

PASSION AND ETHICS

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In a complex and all too often tragic world, it is useful to consider some comments from a great statesman as he guided his nation through even worse prospects than those we see today. Speaking about an adversary nation, he remarked: "...they are being taught from childhood to think of war and conquest as a glorious exercise, and death in battle as the noblest fate for man." On another occasion he said of Europe: "...there are those who say...let us leave it with its hatreds and its armaments to stew in its own juice, to fight out its own quarrels and cause its own doom."

The statesman was Winston Churchill, gravely worried about Nazi Germany in the 1930s. And he was passionate in opposing the policy of appeasement that encouraged Adolph Hitler to ignite one of history's most devastating wars.

I am not an advocate of going to war; I believe few soldiers are. My objective is to point out that history presents unforeseen and massive problems to each succeeding generation. But there are also opportunities to take action with the same passion against the root causes of man's terrible recurring miscalculations throughout history.

Those who fought and won World War II gave my generation an immeasurable gift, a gift not only of victory in war but in peace as well. In an unprecedented break with the historical behavior of military victors, the U.S. initiated the Marshall Plan to restore the vanquished in Europe, while also creating a vibrant democracy in Japan. These were tasks similar to our present goals in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, goals that are so fashionable to criticize and suggest will be unattainable.

Nearly 50 years ago, I chose a military career (quite accidentally) and then embarked on a second business career. My youth was also a time of war, of intense global competition, and of terrible weapons and adversarial philosophies. Fortunately, many of us were determined to find a way to avoid the possible end of mankind. My generation didn't do too badly. We defeated Communism without a nuclear war. We helped lead an unprecedented leap in science and economic progress worldwide.

Now it is up to the generations more recently embarked on life and careers, the young people who must deal with this unbalanced and seemingly unstable world. But what opportunities there are for those who embrace the challenge of bringing about positive change, especially through advances in science and technology!

Here are just a few specifics that fascinate me:

Our growing knowledge of genetics, along with other breakthroughs in medical and biological science, promise to conquer the worst of today's diseases and continue to extend the human lifespan. Yet we will benefit fully from these gains only if we achieve global stability and eradicate the hate-based conflict that occurs in so many places (sometimes even in our own streets and neighborhoods).

I believe our reliance on carbon-based energy will give way to hydrogen, wind and solar energy, transforming the world's economies. But if we do not lift up certain parts of the world as this happens, including the Middle East, they will tragically lose their only economic foundation. The timeline for fostering political liberty, education, economic progress, and all the ingredients that can give people there a stake in the future will become more compelling with each step toward independence from oil.

Lastly, I'd like to mention a revolution that's already well underway, but one which few of us sufficiently grasp. This is the marriage of cheap and ubiquitous computing with universal telecommunications, technology that carries the hope for creating understanding among people as well as far-flung, cooperative progress.

So while the challenges facing those who have recently completed their education are great, the capabilities for resolving the problems we all face are clearly there. Everyone who has worked to realize his or her personal potential through education has taken the first vital step. I urge you to always search for more knowledge, more wisdom, and more perspective.

I also urge you to use what you learn with passion and an abiding sense of ethics.

When you encounter problems, bring a full measure of passion to achieving your objectives. When you have to contend with the often daunting demands of leadership, approach being a leader with passion. Many times, only passion provides the energy to overcome the problems placed before us.

But in addition to passion for life and for a better future, you will need something else — a rudder with which to steer your efforts. The only rudder that can be relied upon in any problem, large or small, is that of good, consistent ethics. With passion and ethics you will win for yourselves, for your families, for your countries, and for mankind. ■

