are going to play some other institution in football or basket ball, let us have teamwork and let the whole institution stand back of the Tuskegee team. Let us stand by it with our prayers, with our yells, and with everything else. If you learn to do teamwork here, you will take that spirit with you into your future enterprises.

I hope, too, we may have teamwork more and more each year in the matter of keeping down expenses. You can realize, when there is a large number of people gathered together, all consuming something and few producing anything, what it means, in the matter of keeping down expenses, for each individual to do his part. I hope throughout this institution we shall have the spirit that shall say from morning until night:

"I am not going to be responsible for any expense that might be cut off."

"I am going to put my thought and conscience into it and I am not going to be the cause of any extra expense being placed upon this institution, even though it be to the amount of only a half-cent."

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We want to have teamwork in the direction of keeping down waste. That is the same thing as useless expense. If each one will make up his mind that he is going to help the general spirit of economy in the dining-room, in the kitchen, in the classroom, everywhere, it will tell immensely in running the institution so far as finances are concerned. Above all, it will help you lay the foundation for something that will be useful for you all through life.

Then we want to have the spirit that shall bring about teamwork in the matter of cleanliness. Let us have a clean institution. Let us have no department of the institution that we would be ashamed at any time, night or day, to throw open to the public. Let us not have to clean up when the trustees, or other visitors, are coming, but let us have the institution clean in every corner from morning until night, from the beginning of one season to the end of that season.

Then, as I intimated a few nights ago, we not only want the school to be clean, but we want to go further than that. We want to have the grounds beautiful; we want to have the yards beautiful; we want to have the classrooms beautiful. We want to have everything beautiful that the students touch here; for in beauty there is always great inspiration.

We want to have such teamwork as shall make it impossible for a student to remain here and be comfortable if he is not doing honest work. We want to make it so uncomfortable for every student here who is not doing honest work that he will say, "I had better get out of this school. This is not the place for me." And when I say honest work, I mean honest work on the farm, in the shop, in the classroom. Make it impossible for any student to learn here who goes to his classes day by day pretending to know something that he does not know, pretending to have studied a lesson that he has not studied. Make it impossible for a student to slip by in his examinations, pretending to have done that which he has not done.

Happily the world has at last reached the point where it no longer feels that in order for a person to be a great scholar, he must master a number of textbooks, that he must read a certain number of foreign languages; the world has come to the conclusion that the person who has learned to use his mind, whether it has come about through the use of a tool or through the use of any other implement, that the person who has mastered something, who understands what he is doing, who is master of himself in the classroom, out in the world, master of himself everywhere, that person is a scholar.

We want to have such teamwork here as shall make it impossible for any student to remain connected with the institution who is dishonest in the matter of the use of other people's property. Let us make it impossible for a student to stay here who is guilty of stealing, and that means that you must consider more and more that this institution is your home and all of us part of one great big family. Every student who disgraces this family by stealing, by dishonesty, by weakness in any of these directions, is just as much disgracing you as if he were of your own blood and kind. Let us have such teamwork as shall put a premium upon truth and shall make it so disagreeable for every student who utters an untruth that he cannot stay at Tuskegee in peace. As I said a minute ago, in proportion as we have the reputation for truth-telling, we shall have an institution that shall make every one of you proud to be a member of it.

We want to have teamwork, not only in the directions to which I have referred, but most of all, highest of all, we want to have teamwork in our spiritual life, in our religious life, everywhere, in the prayer meetings, in the preaching services, in every devotional exercise, in the Young Men's Christian Association, in the Young Women's Christian Association, in the Bible School, everywhere we want to have teamwork, all working together in the direction which shall bring about the highest spiritual usefulness in this institution.

We can get it by each one forgetting his own personal ambitions, forgetting selfishness, forgetting all that stands in the way of perfect teamwork.

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[*] Dr. Washington's last Sunday evening talk to the students at Tuskegee, October 17, 1915