

Vital Speeches Of The Day

November 1995

Pages 61-62

1 of 3

Making A Difference In A Changing World

THE CUSTOMER DESERVES NOTHING LESS THAN YOUR BEST

By HAVEN COCKERHAM, *Vice President, Human Resources, Detroit Edison*

*Delivered to the Career Awareness Program at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina
September 12, 1995*

Dr. Welborne, thank you for that introduction and making me feel so welcome. Detroit Edison appreciates the opportunity to participate in North Carolina A&T's 21st Annual Career Program and I congratulate Chancellor Fort, Leon Warren and Aquarius Moore for making it such a success.

I am delighted to be here and to see your beautiful campus and the excellent academic training it provides. I was born and raised in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Greensboro still feels like home. It is hard for me to believe that it has been more than a quarter of a century since I was here, studying business and economics. I was a student during a turbulent time, a decade that brought us the Vietnam War, the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X — and possibly the beginning of the most rapid and unceasing period of change in America. I would hope that my comments tonight will leave a message for students! as well as business and government leaders who must shoulder the responsibility of managing change well into the future.

I graduated from A&T State University in 1969, the year the United States first landed on the moon. Of course, as I prepared for final exams, I couldn't help wondering what on earth I would do in the coming years. —was I ready for the responsibilities that lie ahead? Would I get a good job? Get married? Raise a family?

To the students in the audience: you probably ask yourselves some of the same questions. I know that your careers are just as important to you as mine is to me. I'm here to tell you that your future will exceed your greatest expectations if you put your heart and mind into any job you are given. Use all your talents. You will succeed if you have confidence in your abilities and remember that you were given your own special talents to benefit others as well as yourselves.

I want to share a story about someone who was born on this day (Sept. 12) in 1913. Although he died in 1980, Jesse Owens is someone worth remembering. As a student athlete from Ohio State, Jesse Owens represented the United States during the 1936 Olympics. Imagine the discrimination that Jesse faced that year in Berlin. Adolf Hitler had publicly vilified him and the nine other black athletes on the American team. Hitler called them "inferior" but, of course, they were not. That year the United States took 12 first-place awards, more than all the other 52 nations put together.

Jesse Owens ran on the winning 400-meter relay team and won the running broad jump. He ran the 100-meter dash in a

record 10.2 seconds and also set a new record for the 200-meter race. The crowd roared when Jesse Owens crossed the finish line in 20.7 seconds. Millions of people worldwide recognized that he had excelled. Jesse Owens won four gold medals in field and track, and he helped the American team set new world records. His team was the stronger because of its diversity, and because he overcame prejudice and gave his personal best. Jesse Owens and the rest of the American track and field team showed they had what it takes to be "world class"

U.S. companies today are also striving to be world class. Business must overcome many new hurdles. In today's global economy being "world class" is, what it takes to remain competitive and to prosper. That's the only way U.S. business can continue providing good jobs and a high standard of living.

I worked in the automobile industry for 20 years of my career. So I speak with first-hand knowledge when I talk about global competition. The people who came into my auto dealership in Newberry, South Carolina, wanted to buy the best car for their money. It was up to me and to the other people working for me and for General Motors to make sure that our customers decided that the "best" vehicle was a Chevrolet or an Oldsmobile.

Since we are all consumers ourselves it is easy to understand why people want to get "a lot for the money." we all want the most for our money and, more importantly, we want to provide the best possible lifestyles for our families. We shop for the best value in all our purchases.

Whether we are in business for ourselves or work for someone else, we should never forget that — like us — our customers expect the most for their hard-earned dollars. That's what I mean when I said that we must put our hearts into our work.

Each of us must give our best if our companies are to succeed. If we are not willing to give our best, there is someone else out there who will. If not someone else in our company, then someone elsewhere in the country or the world.

A French author recently gave this analogy: Executives are like joggers because they never stop running.

I can't tell you from personal experience that is true. Before joining Detroit Edison, I climbed the corporate ladder at General Motors and owned and operated an automobile dealership and my own management consulting firm. I've given my best, and I've never stopped running. In business, the target we call the "best is" constantly moving.

We all want better products and services, and we all must

Vital Speeches Of The Day

November 1995

Pages 61-62

2 of 3

strive to look for better ways to do things, to continually improve and to achieve more than has been achieved in the past—just like Jesse Owens set those world records.

This century has brought technological change that people could not even imagine in 1969 when I was an undergraduate student. IBM didn't invent the computer floppy disk until the following year. Today computers allow us to work at amazing speed and exceed what once were our highest expectations. We can use the computer Internet, or World Wide Web, to share information with people around the world in less time than it took Jesse Owens to run the 100 meter dash.

Here is an example of just how fast the pace of change is in today's society. Research has shown that fast food customers will become restless standing in line at McDonald's for 30 seconds. Just think. That's not much longer than it took Jesse Owens in 1936 to win a gold medal for the 200-meter dash.

Similarly, electricity consumers expect more today than ever before. If a storm knocks down a power line and people lose electricity, they want to quickly find out how soon the power will be restored. Business customers putting in new service or upgrading existing service demand immediate attention.

My company, Detroit Edison has developed state-of-the-art computer systems to get information from and to our customers more quickly. Our systems also allow us to provide better quality information and to offer new services to help our customers become more efficient so they can compete more effectively in a global marketplace.

For instance, we're helping to bring Lon Works computer chips to commercial use. These, chips can be placed into our customers' existing electrical wiring to allow them to automatically control their appliances and equipment at their homes and businesses. New technology means better service for Detroit Edison customers. Our company and its subsidiaries also are selling this technology to other businesses throughout the country.

Technological advances offer new challenges for company employees. For example, the employees working in our computer group all are doing different jobs today than they were just four years ago.

Similar changes are under way in all areas of Detroit Edison. Employees are reinventing their jobs as the company re-engineers itself to provide better service to all our customers. We can't afford to stand still. Competition is coming to the electric utility industry just as it did a few years ago to the telecommunications industry.

To succeed in our new environment, our employees and leaders must have seven qualities. These seven characteristics are at the heart of any successful team.

These same seven qualities also are essential for career success so I want to help you to remember them. Close your eyes for a moment. Picture yourself tasting a shiny red apple that is so good that your mouth waters and you want to eat the fruit to the core. Now picture a FTD delivery truck pulling in front of your home and delivering a dozen long-stemmed red roses. I

want you to use these mental pictures as a mnemonic device to recall the words CORE and FTD. It will be easy to remember the seven attributes of a successful team if you spell out these two words.

First, the C in Core reminds us of our customers and that they have choices as to how to spend their money. How do we show that we care about our customers? Do we demonstrate that we are concerned about satisfying all their needs? Do we listen carefully to better understand what they really want?

We all have customers. We all have to sell something. We all sell ourselves. So being customer driven can help you right now. For instance, if you are looking for a job, you must convince recruiters that you have the skills the company needs. How do you do that? By researching companies and finding ones that match your abilities. Talk to people. Learn more about the company that you want to work for so that you can put your focus on how you might help it. Show your initiative. Find new ways to convince managers that you are the best person for the job. After all, in this example, the company is the customer that you want to buy your service.

Remember, the C in Core stands for Customer driven, an important quality of, any successful team and any successful individual.

The letter O in the acronym Core stands for Optimism. No matter how bleak the situation, we must never give up hope.

That message comes out clearly in the book, The Diary of a Young Girl. Anne Frank was a teenager whose family went into hiding in Holland because of the oppression that Jews suffered during Hitler's reign. This teenager's diary had a huge effect on our world. Even today, five decades after her death in a German concentration camp, Anne Frank is remembered for her overwhelming optimism.

A positive outlook can help people change tragedy into triumph. Candy Lichtner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving in 1980 after her teenager daughter died in a traffic accident involving a drunk driver. Lichtner also, organized Students Against Drunk Driving. These two national organizations have changed the way people think about drinking and driving. They have saved countless lives.

Successful people think in terms of opportunities, The celebrate their successes. They also recognize and reward fellow team members for their contributions.

The letter R in Core reminds us there is no reward, without some risks. Successful people take responsible risks. They recognize certain failures are necessary to learning and growth.

Perhaps no one understood this better than Ronald McNair, a former student of North Carolina A&T. A crew member of the Challenger, McNair was one of my heroes even before he died in 1986. Two years before that fatal flight, he was the second black man in space and as a scientist-astronaut helped launch a communications satellite. Like any champion, McNair knew that "True courage comes in enduring persevering, preparation and believing in oneself

Vital Speeches Of The Day

November 1995

Pages 61-62

3 of 3

Perseverance. Preparation. Confidence. Those same qualities can help each of you conquer the unknown

The letter E reminds us that success comes from being efficient, successful people value results, not activity for its own sake. They have a never-ending desire to improve. Like Jesse Owens, winners form teams that are fast and efficient.

Now I'd like you to remember your mental picture of those beautiful roses that the FTD florist delivered to your home.

F—T—D. The letter F stands for Flexibility. A successful team can quickly change the way it thinks about its environment. It can tolerate ambiguity, team members can navigate and travel multiple paths using a compass if they don't have a map. They'll keep their eyes on their North Star and consider alternate approaches to reach their destination.

The letter T in the acronym F—T—D reminds us that successful people are Team focused. They work together for a common goal. They share information and decision making. They know the business not just their jobs. Members are self-directed; leaders can come from anywhere on the team

The letter D reminds us that successful teams — like the 1936 American Olympic team — are diverse. Unlike Adolf Hitler who refused to acknowledge Jesse Owens' victory at the Olympics, successful people willingly admit when they are mistaken. The ultimate winners in life admit when they are wrong and they go forward. Successful teams respect the individual. They judge ideas on their own merits. They reward people for performance. Successful people earn trust through integrity. They allow constructive dissent to add value, building on ideas by establishing a healthy dialogue. Successful teams develop people and utilize their own unique talents.

To succeed, companies today need teamwork like that which was found on the 1936 Olympic team. Although Detroit Edison has more than 10 billion dollars in assets, we don't own our greatest resource... our 8,400 employees. No matter how well developed our computer systems, we can't continue to succeed unless, our employees are willing to put their hearts and minds into each day's work.

After all, to quote John F. Kennedy, "Man is the most extraordinary computer of all."

I would modify President Kennedy's thoughts only slightly to make it clear that U.S. companies today need the brainchild of men and women. With all of our combined brainpower, I believe American businesses will continue to excel just as surely as our country won the race to put a man on the moon.

Affirmative Action benefits everyone. Young and old. Men and women. All people, without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. We all need each other. The unique talents that people offer us are much more important to us than their differences. We must never limit ourselves, or our society, by excluding anyone. We must cultivate all of our talents.

Who knows who will discover a cure for diseases like cancer and AIDS? Jonas Salk was only an average student in high

school who was generally ignored by his classmates, but he went on to discover the polio vaccine.

When Ben Carson was growing up in Detroit, I'm sure that most people never realized that this young black man would grow up to be a talented neurosurgeon. At one point Ben was doing so poorly in school that his math teacher said he was encouraged when he finally turned in a "D" assignment. When he was 14, Ben fought a friend with a knife and nearly killed him. It was then that he decided to turn his life around.

Ben set out to fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor and saving people. He improved his grades, graduating third in his high school class and receiving scholarships to Yale and the University of Michigan Medical School by the time he was 33, director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital. In 1987, Dr. Ben Carson did what other surgeons thought was impossible. He separated Siamese twins joined at the head. Patrick and Benjamin Binder wouldn't have had a chance if Ben Carson hadn't pursued his dream to be a doctor.

Much of the strength, the creative genius and the soul of American society comes from its diversity. Our potential is greater than ever. U.S. business will prosper as it recognizes the value of a diverse work force and uses all of its resources. Diversity will help companies keep moving in the right direction. As the pace picks up in our increasingly connected multicultural world.

In conclusion, I offer some advice to today's students. Recognize the differences between yourselves and others but never let those differences stop you in your tracks or in your career.

Keep going.

Keep learning.

Keep caring.

Remember the tasty apple, the beautiful flowers and think of the seven qualities in the word CORE and the acronym F.T.D. Don't be afraid to bite deep into the fruit of life.

Show your Care and Concern

Be Optimistic

Take Responsible Risks

Be Efficient and keep your eye on Results

And I hope you will still smell the roses no matter how fast you are moving. Join groups that are:

Flexible

Team Oriented

and that value diversity

But most of all, remember the customer deserves nothing less, than your best. And, I am confident that you'll create career opportunities for yourselves that exceed your highest expectations today. Of course, you may not think so at the time because the winners in life — like Jesse Owens — are always looking for ways they can go faster or jump higher. They realize that is what it take to be world class.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you the very best.