

The Formula for Success at BYU

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My dear brothers and sisters: Last week at this same hour we heard a message from the prophet of God. President Spencer W. Kimball gave us a message of love and admonition and challenge: he expressed his love for each of us, he admonished us to behave with integrity toward our commitments and to do what we know to be right, and he challenged us “to equip [ourselves] to be honorable, productive citizens of the Kingdom” (Spencer W. Kimball, “Integrity: The Spirit of BYU,” in *Speeches of the Year, 1979* [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980], p. 163).

In this annual President’s Message I will follow this same pattern of love and admonition and challenge.

As I look out upon this great audience of faculty and students, my heart overflows with feeling for each of you. I feel like the Prophet Joseph Smith must have felt as he said of Nauvoo and its people: “This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens” (*History of the Church*, 6:554). There is nothing more exciting and rewarding than to observe the growth of a human soul, and that is the daily blessing of those who are privileged to serve at BYU. We who serve here are grateful that our life’s work can be associated with the

processes of creation and learning, which are the unique concerns of the University.

We are also grateful that we can work in this atmosphere. There is no group of thirty thousand anywhere on the face of the earth who are comparable to those who study and work on this campus. Our relationships with one another are expressive of love and trust. We are truly friends to one another. In another great statement made during the closing period of his life, the Prophet Joseph Smith said:

Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of “Mormonism”; . . . to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers. . . .

It is a time honored adage that love begets love. Let us pour forth love—show forth our kindness unto all mankind, and the Lord will reward us with everlasting increase. . . . Friendship is like . . . [a blacksmith] welding iron to iron; it unites the human family with its happy influence. [History of the Church, 5:517]

Dallin H. Oaks was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 11 September 1979.

This is a campus of friendship and love in the greatest and best sense of those words. I know that I speak for all of your teachers and other servants at BYU when I say how much we love the students of Brigham Young University and how much we want them to succeed. We are committed to your success, not just in the classroom and the examination, but in the greater and more lasting accomplishments of learning and eternal growth.

You are worthy of special love and concern. Surely there is no group of men and women anywhere on the face of the earth who are more worthy of Heaven's blessings or more willing and committed to serve their Father in Heaven and their brothers and sisters than those who gather on this campus.

Our loving relationships include those who are not of our faith. This year, as always, our student body includes about one thousand students who are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We welcome you as friends and brothers and sisters, and we anticipate that your presence here will enrich our education as well as yours. We invite you to take part in the active religious life of our campus wards and stakes. If you choose not to, we urge you to affiliate with a church of your choice and to have an active religious life so that your college years will be times of spiritual as well as intellectual growth.

Not just the Church, but the whole world has a great stake in what happens at BYU. We live in a world of sin and ignorance. I heard it said the other day that when there is a problem to be solved God sends a child. All the hopes of this troubled world rest with its youth. We who are teachers and exemplars have the holy calling of helping you to prepare for the missions that will give reality to these hopes. You are our future.

As we begin this new school year some of you are having your first experience in higher learning. Others have transferred here after beginning studies in another place. Still others

are resuming their studies at BYU after service in the mission field or continuing after studies here last year. But all of you are here because you desire to grow in intellect and spirituality. You have come to the right place. BYU is a unique place for growth and learning.

Often, during the hours that I have spent preparing this message, my thoughts have gone back to my own experiences at BYU. I graduated twenty-five years ago this spring. BYU was a small college then, with about five thousand students. It was little known beyond the valleys of the mountains and the enclaves of Mormon culture. In paper credentials its faculty were less qualified, and I seem to recall that its students were less serious. The educational program was less exacting than now. Yet the concern for spirituality and eternal values that makes this University unique today was present then, and so were those loving relations between and among students and teachers.

As I look back and identify the most important ingredients in my experiences at BYU they are the same you would cite to explain why you have chosen to study here. There is something special about this place, something easier to feel than to describe. It is what the alumni call "The Spirit of the 'Y'." President Kimball referred to it last week when he said that, although there are vast differences between the size and physical facilities of the BYU he attended and the BYU of today, "what matters most is the spirit of the program." To use his words:

Brigham Young University was established for the purpose of helping men and women to learn all that the world has to teach them, but to do so in a setting infused with faith in the continuing concern of God for man, in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and in the capacity and willingness of the Lord to speak to us today, both through the quiet whisperings of the Spirit which come to us as individuals and through the words of leaders he has called to give us

guidance. That is the spirit I felt here when I was young; it is still the spirit which animates this great institution. [Kimball, "Integrity," p. 161]

Also unchanged is the formula for success at BYU. It is unchanged because it is grounded on eternal truth. It is the same for you as it was for those who enrolled a century or a half-century or a quarter-century ago. I can identify four ingredients; I share them with you and use them as the organizing principle for the words of admonition and challenge I will offer. The ingredients of success at BYU are: first, be worthy; second, seek learning; third, work hard; and fourth, help others.

Be Worthy

First, be worthy. Our focus on personal worthiness is unique. We are concerned with behavior and consider personal worthiness an essential ingredient of our educational enterprise. This concern stems from our knowledge that we learn best when we are in harmony with the commandments of Him who is the source of all truth. By this means we can have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, the great teacher whose mission is to testify of Christ, to guide us into all truth and to bring all things to our remembrance (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13). Pray for the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Pray for help in your studies. By this means you "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118).

We must also keep the commandments of God. The Holy Spirit will not dwell in us if we are not clean and pure. Sin drives out the Spirit of the Lord, and we lose the promised assistance. This is one of those eternal principles that you can verify by immediate personal experience. Recall a time when you were resentful or quarrelsome or angry or filled with hate. Could you study effectively? Could you think clearly? Did you receive any enlightenment during that period?

Sin and anger darken the mind. They produce a condition in men and women that is the opposite of the light and truth that characterize the word intelligence, which is the glory of God. Repentance, which can cleanse us from sin through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is therefore an essential step along the path of learning for all who seek light and truth.

In the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord gives this great promise, which clearly ties personal worthiness to the enlightenment of the mind: "And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole body shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things" (D&C 88:67).

As President Kimball said last week:

I have learned that where there is a prayerful heart, a hungering after righteousness, a forsaking of sins, and obedience to the commandments of God, the Lord pours out more and more light until one finally has power to pierce the heavenly veil and to know more than man knows. [Kimball, "Integrity," p. 163]

This is the ideal toward which we strive, but none of us measures up completely. None of us is perfect. Though our desires are good, we are all capable of foolish and self-destructive acts and omissions. We all have need of repentance. We all need to be tolerant and loving with one another. At some time of our lives, each of us needs help in getting over what someone has called "Fools' Hill," that steep slope between the foolishness and self-centeredness of boys and girls and the wider unselfish perspective of men and women.

The provisions of BYU's Code of Honor identify our commitments to behave so that we will be worthy of the companionship and teaching influence of the Holy Ghost as we pursue our studies in this unique institution. In doing so we draw closer to our Savior, the light

and life of the world, who enlightens our eyes and quickens our understanding (D&C 88:11). The importance of knowing Him and qualifying for His blessings was impressively described in these words of Malcolm Muggeridge, British journalist, author and broadcaster:

I may, I suppose pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue—that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions—that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time—that's fulfillment. Yet I say to you—and I beg you to believe me—multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty. [Quoted in George C. Roche III, "Faith and Freedom," in *Imprimis* 8, no.8 (August 1979):2.]

Seek Learning

Second, seek learning. If you would be successful in pursuing an education at BYU, be hungry to learn. If you desire to obtain a good education, one that will increase your joy and enlarge your capacity to serve your family, your community, and your profession, seek learning for the sake of learning. Do not limit yourself to a grudging compliance with minimum requirements of attendance, assignments, and degrees. Pursue learning for the purpose implied in the motto of this University—"The Glory of God is Intelligence."

Remember that you are here to gain an education, to become a person of learning. This qualification or status often involves degrees and an increased value on your services in the marketplace, but it is distinguishable from

either of them. A learned person can think clearly and communicate effectively and has a fund of knowledge and understanding about people and social institutions and the physical world. There is no better indicia of a learned person than that contained in the Lord's commandment that His people should be instructed in:

Things both in heaven and in the earth and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms." [D&C 88:79]

An educated person will be adaptable, because his or her skills and knowledge are the general kind that equip a person to live and lead in society, not just to perform a highly specific individual task. The trouble with highly specialized skills is that technology can make them as obsolete as the skills involved in manufacturing clipper ships, carriages, or slide rules.

A learned person is an enemy to ignorance, and there is so much ignorance in the world. People by and large lack literacy in economics, history, and government; in nutrition, ethics, and education; in law and medicine. We are too easily victimized by quacks and demagogues, by rain-makers, panacea-peddlers, and political and other practitioners of the cults of something-for-nothing and get-rich-quick. A learned Latter-day Saint should seek answers to the important physical, social, and political problems of the day. He or she should be prepared to defend the truth, to withstand social pressures, and to make a positive contribution to society.

Can you identify our most important current problems? Do you know what is happening in the world around you? Do you read a newspaper every day, or do you depend on the fragments of news you receive on television or

radio? In addition to the *Universe*, which should be read for campus news, each BYU student should read at least one other daily newspaper. Some will choose the Provo *Daily Herald*, which has fine coverage of local and community events in addition to national and international news. Others will read the morning *Salt Lake Tribune* or the evening *Deseret News*. The *Deseret News*, of course, includes the *Church News* on the weekend, which is of vital interest to every Latter-day Saint. Others may wish to go to the library and read one of its collection of 30 daily newspapers from all parts of the world. Whether by individual trips to the library or other source or by subscription in each apartment or by some other cooperative arrangement, each student should read a daily newspaper.

If you miss one single forum assembly in this year, you will have missed a great opportunity for learning. No matter what the subject, all of our forum assemblies, and a selective sampling of the other lectures given on campus, are an essential part of your education at BYU. It has been my personal experience that the intellectual excitement produced by an excellent lecture—whatever the subject—stimulates my mind and brings a flood of ideas, even in subjects unrelated to the lecture. Do not miss that stimulation and the added perspective given by the superior lecturers we have on this campus.

At Brigham Young University you are privileged to take a guided tour with the best thinkers and through the best information available in the world today. Most of you will be eager and alert, stimulated by ideas, struggling with the exciting process of learning. Most BYU students are busy preparing themselves for the important responsibilities that they will bear. Do so. Do not be one of that smaller but painfully visible group of students who are still struggling up the far slopes of “fools’ hill,” chasing butterflies, giggling on the fringes, and pursuing the frivolous things of

life while the sands of their study time at the University fall through the hourglass at their inexorable rate. These will finally leave—perhaps with a degree, hopefully with some kind of a job, but almost certainly without the education and learning that is the purpose of our mission here.

Those who are not willing to seek learning should voluntarily withdraw from the University and allow their place to be taken by some of the thousands who are clamoring for admission. It is wrong to do otherwise. The resources devoted to the education of each student at BYU are enormous. You are aware that for every dollar you pay in tuition the Church appropriates more than two additional dollars out of its sacred tithing resources. In addition, those tithing resources have built this huge campus with all of its beautiful and serviceable facilities. If you take the annual capital cost of the investment in this campus and add it to the annual appropriation for the costs of education here, the total exceeds the earnings on a capital fund of more than \$50,000 for each of the students at BYU. Stated otherwise, this means that each student at BYU is supported by a capital investment in excess of \$50,000 per year. Considering the source of that capital investment, it is appropriate to point out that faithful Mormons all over the world have had to earn and pay an honest tithing on a half-million dollars to provide the capital necessary to support each individual student in this enormous student body. That is what the Church and its members are investing your education. Are you doing your share? Are you investing a commensurate amount of time and effort to seek learning?

Work Hard

Third, work hard. I love the lines of Longfellow’s poem:

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,*

*But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*
[“Ladder of St. Augustine”]

As you analyze your own study habits and self-discipline, ask yourself whether you are, in effect, sleeping or just lazing along waiting for some kind of “sudden flight” to a lofty position. Be the kind of person who uses time carefully, making every minute count for learning and earning and living. If so, you will be “toiling upward in the night,” taking the steps necessary to move you to the heights.

There are few things that give me more pain than to see young men and women who do not realize their potential, who do not “get their act together” and discipline themselves into the work necessary to acquire the skills and learning characteristic of a good education. There is too much sunning on the lawn, too much seeking after pleasure, too much dependence upon the opinions and work of others, too little self-reliance.

I know of no better words of advice on this subject than to “work first, and play later.” The discipline of forcing oneself to work first until the job is completed—whether it be a daily assignment, a term paper, or other needed task—and only then to enjoy the pleasure of play is a master secret of life. It bears immediate fruits in accomplishment, but its most important long-range effect is self-discipline, which unlocks the door to undreamed-of accomplishments. How do you spend your time? Are you the master of your own time, or do others control your time by flicking the switch on a television or by impromptu invitations to pleasures or diversions that you have no willpower to resist? Work first, and play later.

We are fond of saying that BYU is the Lord’s university, but we do not make it so by self-labeling or self-congratulations. Nor do we achieve that standing by whining excuses, by self-righteous posturing, or by trivial rhetoric in the *Universe* or other public press. Neither

do we become great scholars or educated persons by being hired by or admitted to the University. Academic accomplishments and standing come from an accumulation of individual effort in the classroom, the laboratory, and the library, not by University action in the office of admissions or public relations.

One of the greatest obstacles to achieving the University’s prophetic destiny is the thought that we have already arrived, either as an institution or as students or faculty in it. In the Second Century Address he delivered on this campus four years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball challenged us to greatness by reciting many things we have yet to do. Then, he promised, in the process of time, as we put forth the enormous effort required, “this will become the fully anointed university of the Lord about which so much has been spoken in the past” (Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” in *Speeches of the Year, 1975* [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976], p. 253). A great work remains to be done. Many lives are yet to be blessed. There is work enough to do for all of us. Let us each commit our best efforts toward that great destiny.

Help Others

Fourth, help others. The final ingredient of success at BYU requires us to lift our eyes from the essentially personal concerns of being worthy, seeking learning, and working hard. We should make a contribution to the lives and well-being of those around us, of the University, and of the Church that sponsors, supports, and directs us.

There are many ways to help others on this campus. In the course of the year we will encourage everyone to make a cash contribution, even a nominal one, to help the University’s fund-raising. But more importantly, I hope that each of you will find a variety of ways to give of yourself in personal service to others. Some can work in student

government; some in student development; some in the Cougar Band; some by representing the University on athletic teams, in performing groups, or in other competitive activities; some in community service projects; some in various social, political, or service organizations. All can assist in the national energy crisis by walking when possible and by being conservative in thermostat settings. All can help keep our campus clean and beautiful, and all can serve in Church callings.

But even as I urge you to serve others, I need to caution you to keep your lives in balance. Remember that your primary activity during this period of your life is to get an education. Do not spend so much time in service activities that you neglect your primary responsibility to obtain an education during your years at BYU. Even as King Benjamin, that great Book of Mormon prophet, exhorted his people to impart of their substance to the poor, he cautioned them to “see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27).

Our Code of Honor also commits us to help others to “fulfill their responsibilities under this Code.” There are many ways to do this. At a minimum it means that we should set a worthy example of observance ourselves. Also, we should discourage others from violating the Code. In more serious instances, it will be appropriate to seek the help of a bishop or other ecclesiastical officer. And where the violation poses a serious and immediate threat to members of the University community, it will even be necessary to report the conduct to responsible University officials. Such would be your obligation, for example, if you knew someone who was engaging in predatory sexual behavior or was using drugs, both of which offenses can involve others in serious moral transgressions. Already this semester we have had one such incident. Two days before classes began two young men who had come to BYU

from another state were smoking marijuana in their room in one of our dormitories. Smelling something suspicious, an alert student notified Security and these prospective students were arrested, charged, dismissed from school, and sent home, all before classes began. I am grateful for the student who reported this serious incident. We are determined not to have any drug abuse at BYU, and with that kind of cooperation we never will.

As a less serious level, your obligation of consideration for others should rule out the kind of juvenile horseplay or distractions that make it difficult or impossible for roommates to study. These are serious breaches of courtesy in a learning community. Help create an atmosphere where all BYU students can meet their responsibilities—including their responsibilities to seek learning by study and also by faith. Have concern for the safety of others. Never be part of the kind of destructive prank that disables a fire extinguisher or misuses the emergency phones we have installed to provide an immediate communication line to Security for those persons who feel physically threatened and need immediate assistance or reassurance.

Another way to help others is to keep your commitment to observe our Dress and Grooming Standards. I receive many questions from students on this subject, and many letters from alumni. Some ask why we have such standards; others ask why, when we have them, we do not have one hundred percent observance. President Kimball answered most of these questions last week. Once you have promised—as you have—observance is a matter of integrity. Why is this promise a condition of enrollment? As President Kimball told us last week, BYU is “a showplace,” a “city set on an hill, which cannot be hid” (Kimball, “Integrity,” pp. 161–162). What we do here is noted far and wide.

President Kimball also expressed his approval of the fact that visitors can come to this campus and “see young men and young

women who look like men and women, who have not succumbed to the morally destructive trend toward a unisex appearance in dress and grooming." He reminded us that "if we dress like the opposite sex, we tend to lose our sexual identity or some of the graces that distinguish the eternal mission of our sex." (Kimball, "Integrity," p. 162.) Be especially watchful to observe those portions of the Dress and Grooming Standards that distinguish visibly between men and women. Men, wear your hair in a way that will not confuse you with feminine fashions. Women, dress so that your clothing will not be confused with men's apparel.

Those who come to BYU have elected, as President Kimball said, to become part of a special community that has a "special calling to represent the Church and its highest standards" (Kimball, "Integrity," p. 162). We have, in short, a sacred responsibility to conduct ourselves and to present ourselves—including our dress and grooming—so that we fulfill what President Kimball called our "special calling to represent the Church and its highest standards." If we fail to do this we have broken a covenant and failed in a sacred responsibility to help and build others, including the faithful members of the Church whose tithes support our education. Are you measuring up to that responsibility? Will you measure up all day, every day, everywhere, as long as you are a student at BYU? Please resolve that you will.

I will close with some comments on a current religious and social problem that sweeps across all of my four ingredients for success at BYU, touching worthiness, learning, working, and helping. The subject is men and women.

The scriptural account of creation tells us that God created man in his own image, "male and female created I them" (Moses 2:27; see also Genesis 1:27). The differences between men and women therefore have their origin in God's deliberate creation. There are many forces in our society that seek or tend to eradicate differences

between men and women: in laws, in matters of physical appearance, in forms of address, in cultural amenities, in ecclesiastical functions, and, at the extreme level, even in physical attributes. The leaders of our Church—the living prophets—have set their influence against these tendencies and have taught and counseled members of this Church in terms too clear to misunderstand that the attempted eradication of many of these differences is evil and threatens the appropriate relationship between the sexes and the God-ordained institution of the family.

At the same time, some efforts to do away with discrimination on the basis of sex are praiseworthy. As the First Presidency said in a recent public letter: "Women, as daughter of God, should have without discrimination every political, economic, and educational opportunity. Where there now exist deficiencies concerning these matters, they can and should be directed by specific legislation." (First Presidency to General Authorities, Regional Representatives, Stake Presidents, Mission Presidents, Bishops, and Branch Presidents in the United States, October 12, 1978.) We have not yet grappled with this problem long enough to define clearly those differences between the sexes that are merely discriminatory social customs rooted in the selfish interests of the dominant male sex, which should be changed, and those differences that are essential and eternal, which must be preserved. The subject is obviously one for continued prayerful consideration and careful attention to the teachings of our leaders.

In the meantime, what are we doing at BYU? Our Dress and Grooming Standards require some important visual differences between men and women, as already noted, but in most respects they make no distinction between the sexes. Both men and women are committed to wear clothing that is neat and clean. Both are required to avoid coming onto campus in bare feet, shorts, or immodest clothing, as well as grubby attire, which is defined

as any clothing that is ragged, torn, excessively faded, or conspicuously patched or altered to give a shabby appearance.

More importantly, we make no distinction in the educational opportunities we offer to our men and women students. Any person on this campus giving counsel that any particular major or field of study is not open on the same basis to young women and young men is doing so without authorization and directly contrary to our policies. The choice is up to you.

From the beginning of this institution, well over a hundred years ago, we have been committed to coeducation. The founder of this institution was so concerned about the education of women that on one occasion he said that he would rather educate women than men, because a woman's influence through the home and the schooling of sons and daughters would magnify the effect of her education so profoundly. Both men and women need to learn how to become effective parents; both should learn the qualities that make for a happy married life. Both need to be concerned about earning power. Young men generally assume that they will have to earn a living, and this is appropriate; but it is a mistake for young women to assume that they need not be concerned with that subject. I hope that each of us

is aware that approximately half of the young women now enrolled in this University will have to earn a living for themselves at some time in their life because they have not married, because they have been widowed, divorced, or separated, because their husband is unable to provide for them, or for some other reason.

All of the admonitions and challenges I have given can be summarized in this one overarching challenge: keep all of your commitments and make the most of all of your opportunities at BYU. Like the Savior's commandment to be perfect (see Matthew 5:48), it is an impossible challenge to achieve completely and consistently. But it is an ideal that all should seek. We merit blessings and acquire learning as we do. When we slip we should, as President Kimball admonished, use the principle of repentance, "rising again whenever we fall, brushing ourselves off, and setting off again on that upward trail" (Kimball, "Integrity," p. 164).

You are on the upward trail. You have chosen the high road, where expectations are lofty, effort is great, and blessings are unnumbered. You will succeed. We know that you can. We love you and pray our Heavenly Father's choicest blessings upon you in your righteous efforts, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.