

# COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS GIVEN AT Keller Graduate School of Management, Milwaukee Center, Milwaukee, WI, USA (June 6, 2003)

**“Life is a journey, enjoy the ride and make a difference”.**

(Reprinted with permission from Quality Engineering, Vol. 16, No. 3, Marcel Dekker, Inc., NY., March 2004)

**By Manu K. Vora, Ph. D., MBA**

(Business Excellence, Inc. P. O. Box 5585, Naperville, IL 60567-5585. E-mail: manuvora@b-einc.com )

From my life's journey, I would like to reflect upon several observations:

## **1. Be Positive and Self-confident**

HERE ARE SOME KEY ideas from the *Optimist's Creed* – promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. You should think only of the best, to work only for the best, and expect only the best. You should be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble. The current job market may be on the minds of some of you, and it is a valid concern. However, focus on your talents and strengths. *Believe in yourself and go after your goals, as the sky is the limit!*

## **2. Be Ready to Help Others**

We should be just as excited about the success of others as we are about our own. We must do everything possible to make all our friends feel that there is something in them. Recognize others for their achievements and contributions. Let me share an example from my undergraduate days from India. With a nine-month study cycle, I used to devote the first eight months for study, preparing notes, solving the previous years' exam questions, etc. I would keep the ninth month open before the final exam to work with others in my class of 60 fellow students. I would share my notes with my friends. When anyone had a difficult question, he would come to me. By working with individuals on difficult questions, I gained a lot in problem solving skills and that helped me to do better on the final exam for myself. What a reward! As *Confucius* has said, “*He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own*”.

## **3. Continue to Improve and Renew Yourself**

You should give so much time for the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others. You should forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. *Take control of what you can, let God have the rest!*

## **4. Ethical Leadership**

In the recent past we have witnessed a world full of corporate scandals such as Enron, Global Crossing, Worldcom, etc. It is apparent that lack of ethical leadership is one of the root causes of this phenomenon. All of us as leaders in our area have a special obligation to be ethical. Our parents taught us the ethics to start with. We need to continue to learn and reflect within an organization to be ethical in all our dealings with customers, suppliers, fellow employees, and other stakeholders. Let us hold each other responsible and accountable for ethical leadership.

## 5. Learn, Apply, and Share your Knowledge

The management field gets richer as we learn new concepts from others who have practiced them. Then and only then are we able to introduce those concepts in our area as applicable. The key to success is sharing your knowledge with others. According to *Aristotle*, ***“With regard to excellence, it is not enough to know, but we must try to have and use it”***. Learning is a process, not a goal. Each new insight creates another layer of potential insights.

## 6. Maintain the Balance between Work and Family

Life is not about work! Work is only necessary to keep us living so as to enjoy the beauty and pleasures of life. Life is a balance of work and play, family and personal time. You define your priorities. Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim of human existence. Life is short; do not take it for granted. Watch your thoughts, as they become words. Watch your words, as they become actions. Watch your actions, as they become habits. Watch your habits, as they become character. Watch your character, as it becomes your destiny.

## 7. Make a Difference

According to the late *John F. Kennedy*, ***“For those to whom much is given, much is required.”*** This is especially true of all of us present here. From my travels through four Continents, I am convinced that we have an opportunity to make the entire world a better place. To do this effectively, we all need to be life-long learners and teachers. Remember, *Mother Teresa* aptly said, ***“We can do no great things, only small things, with great love.”*** We are the torchbearers of management knowledge and the whole world is counting on us.

## 8. Power of Expectations

Let me share a short story on the power of expectations. Imagine we are all in my eighth grade mathematics class. We had just finished a chapter and were reviewing a problem set at the end of the chapter. Then we came to a difficult problem. The teacher started going around the class asking each of the students to solve it. The class seating was by last names, so I was number 27 in a class of 30. When my turn came, the teacher made a comment, “I know you can solve this problem; however, I will come back to you after everyone else gets a chance to solve it first.” That meant 3 other students would try and then I would have my turn again. Honestly, I was scared, as I did not know the answer when my turn came the first time. However, when the teacher came back to me, I had just figured out the solution. My real learning was that this teacher had so much faith in me as well as high expectations of me. How could I let him down? I truly believe in *Norman Vincent Peale*’s observation: ***“I expect the best and with god’s help will attain the best”***. Over the years, I have been very fortunate to work with many leaders, professors, and teachers who always had high expectations of me. I have also learned to set high expectations for members of my team and family.

*Enjoy today -- as yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift, that is why they call it the present!* Take a few moments to smell the roses, as it is soothing for your mind, body, and soul.

In closing, I would like to congratulate all of you again for your achievements at the Keller Graduate School of Management. Now go out and enjoy life's journey while making a difference. The world is waiting for you to make your mark. God bless you all!

**Biographical Sketch:**

Dr. Manu Vora is Chairman and President of Business Excellence, Inc., a global quality management consulting services firm. Manu has B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. in chemical engineering and an MBA with marketing management. He is ASQ Fellow, CQE, Grant Medallist, and past Vice President with ASQ Board of Directors.