

Eagle Scouts: Moving Along the Winning Path

by

**Albert J. Simone
President**

Rochester Institute of Technology

**Keynote Address
Otetiana Council Eagle Scout Dinner**

January 11, 2007

**Rochester Riverside Convention Center
Rochester, New York**

Table of Contents

	Page
I. DID YOU KNOW?	1
II. AN ELITE GROUP OF WINNERS	1
III. WINNING OVER A LIFETIME	2
A. Integrity	2
B. Learning	4
C. Leading Through Service	4
D. Focus	5
E. Preparation	6
F. Giving 100 Percent	7
G. Putting It All Together	8
IV. WINNING AFTER LIFE	8
V. CONCLUSION	10

DID YOU KNOW?

Eleven of the 12 moonwalkers were scouts. Jim Lovell was an Eagle Scout and he was one of only three individuals to participate on two moonwalk missions. Only 3% of scouts ever achieve the status of Eagle Scout. Many distinguished and illustrious individuals are Eagle Scouts. The long list includes:

- United States President Gerald Ford
- Trumpet player Winton Marsalis
- Walmart founder, Sam Walton
- Movie producer/director Steven Spielberg

Interestingly, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, is not an Eagle Scout. However, his father, Bob, is an Eagle Scout.

The best of the best Eagle Scouts, after being an Eagle Scout for at least 25 years, are named Distinguished Eagle Scouts. These are people who have achieved significant success in their field and have an outstanding record of community service. Jim Lovell is a Distinguished Eagle Scout. Just a few moments ago, you were introduced to and heard from the Otetiana Council's two most recent Distinguished Eagle Scouts: the brothers Frank Steenburgh and Bill Steenburgh.

The Steenburgh family raised six boys, Frank, Bill, and four others. All six are Eagle Scouts. What a record! As Frank and Bill (especially Bill) openly admitted, the unofficial "Super" Eagle Scout in the Steenburgh family is their mother, who also sent some remarks for this occasion which Bill graciously relayed.

AN ELITE GROUP OF WINNERS

There are 103 Eagle Scouts from the 2006 class here this evening. Collectively, you are an elite group of champions. At this state of your life, you are winners. What is a winner? I answer this question by drawing from the thoughts of my very close friend and valued colleague, Barry Culhane, Executive Assistant to the President of RIT. According to Barry:

The Winner is always a part of the answer.
The Loser is always a part of the problem.

The Winner always has a program.
The Loser always has an excuse.

The Winner says, "Let me do that for you."
The Loser says, "That's not my job."

The Winner sees an answer for every problem.
The Loser sees a problem for every answer.

The Winner sees a green near every sand trap.
The Loser sees three sand traps near the green.

The Winner says, “It may be difficult, but it’s possible.”
The Loser says, “It may be possible, but it’s too difficult.”

Today you are winners. I congratulate all of you Eagle Scouts for your remarkable accomplishments to-date. I know your parents and members of the Otetiana Council are proud of you and of what you have accomplished so far in your lives.

The next important question for you is: What does it take to remain a winner over the course of your life? That is, while you are a winner today, what do you have to do to be a winner tomorrow and the day after? I shall discuss the answer in the next section.

WINNING OVER A LIFETIME

There are six attributes which are necessary if you are to be a winner over the course of your lives. These attributes are:

- Integrity
- Learning
- Leading Through Service
- Focus
- Preparation
- Giving 100 Percent

Integrity

When I was president of the University of Hawaii, I was asked by one of the two daily newspapers to be the Keynote Speaker for an Annual Award Banquet in which the valedictorians from each of the high schools across the state were recognized. Hundreds of people were present at the banquet since the valedictorians were invited to bring their parents and siblings as well as high school principals and key teachers in their lives.

Preparing a keynote speech for a group such as this was a formidable challenge – just as preparing remarks for you Eagle Scouts this evening is a formidable challenge. Back in Hawaii, I asked the same question that I asked of myself a couple of weeks ago as I prepared these remarks: What could I possibly communicate to this outstanding group of individuals that would be of value? In the case of the valedictorians in Hawaii, it was clear that they were brilliant and hardworking, and that they had the support of family, friends, and teachers (just like you Eagle Scouts). Then a thought occurred to me.

I asked my assistant to review the morning and evening daily newspapers for the past two weeks, searching for examples of violations of ethics and integrity. Always at the top of my list for success in life is the basic attribute of integrity. For me, integrity means saying what you mean and meaning what you say at all times; never lying, stealing, or cheating; keeping your word; being trustworthy and honest; and being a person of honor.

As I suspected, in every edition of both newspapers every day, there was a story – sometimes large and sometimes small – of an individual who had been unethical. These individuals included medical doctors, lawyers, business people, professors, college presidents, priests and clergy, heads of charitable organizations, teachers, and the list goes on. I then asked my assistant to look into the backgrounds of the individuals named.

What we found was that in nearly every case, the history of these individuals showed that they were brilliant, that they had a phenomenal work ethic, and every step along the way they had the support of family, teachers, and colleagues. Yet, now they saw themselves accused of malfeasance and unethical and even criminal behavior, they saw themselves on trial in courts of law, and some of them saw themselves in jail. In each case, they and their families suffered extreme embarrassment and humiliation. Their lives were forever tainted, if not ruined. All the good that they had accomplished over their lives was now forgotten and they would be forever remembered as individuals who strayed.

Things have not changed one iota, it seems, since my study of approximately 17 years ago. We have current examples of Enron, World-Com, Tyco International, Cendant and numerous others in the newspapers within the last week. We have examples of individuals locally (i.e., Rochester), state-wide (Controller), and nationally (U.S. Congress). These people who are being reported on in the *Democrat and Chronicle* and other media also have a history of being smart, hard workers, with support from family and friends throughout life.

What does all this mean for you? It means that at various stops along the way in your journey through life, you will come to a branch in the road which represents an ethical dilemma and challenge. The branch you take can define your life. What I can offer you is this advice: Always do what you truly believe is right, fair, and just; do not take the easy road if it is not the right road; be strong when temptation calls.

How do you prepare for this? It is hard to say. We offer full-fledged courses at RIT in ethics in the E. Philip Saunders College of Business, in the B. Thomas Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences, and in the College of Liberal Arts. Each of the other colleges includes topics of ethics in their curricula. We have adopted a campus-wide honor code and are developing an ethics across the curriculum program.

Aside from what we might be doing at RIT, each of you Eagle Scouts has had the opportunity to learn from the examples and the teachings of your parents, teachers, ministers, and Scout Leaders. Fundamentally, however, doing the right thing is something that is within each of you. Although we can talk about it, and talk about it intensely, I do not believe it can be taught. Instinctively, you know what is right and fair and just.

Perhaps the best test that I can offer you is this. Whenever you come to that branch in the road, ask yourself, if you were the individual who was to be affected by a decision made by someone else, how would you want that decision made? I am sure you would want that decision made honestly, without bias, prejudice, or in the selfish self-interest of the

decision-maker. In short, treat people the way you would like to be treated. Make the decision that you can live with and explain with pride to anyone who might ask at any time.

Integrity is the most important defining characteristic of any human being. It defines who you are. It cannot be taught. It can be thought about. You have to feel it.

I have every confidence that you will know the proper branch to take when you come to this part of your journey and, moreover, that you will take that path. If you do, you can be a winner. If you do not, you can never win.

Learning

Right now, you are all in high school and most of you are preparing for college. You have been learning every day of your life for the past sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen years. And you have learned well, and that is why you are a winner today. But if you want to continue to be a winner over your lifetime, you have to continue to learn every day of your life over your full life. My favorite way of expressing this thought is to quote Confucius:

“Learn while you are young, lest you grow to be an old fool, for youth is such that it cannot endure.”

Right now and over the next several years, you will be able to assimilate knowledge at a faster rate per unit of time than probably at any other time in your life. Take full advantage of this opportunity. Stockpile knowledge. Make learning a habit and a condition of your life going forward. When that time comes when you are not really “old” but rather just “older”, like my good friend Frank Steenburgh sitting right here in front of me, you still will be winning.

Leading Through Service

Winners are called upon to lead. But not all leaders are winners. To be a winning leader you have to be compassionate and humble. You have to recognize that *the true test of leadership is service to the people you lead.*

This idea of the “servant-leader” can lead to paradoxes. Interestingly, these paradoxes define the servant-leader. I offer you some of these paradoxes, as described in Tim Hansel’s 1987 book, *Holy Sweat*.

Specifically, a servant-leader is:

STRONG ENOUGH TO BE WEAK
SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH TO FAIL
BUSY ENOUGH TO MAKE TIME
WISE ENOUGH TO SAY: “I DON’T KNOW”

SERIOUS ENOUGH TO LAUGH
RICH ENOUGH TO BE POOR
RIGHT ENOUGH TO SAY: "I'M WRONG"
COMPASSIONATE ENOUGH TO DISCIPLINE
MATURE ENOUGH TO BE CHILDLIKE
IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO BE LAST
PLANNED ENOUGH TO BE SPONTANEOUS
CONTROLLED ENOUGH TO BE FLEXIBLE
FREE ENOUGH TO ENDURE CAPTIVITY
KNOWLEDGEABLE ENOUGH TO ASK QUESTIONS
LOVING ENOUGH TO BE ANGRY
GREAT ENOUGH TO BE ANONYMOUS
RESPONSIBLE ENOUGH TO PLAY
ASSURED ENOUGH TO BE REJECTED
VICTORIOUS ENOUGH TO LOSE
INDUSTRIOUS ENOUGH TO RELAX
LEADING ENOUGH TO SERVE

Focus

A winner has to focus. That means setting goals, establishing objectives, developing strategies, all consistent with a vision and mission. Focus requires more than thinking about and writing down goals, objectives, strategies, and missions. It requires resilience, persistence, and stick-to-itiveness. The focus is always in view and the winner cannot be deterred from working tirelessly to achieve the mission.

One way to think of the intensity and commitment entailed in a winning focus is illustrated in the following story. I picked this story because of Jared Bennett, an Eagle Scout who is here tonight. Jared is my mentoree and I enjoyed very much our conversation over dinner. Jared is an honor student at Greece Odyssey High School and an All-County lacrosse player. He is considering several colleges at this time. He does know that his major will be Print Journalism. I picked this example because of Jared and the professional career for which he is preparing. The story goes like this.

Al Neuharth, who was then Chairman of the Board of the Gannett Company, tells the story about newspaper editors. I bring this up because Jared, whose favorite subject is English (followed closely by his second favorite subject which is History), will probably – unless he wins a Pulitzer Prize – rise to the rank of newspaper editor (since he is a winner). That, of course, will require focus. Al Neuharth's story talks about the relentless focus of newspaper editors in the following way.

Editors were asked to speculate on how the *ultimate story* would be reported in their papers. The first question is: "What is the "ultimate story"? The answer is "the end of the world". Well, here we go:

- In the *New York Times*, the headline might read: **“World Ends. Third World Countries Hardest Hit.”**
- The *Wall Street Journal* would note: **“World Ends. Stock Exchange Halts Trading Early.”**
- The *Washington Post* would proclaim: **“World Ends. White House Ignored Early warnings, Unnamed Sources Say.”**
- And Neuharth’s own *USA Today* would note cheerfully: **“We’re dead. State-by-State Demise on Page 8A. Final, Final sports Results on Page 10C.”**

While focus is an essential attribute of winners (as noted in the headlines above), I nonetheless offer this caution to Jared and the rest of you Eagle Scouts about focus: Do not go overboard. While focus is critical, do not let it overtake your overall and proper perspective of life in general. While strong focus is necessary to win, at the same time, it has to be kept in balance and under control.

Preparation

Eagle Scouts, of course, know all about “being prepared.” Since this has been drilled into you ever since you were a Cub Scout, I will skip the standard rationale and try to make the point in a humorous fashion. The point is that while you must always be prepared, the most important thing to be prepared for is the situation for which you cannot prepare. What do I mean by that? Think of yourself, and what follows, as the person who receives the following comments and must react. I doubt that there is any preparation for what you are about to hear – nonetheless, you must be prepared:

- “I’m going to graduate on time, no matter how long it takes.” Senior basketball player at the University of Pittsburgh.
- “You guys line up alphabetically by height.” Bill Peterson, a Florida State football coach.
- “You guys pair up in groups of three, then line up in a circle.” Bill Peterson, the same Florida State football coach.
- 1992 – Pat Williams, Orlando Magic general manager, on his team’s 7-27 record: “We can’t win at home. We can’t win on the road. As general manager, I just can’t figure out where else to play.”
- 1991 – Frank Layden, Utah Jazz president, on a former player: “I told him, ‘Son, what is it with you? Is it ignorance or apathy?’ He said, ‘Coach, I don’t know and I don’t care.’”

- 1987 – Shelby Metcalf, basketball coach at Texas A&M, recounting what he told a player who received four F’s and one D: “Son, looks to me like you’re spending too much time on one subject.”

The lesson from the above is that you should always be prepared, recognizing that in some situations in which you will find yourselves, it is impossible to be prepared. In this case, you just grin and bear it.

Giving 100 Percent

What does it mean to give 100 percent? My training and education is as a mathematical economist. I like to build mathematical, statistical, and computer models of situations in the economic, management, and social arenas to arrive at quantitative solutions. So let me apply this approach – fashioned and fine-tuned over a lifetime – to answering this question. Let us do a little one-to-one correspondence.

Specifically, let us take the alphabet. There are 26 letters from A to Z. Let us assign a numerical quantity to each of these numbers using an arithmetic progression which increments by one. In particular, we will assign the number 1 to A, number 2 to B, ..., 25 to Y, and 26 to Z. This is represented as follows:

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z is represented as:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26.**

Armed with this model, let us try to answer the question of what does it mean to give 100%? How about “Hard work”? Let us test it.

H-A-R-D-W-O-R-K

$$8+1+18+4+23+15+18+11 = 98\%$$

That does not work, it only accounts for 98%. Let us try “knowledge”:

K-N-O-W-L-E-D-G-E

$$11+14+15+23+12+5+4+7+5 = 96\%$$

That is even worse, since that only totals 96%. Let us try “attitude”:

A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E

$$1+20+20+9+20+21+4+5 = 100\%$$

We have it. Giving 100% means having the right attitude.

The right attitude is getting up when you get knocked down. It is smiling on the outside when you are hurting on the inside. It is believing and acting as if the glass is always half full and never half empty. It is “can do”. It is “never give up”. It is treating people with

respect, that is, treating people the way you would like to be treated. If you have that attitude, you can win. Without this attitude, you can never be a winner.

Putting It All Together

You cannot be a winner if you exhibit just one or a few of the six attributes I have described above. You have to put them all together. All of them have to be present. You have to be defined in terms of these six attributes. If these attributes are who you are and you are these attributes, and you live your life in this fashion every day, you will truly be a winner every day. These days add up to being a winner throughout your life.

Let us talk about this last statement a little bit more.

WINNING OVER A LIFETIME

You are a winner today. We have talked about what you have to do to be a winner tomorrow and the day after, and the day after that. The real test, however, comes at the end of your life when you look back. It is then that you will really know if you have been a winner. You have adopted the six attributes I have described and tried to practice and live them every day. But did it really work out? Ralph Waldo Emerson, the early 19th century philosopher, gives us, I believe, a tremendous insight into the answer to this question. I believe you can think of yourself as a winner if, at the end of your life, you can say the following about yourself:

“To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

In the above quote, the last sentence is: “This is to have succeeded.” In the context of what we have been discussing tonight, I would substitute for that sentence: “This is to be a winner”. What about winning after life?

WINNING AFTER LIFE

We have been alternating being serious with having a little fun. The last section was kind of serious, so before I try to summarize everything, let us get a little bit on the light side. Specifically, let us go to my favorite sport, which is baseball. I would like to follow up on the question of being a winner after life.

You are a winner now. You have been a winner along your life’s journey. You have passed the test at the end of your life according to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Is that all there is?

As a winner, I would hope you would want more. What is it like to be a winner after life? Let me offer you this insight by telling you another story. Again, I borrow this story from my colleague Barry Culhane.

Two 91-year-old men, Moe and Sam, have been friends all their lives. They grew up next door to each other. When they were three year's old, they were playing baseball in their back yards. They went through grade school together playing sand lot ball, and they played together on their high school baseball team. They went to college together and played on their college baseball team. They got married and lived in the same town, two streets apart. In their twenties, they played fast-pitch baseball in the town league. Then they played fast-pitch softball. Then when they were in their 50's and 60's, they played slow-pitch softball. They loved baseball and it was the common fabric that connected them throughout their entire lives.

Years have passed. It seems that Sam is dying, and Moe comes to visit him every day. "Sam", says Moe, "You know how we have both loved baseball all of our lives, and how we played minor league ball for so many years. Sam, you have to do me one favor. When you get to Heaven, and I know you will go to Heaven, somehow you've got to let me know if there's baseball in Heaven."

Sam looks up at Moe from his deathbed, and says, "Moe, you've been my best friend many years. This favor, if it is at all possible, I'll do for you." Shortly after that, Sam passes on.

It is midnight a couple of nights later. Moe is sound asleep when he is awakened by a blinding flash of white light and a voice calls out to him, "Moe. Moe..."

"Who is it?" says Moe sitting up suddenly. "Who is it?" "Moe, it's me, Sam." "Come on. You're not Sam. Sam just died." "I'm telling you," insists the voice. "It's me, Sam!" "Sam? Is that you? Where are you?"

"I'm in Heaven," says Sam, "and I've got to tell you, I've got really good news and a little bad news."

"So, tell me the good news first," says Moe.

"The good news," says Sam, "is that there is baseball in Heaven. Better yet, all our old buddies who've gone before us are there (well, not really "all", some didn't make it.) Better yet, we're all young men again. Better yet, it's always springtime and it never rains or snows. And best of all, we can play baseball all we want, and we never get tired, and the fields are manicured and we always get a good bounce!" "Really?" says Moe.

"That is fantastic, wonderful beyond my wildest dreams! But, what's the bad news?"

"You're pitching next Tuesday."

The moral of this story is that a true winner thinks about winning and prepares to win not only today, and not only over a lifetime. A true winner is thinking about winning forever.

CONCLUSION

Let me summarize as follows:

- You are an elite group.
- You should be proud. I know your parents are proud. Your Scoutmasters are proud. I am proud.
- You are on a winning path.
- You can stay on that winning path if you demonstrate:
 - Integrity
 - Learning
 - Leadership Through Service
 - Focus
 - Preparation
 - Giving 100 percent
- Integrate the above attributes over a lifetime and allow them to define you.
- Think about how you want to be remembered.
- Believe that you will be a winner forever.

Eagle Scouts: Congratulations to you all. It has been my honor and privilege to have this opportunity to have this conversation with you. Good luck in all of your future endeavors over the exciting and challenging years that lie ahead.