

Invocation delivered by the
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President of the University of Notre Dame,
at the YPO Annual Convention,
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As we begin our annual meeting this year, I am indeed honored to voice for all of you a simple invocation for the blessings of Almighty God upon all of us and upon those with whom we work here and at home.

If I might particularize the specific blessings that we young presidents seek, I would ask that we be granted an abundance of those special virtues that characterize good administrators - that by God's grace and the consecrated use of our talents, we may be equal to the opportunity that is ours in these times.

First, Lord, grant us the virtue of vision. This is the virtue of ancient prophets and of old wise men. Vision is generally unusual among young men. But, we need vision most of all today, to see and appreciate the whole wide range of opportunities that are especially open to us as young presidents here in America.

Vision shows us clearly that our dealings are not merely with dollars and cents, materials and services. Our basic concern must be with people, human beings, fellow Americans. People, old and young, intelligent and stupid, handsome and ugly, rich and poor, good and bad - here our work begins and ends, has merit or fault, profit or loss.

In a sense, industry may be said to begin in the damp depths of our mines, on the green and golden plains of our vast land, in the cool shadows of our virgin forests, along our lush river valleys, and across the snowy crests of our mountain ranges. But this good earth and rich land yields only the raw and unfashioned gifts of nature - the basic minerals, foods and fibers that are wondrously transformed by man and his industry.

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It is man who brings these many gifts to light, who uses his mind and hands, with consummate skill, to perfect and produce, to fashion and to mold. And it is man who buys and sells and uses these fashioned gifts of God for the good life here on earth, a figure of life eternal. Without man, this marvelous land of America would be undiscovered, undeveloped, and unused. And God Himself would be less praised in the absence of our cheery homes, filled with the noise and laughter of happy children.

Lord, we would be failures as presidents, young or old, if we lacked this vision of how industry has helped to make America a bright and wholesome land where people are prized as our greatest resource, the inner strength of our nation. America would be an empty, cheerless place without our millions of happy, secure people, bearing proudly the dignity and likeness of sons of God.

At night, Lord, when we fly above this vast land, we see on all sides, like so many scintillating jewels in the darkness, the many communities that make up America - the twinkling lights of tiny hamlets, the sparkling suburbs, the colorful thoroughfares of our great cities, the bursts of light from our great industrial centers. Show us, Lord, that we have a part in all of this - in the warmth of good families, in the fruitful production of industry, in the order of good government - in all the joy, and security, and fulfillment of human life for all here in America.

Of old, it was slaves that quarried the rock, turned the mill, and erected against a desert sky the empty hated monuments to the few who selfishly ruled, exploiting God's gifts and God's people, so that a few might rustle in silk while millions shivered in rags. Few, too, it was who lived in marble palaces while millions grovelled in foul hovels; few were sated with delicacies while millions eked out an animal-like existence in starvation and famine.

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Such has not been and is not the vision of those who preside in America. Our greatest monument is our living society of the free, the challenge of equal opportunity, the aristocracy of talent, and ability and hard work, not of birth, or family, or race.

It is such a vision that You have placed in our hearts, O Lord, for You have fashioned us and all men after your own image and likeness, to be free, not slave, to walk with head held high, not face to earth like brute animals. Grant us, Lord, the vision to see that all we do as presidents can lift men yet higher in actual dignity. Grant us the vision to see that we can, by our deeds, grace this living monument - our free American society of men who walk with dignity while they work with us. Give us the vision to make America an ever brighter beacon in a world still darkened in too many places by unhuman slavery and human oppression.

Our balance sheets can never tell the warm story of this human aspect of our work. Let the record be written in the hearts of those who work with us and for us - who share with us the glory of making this great vision of America under God come true.

Buttress our vision, Lord, with the other virtues that must form part of our character as young presidents - if the vision of America is to be realized today and tomorrow under our guidance.

Grant us the virtue of understanding - to understand ourselves and our fellow Americans who work with us. In understanding ourselves let us see our faults as well as our virtues. Let us see that we can and do make mistakes, that we do need help from the strength and counsel and companionship of others, even though our positions are essentially lonely by nature of our being alone at the top of our organizations.

Keep far from us the stupid pride that would deceive us into seeing ourselves as self-sufficient supermen, infallible geniuses, indispensable giants. Help us remember that the best of us will be quickly replaced and soon forgotten after we die.

In understanding our fellow men and women, let us see first what we can do for them, not just what they can do for us. Help us to understand that true leadership ennobles others in leading, does not exploit others for personal selfish purposes. Help us also to understand the faults and weaknesses of those we work with, not to ridicule or overly criticize, but to help and to guide and to strengthen. Let us understand that others can be better and happier and thus more productive and fruitful in their lives if they receive the proper encouragement and guidance from us. All this is made possible by a sincere and warmly human spirit of understanding - that sees the good, the promising, the potential in everyone, not just the bad, the negative, and the weakness. Make each one of us - the understanding president - the man who builds, inspires, and truly leads.

Join this great virtue of understanding with the consequent virtues of humility and patience - humility that we may see ourselves as we are, not better, but no worse either. Let us be neither overbearing nor pessimistic, but just able to live patiently with the reality of ourselves as we are, doing all we can today, but able to put off some things for tomorrow, and still to sleep soundly tonight.

Let these virtues of humility and patience characterize our dealings with others, too, Lord, so that they will not find us always on a throne of our own supposed perfection, or just emerging from the pit of despondency. Grant us the balance to be what we are, patient with what we find in ourselves and in others around us, willing to live patiently with the inevitable mistakes of others because we have learned to live with our own failings.

Help us to do all this and still improve, Lord. And when we have done all that we reasonably can do with ourselves and with those around us, then let us honestly and humbly recognize what we cannot do, and let us be patient enough to live with that reality and still begin another day without envy, or rancor, or discontent. And let us be grateful for what we are, and for the people who work with us - for while we and they might be better, we and they could also be much worse. Let us always remember the unhappy man without shoes, who felt sorry for himself, until he saw another man without feet. In our gratitude, let us particularly remember those we love and those that love us.

Lord, there are two other virtues we need if we are to lead as we should and as the times demand: the virtues of integrity and courage. Grant us the personal integrity to recognize always what is right and just, and fill us with the moral courage always to do what is right and just, even though this might be unpopular and difficult and even costly.

Our elders have not always given us good example in this, Lord. Too often the business decision has reflected the expedient, or the obviously profitable, or the easy way out - without reference to whether it was also the just or the right thing to do. We are always under pressure to follow the line of least resistance, Lord. We all like to be popular. We do have to balance the budget and to show a profit - but give us that rare kind of courage that reflects integrity - the courage to look behind popularity and profit to the most important aspect of any transaction - what is right and just in the situation. Once we have decided that question, Lord, give us the courage to follow through, no matter what the pressures in any other direction, for any other reason.

And give us the ancient wisdom to know, Lord, that in business or in any other human endeavor, integrity and courage are the best reputation we can have among men, for honest and courageous men have no price on their souls and no fear in their hearts.

If we always do courageously what is right and what is just, our profit will, in the long run, be beyond dollars and cents, but will include them too. Our popularity will be based on something more solid than our ability to cut corners, and our services will be in demand whenever something really important and difficult is at stake.

As young presidents, Lord, we have even greater need for these virtues of integrity and courage. We need them so that even older people below us can look up to us with pride and confidence, and can be happy to follow us, not deterred because of our age, since what we stand for is ageless and priceless in any age.

Lord, we have asked for a lot of virtues here, but really all we are asking for is one thing - the character we need to do our jobs - the vision to see our opportunities, the understanding to see ourselves and others as we are, the humility to live and work with ourselves and others as we are, the patience to be satisfied with what can be done in a human way, the integrity to see what is right and just, and the courage to be men of integrity no matter what the difficulty involved.

Suppose you grant us all these virtues, Lord, what profit will there be in us? Maybe not a lot, Lord, but surely some. Surely, with all of these qualities, and with so many of us in positions at the top of so many enterprises, some good should result for a great number of people and for America. We ask You only to give us a chance, Lord. We are young enough not to be stodgy, stuff-shirted, and ultra-conservative. We are new enough at this president business not to be deeply rutted in bad habits and stubbornly backward attitudes. And finally, Lord, we have enough youthful energy and enough of the idealism and optimism of youth to commit ourselves to the best in business - the broadest range of our opportunity for the good of America.

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Grant that beyond the economic good of our people, we may have a hand in achieving also the spiritual good, the community good, the political good, the human good of all our people.

Many people depend upon us, Lord. We would just like to say tonight that we, too, depend upon You - upon your guidance, to see, your grace, to do, and upon your blessing that alone can fully fructify our efforts.

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