

Seeing as Far as Forever

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I must tell you that the invitation to speak today came as a great surprise to me. As I have pondered what I could say, I have asked myself: “What about my life could be of value to you? How do we all strive together to set and attain meaningful goals? How can we meet the challenges of this life and return to live with our Father in Heaven?” I pray that as we share this time together, you can gain something from the experiences and support that I have personally relied upon in my journey.

As a child I loved to read and daydream. Sometimes I would daydream about things I read, but often I would just daydream about who I was and who I wanted to be. My favorite place for both of these activities was on the roof of a building that was used as a storage cellar by our family. I would climb up a plum tree next to the cellar with book in hand, then from its branches scramble onto the cellar roof, gingerly work my way over the peak, and settle on the other side under the enveloping leaves of my favorite apple tree. From there I could see forever, and it wasn’t hard to imagine that I could be Glinda the Good Witch in the Land of Oz or Nancy Drew spying on some shady characters up to no good. Unseen, I could also watch my father fixing sprinkler pipes or trimming trees and see my mother with her hoe banishing the weeds

from the flower beds or hanging fresh wash on the clothesline.

Even during my early teenage years I would escape to this secret world. However, by then more time was spent thinking about reachable goals and less about fantasies. It was also here that I said many prayers and had intimate conversations with my Father in Heaven. I remember once puzzling out loud to Him: “I try so hard to be good. Why do I seem to get into so much trouble?” What I didn’t seem to grasp was that while uttering this prayer I was sitting on the cellar roof that I had been banned from more than once. Even though I tried to be “good,” I had trouble sometimes understanding the meaning of the word *no*. I don’t think that’s changed.

Fortunately these early years of my life did much through fantasies, dreams, wishes, plans, and prayers to develop in me an understanding of the importance of goals and the value of a plan to reach those goals. As I have spent time raising children, teaching, coaching, and advising and counseling, I have learned

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some important lessons that I would like to share with you today.

Know Who You Are

The first and most critical step to setting and reaching goals is to know who you are. I have had many affirmations of this important principle.

After almost 20 years as a stay-at-home mom, I went back to school to earn my teaching certificate. With certificate in hand, I was excited to be offered a job at East High School in Salt Lake City. The only catch was that in addition to teaching English and history, I was assigned to coach swimming. Fortunately for me, I had learned a little from my children, who were competitive swimmers. We also had some great swimmers on the team, and I had excellent assistants. It was not long before we had one of the top teams in the state. In the process I learned a lot about what motivates an athlete to perform well and how to help a swimmer set goals and focus on reaching those goals.

At the same time that the swim team was having astonishing success, the East High School football team was struggling. At the end of the 1989 season they had the dubious reputation of the longest losing streak west of the Mississippi. *USA Today* reporters amazingly appeared at these high school games, covering the record-breaking streak. After being defeated the first game of the 1990 season, the team had a 30-game losing streak and had not won a game in four years. The head football coach came to me after this first game—in what I sensed was a state of desperation—and asked if I would accept a position as an assistant varsity football coach for the rest of the season. (I must explain that I did have some experience with football. My father had been a football player and during my years growing up had coached at Provo High School. I had spent time scouting teams with him—watching and loving football. However, never on the cellar roof of my youth

had I ever imagined that I would someday be coaching football.)

My coaching responsibilities were to work with the kickers and the special teams, keep the players motivated and focused during practice, and give the pep talk to the team before the game. I quickly became acquainted with the players on those long, hot August afternoons as we worked hard during the two weeks until our next game. I clocked hang time on punts, held the ball for place kickers, and dodged errant tackles. A smile here, a cheer there, a forceful pat on the shoulder pad, and sometimes a symbolic kick in the pants were common. I also encouraged the players to help each other. Some of the defensive linemen would show up early on Saturday mornings to shag balls as the kickers practiced before the team meeting. Soon these linemen were well aware when the kickers improved their distance and hang time and offered some mocking words of praise. The kickers in turn loudly harassed and applauded tackles and sacks.

It didn't take me long to discover that these young men were not losers. They had talent, character, and determination. But for four years they had heard the press, fans, and friends talk about how "bad" East High football was, and they had come to believe it.

When the moment came for me to get the team psyched for the game with West High School (our most serious rival), I didn't rant or stomp and yell to work them up. I simply shared with the players what I had learned about them in those two weeks: They were not losers. They were individual winners and had every right to go out on that field and succeed. Each one of them had a job to do, and they only needed to go out and do their part to the best of their ability in support of the entire team.

I think the rest of the coaching staff was somewhat disappointed at that point and wondered why they had hired me. They had expected a high-spirited rally to arms.

But I wanted to give them something more sustainable than a pep talk. I wanted each one of them to reach inside themselves and excel.

Those young men went out on the field that day and played like winners. Suddenly they were cheering each other on and smacking helmets and pads with pride. After a grueling game and four overtimes, the score was East High 42, West High 35. The East High football team had learned how to win, and these young men no longer questioned who they were.

This experience and the rest of the season indelibly impressed on me the importance of knowing who we are and what we are capable of doing. The Savior is our ultimate example. He knew what His mission was when He came to this earth, and He knew the consequences if He should fail. We should feel the same urgency in our own mission on this earth.

President Joseph F. Smith has told us:

If Christ knew [His mission] beforehand, so did we. But in coming here, we forgot all. . . . But by the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home. [GD, 13–14]

We can sense “the germ of eternal life” within us (GD, 14). What confidence we should feel about who we are, what the importance of our mission is, and how much ability to succeed we have as we reach inside ourselves and excel.

Set the Right Goals

Once we have a clear picture of who we are and why we are here, the next step in this journey is to accept our mission and set meaningful goals. I would like to share with you an experience I had on a trip to Asia. Each year we try to provide an Asia Business Study Abroad Program for interested Marriott School undergraduate and graduate students. One of the countries we visit is Vietnam. On several

occasions we have been able to arrange a chance for the students to visit with families who are part of a microenterprise program in the area of Ho Chi Minh City.

In the microenterprise program, the women in these families are given small loans beginning at less than \$50. They use this money to start up a business that they can develop and grow to help support their families. Some women weave mats, some weave hammocks; others raise chickens, ducks, or even small pigs. No matter what business these women were starting, we found they set similar goals for the use of their profits.

The first goal was always to guarantee the necessities of life such as food and clothing for their beautiful children. The next goal was to replace the troublesome thatched roofs of their homes with metal roofs to keep out the moisture and the bugs that lodged in the thatch. The next goal as their business grew was to cover the dirt floors of their homes with tile. And, finally, when they were really doing well, they would buy a nice bed to replace the customary sleeping mats and add indoor plumbing.

These goals were very important to them and followed this predictable pattern. Although we are blessed to be able to establish goals at a much different economic level and focus farther into the future, we still sometimes stop short of making our goals part of an all-important eternal plan.

I am a list maker, and each weekend I create a list of tasks that I want to accomplish during the weekend or the week ahead. This is one of my lists:

- Do the wash
- Clean out refrigerator
- Plan Sunday dinner
- Groceries
- Work out
- Get birthday present
- Work on devotional talk
- Pay bills

Plant flowerpots
Clean out the left side of the garage
Go to the bank
Start Relief Society lesson
Get oil changed
Clean out dresser drawers
Clean off patio

As I review this list, I see two major problems. The first one is that the list of goals is not realistic. I never get everything done. In fact, “clean out the garage” has been on the list for six months. I always leave it until last and never get to it. It isn’t because this is not an important item. In fact, throughout the winter either my husband, Glen, or I (mostly Glen) have had to park our car outside because there is no room to get our two cars in our two-car garage. Obviously I need to develop some strategy other than putting this on my weekly list.

The second problem with my list is that these are not meaningful goals, and even if I accomplish them I am no further ahead a week from now than I am presently. Where on my list are things I need to do to follow the admonition given by Elder James M. Dunn?

Our earthly sojourn is part of a divine plan of happiness designed by Him [God], which beckons us to live by faith, to gain mortal experiences, and to become qualified through obedience and the power of the Atonement to return to His presence forever. [James M. Dunn, “Words to Live By,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 35]

Clearly my To-Do list needs to start with some important things like checking in with my sick neighbor, going to a temple session, and getting to my planned study of the scriptures. Then I can add the mundane tasks of my life as Things to Do Next.

During the spring and summer semester I am teaching a class we call our Management Suite class. That may seem like a strange name for a class, but a definition of *suite* is “a set of

things having a certain dependence upon each other and intended to go or be used together” (*Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language, International Edition*, vol. 2 [1974], 1254, s.v. “suite”). The suite class is actually a combined curriculum of religion and business—the spiritual and the secular. These subjects are intended to “be used together.” To us this is one of the most important classes in our business curriculum. Some of the topics we cover are Pride and the Economic Cycle; Work, Family, and Church; Moral Leadership; Personal Integrity; and Career Planning. Each one of these topics and the many others we cover has application to the goals we set in our spiritual, personal, and professional lives.

At the beginning of spring classes I asked the students to set a goal to pursue during the spring and summer terms. I would like to share some of these goals with you and let you compare them to my Vietnam goals or to my original To-Do list. Some of the students set very practical goals and some set more eternal goals, but I am very impressed with the direction the students have chosen. Here are some examples:

“I have planned to spend more time with my wife. . . . I believe that if we dedicate time sharing our testimonies and thoughts about life together on a daily basis, we will grow closer together and implement celestial attributes in our marriage. There is no point in trying to gain mortal accomplishments if I neglect the person most important in my life.”

Another student said, “My number-one focus this semester is to dedicate and set aside time for those I interact with. . . . I want to make sure I can be there for those I care about.”

Another: “My personal goal is to choose each and every day to actively be the person I sincerely want to be. Every day I want to choose to do my best and be the most Christlike person I can be.” Included with this goal were daily goals to help him achieve this broader goal.

Another goal: “Get a job that creates opportunities for others.”

One was: “Work on becoming a more effective leader.”

The last one: “Prepare our home with the Spirit of the Lord for the arrival of our little boy. I want to do this so that he may be raised with all of the blessings of the gospel and understand them.”

Elder Dunn again instructed us when he said:

Life is short. “It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). In the precious time that we have in mortality, there are many things to be done. Some of these things are more important than others, and we must make wise decisions. Some things are obviously wrong. Some are good. But some are vital if we are to meet the expectations of our Father. [Dunn, “Words to Live By,” 35]

We worry about choosing between right and wrong, but many of our more difficult decisions involve choosing between right and right. Conscious planning must be directed toward eternal issues. We need to look at our goals and wisely choose how we direct our time and energy.

Don’t Get Sidetracked

The next problem we run into is that even though we have set good goals and begin to pursue them, we often get sidetracked.

Teaching and working with business students in the Marriott School has given me some insights as I watch them. Unfortunately I have met with some students who have been sidetracked along the way and end up struggling academically, physically, or emotionally. The original goal for some was to obtain strong business skills that would qualify them for a promising career with a healthy salary to provide for their family. However, the temptation to begin using those skills partway through their schooling results

in more and more hours of part-time or full-time work and less and less time to spend on classwork. The additional money from that \$10-an-hour job has suddenly stymied their progress toward the long-term career they are seeking. They have lost sight of their original goal.

Some other students I have worked with have lost the courage and confidence to continue the fight. They came to BYU carefree and with few responsibilities. Now they are married, have a child, have a part-time job, and feel the weight of the world on their shoulders. The goals ahead seem monumental. At times I think we all feel that pressure and want to give up—at least for a while. Often I find for myself that my prayer from the cellar roof has changed to “I faithfully try to do what is right, but why is it such a struggle?” Under these circumstances, I often turn to one of my favorite scriptures: Joshua 1:9, where the Lord speaks to Joshua and says, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” If we can just remember these words, the spirit behind them can help us dig a little deeper and look a little harder for solutions to our struggles.

If we are working to be obedient and are striving toward worthy goals, the Lord will be with us and give us strength. He has promised us in the Doctrine and Covenants, “Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good” (D&C 90:24). When troubles come that make us want to quit, we need the courage to remember that we know who we are and why we are here. We also know that we have prayerfully set goals that are heading us in the right direction. We should not fear, and we must not give up. The character and courage that has brought us this far is still there. There are solutions, and we just need to find them. We may need a tree to climb or a roof to scale to improve our vantage point, but success is possible.

Make It a Team Sport

This brings me to my fourth and final point. Struggles become easier if we make life a team sport. I have often wondered what motivated the Savior to come forth in the Council of Heaven and offer Himself as a sacrifice for us. Since it was not for personal glory, it must have been for love—the type of love that we can only begin to imagine as we experience love for spouses, parents, and children. I would like you to remember one of the student goals that I read earlier: “My number-one focus this semester is to dedicate and set aside time for those I interact with. . . . I want to make sure I can be there for those I care about.”

Through my coaching experiences I have learned that athletes perform at a higher level as part of a team than they do when focusing on their individual accomplishments. While coaching swimming I was surprised to find that during the season the best times the swimmers recorded were when they were part of a relay team instead of when they were swimming an individual event. If you want to perform at your best level, become part of a team. That team can be a team of two or a team of more. There are many around you to seek out as teammates.

One of my favorite authors is the Jewish writer Chaim Potok. In his book *The Chosen*, the main character, a young man named Reuven, and his father have a discussion. The father says:

“Reuven, listen to me. The Talmud says that a person should do two things for himself. One is to acquire a teacher. Do you remember the other?”

“Choose a friend,” [Reuven] said.

*“Yes. You know what a friend is, Reuven? A Greek philosopher said that two people who are true friends are like two bodies with one soul.” [Chaim Potok, *The Chosen* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 74; book 1, chapter 4]*

When Glen and I were first married and starting our family, I found a very dear friend

who was in the same circumstances I was. We would talk on the phone each morning as we did our breakfast dishes. We would talk about the wonderful things in our lives and our daily struggles. We could always help each other when things got tough. Even though I moved away from that neighborhood and our lives became separated, every time we see each other it is like we just talked yesterday, and we can share and support just as before. We are still like “one soul.”

Here on this campus are many opportunities to find a teacher and a friend. I have never been at a university where the faculty is so willing to mentor and counsel students. When I was in the MBA program here at BYU, I relished the opportunity to become good friends with my professors. Fortunately I have had the opportunity to return to the Marriott School as a colleague of these wonderful people. I am thankful that I had the chance to begin these relationships while I was a student. It is easy for me now to tell a business student to take a certain class because I know that faculty member can change a student’s life.

In addition to finding a teacher, take advantage of the chance you have to build lasting friendships. This is such a short period of time, even though it may seem sometimes to go on forever. Part of the value of being at BYU is the wonderful people you associate with. You do not know but what you also might play an important role in each other’s lives some time in the future.

Sometimes when it seems that you are most alone, you discover a wonderful friend who is there to support you. Last year at about this time we lost a son. I was in Beijing, China, at the time I was notified of his death. The following days—filled with shock and disbelief as my daughter Shannon and I struggled to get home—are still very vague to me. We flew into Salt Lake, where we joined the rest of the family, and then flew out the next morning to New York for the funeral service. Separated from friends and

other support, our immediate family clung together during those dark days.

As we returned to Salt Lake and pulled into the driveway of our home, the first thing I saw was that all of my flowerpots had been planted with beautiful blooming flowers and flowering baskets were hanging from our arbor. Our neighbors had gotten together and planted along the entryway to our home. More than the beauty it presented, I felt a deep connection with these wonderful people who had worried and cared about us. This was the way they had expressed their love. Those flowers were beautiful for the entire summer and were a constant reminder that we were not alone.

As we look to those who love us, remember the most important team member we can have is Christ. He is always there to be a companion and support for us. Christ has promised us that He will be with us: “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (D&C 88:63).

The words and music of the hymn “Be Thou Humble,” written by Grietje Terburg Rowley, can be a great consolation as they remind us that we are not alone at any time, no matter how great our struggle.

*Be thou humble in thy weakness, and the Lord thy
God shall lead thee,*

*Shall lead thee by the hand and give thee answer to
thy prayers.*

*Be thou humble in thy pleading, and the Lord thy
God shall bless thee,*

*Shall bless thee with a sweet and calm assurance
that he cares.*

[*Hymns*, 1985, no. 130]

So let us remember that from the vantage point of a roof and a tall tree, our perspective is to look as far as forever and set goals that will not just help us through the week but will lead us on into eternity. Focus on who you are, because there are no losing streaks that cannot be overcome if there is a glimpse of where you came from and a vast panorama of where you are going. Make sure your To-Do list starts with eternal goals first and leave cleaning the garage to last. Most of all, do not be afraid. Finally, remember you can always find a friend. Always reach out that hand so the Lord can lead you.

I pray that each of us will be led together to a bright future with a sweet and calm assurance that we all care for each other and seek to understand the daily blessings of the gospel. This I say in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.