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INDEPENDENCE

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Take the Dare

Katie Hill

What is freedom? Knowledge, safety, a lessening of limitations: these are all important parts of it. However, these are simply the *outcomes* of freedom—the results that come from obtaining it. So what is the thing itself? How can an idea so vast and far-reaching be defined?

Quite easily, really. It can be done in one little word: *work*.

Ah, that dreaded word! It's the thing no one wants to hear, but everyone needs to know. After all, the only way to get what you want is through effort. Anything below that will not bring the desired result.

But there's more: a total lack of effort results in a total lack of functionality. Work means success, happiness, and progress, whereas laziness equals . . . well, nothing. How can you expect something in return when you gave nothing to begin with?

Every year since the dawn of our nation's growth, there has been some form of labor put into the preservation of our freedom. In the beginning, we had the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence. Later on, there was the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Still farther along came the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation. If any one of these events had had no work put into it, our nation—and by extension, the world—would be drastically different today.

Take the Constitution, for example. If it had been drafted by an unmotivated person that didn't much care if it actually worked or not, the government would almost certainly have collapsed a long time ago. To put it in the words of Winston Churchill, "It would certainly be a great disaster . . . if a violent collision should take place between the large majority of the American people and the great instrument of government which has so long presided over their expanding fortunes." The key word here is *instrument*, insinuating that the Constitution is but a tool to be handled by the actual laborer. Through this statement, Churchill communicated a need for our country to use the Constitution in every way it knows how to protect and defend our liberty.

Churchill was not the only renowned individual to speak of this, however—not by a long shot. Our beloved first president, George Washington, expressed the same opinion in his farewell address to the nation:

Towards the preservation of your government, and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite, not only that you steadily discountenance irregular opposition to its acknowledged authority, but also that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles, however specious the pretexts.

Washington, like Churchill, understood how important it is to protect this government—which, though strong, can be destroyed shockingly fast by any number of evils. So, in his final words to us as president, he begged us to keep a wary eye out for those destructive forces of greed, dishonesty, and fear that will surely attempt to pull down our carefully-constructed government. When they come, it is his hope that we will fight against them and drive them out.

Hard work and patience, awareness and improvement, sweat and tears—these all are essential to the upholding of a nation. What many people forget, though, is that they are the keys to *everything*: maintaining an occupation, raising a family, keeping a good reputation, moving to another state, etc. Every single factor in life is influenced in some way by how hard a person works.

Now, think about all the things that ever went wrong in your life. What happened? Perhaps there was some malfunction or mistake that caused something bad to happen, making it no specific person's fault; this does happen on occasion. More likely, though, the plan failed due to a lack of effort on the part of someone involved. Is there a way to stop this from happening? Yes. It's called doing what is expected of you. It's called being courageous. It's called action.

Imagine that all those little things—small triumphs and failures—are the rungs of a ladder. At the top of this ladder you know lies something wonderful, and though you may not know what that something is, you have been told that it is worth all the pain. With each new victory, each trial overcome, you come a little bit closer to that goal. What would happen if you suddenly decided to stop climbing, and instead waited for someone to carry you the rest of the way? It would definitely be easier. Less suffering is a good thing, right?

But what about the people behind you on the ladder, all of whom depend on you to keep going so they can reach the top? You have stunted their progress. You have stopped their growth. You are to blame. By simply sitting there and making no effort to continue, you are communicating to those beneath you that, whatever is up there, it's not really worth the labor, and you can afford to wait for it. They will believe you because you are the leader, and they can't see what's waiting for them.

This is a problem. What state are you now in? What state are your followers in? You know the word.

Apathy.

The very word reeks of careless indecision and lack of direction. You must break the chains of this thoughtless enslavement! Reach for the next rung of the ladder, even if it uses every ounce of strength you have, and prove to the world

that you will *not be beaten!*

Once you have overcome your fears and your doubts, don't stop: climb. Climb like your life depends on it; like the whole of America will fall unless you can find the strength to drag yourself up to that ledge and see what waits there. And if you do—if you put your heart and soul into this work—I promise it will be more than worth your while.

Some of you may not believe me, so I dare you to try it and see. I cannot explain to you the feelings you will experience atop this victorious stand; no one can. It is something that you must discover for yourself.

When you finally stand there and have seen and felt it all, I would ask, is your mission complete? No! You have simply risen to the next task appointed you—that of lifting others. To put it in the words of James Russell Lowell, “. . . true freedom is to share all the chains our brothers wear, and, with heart and hand, to be earnest to make others free!” (Wells-Barnett). Think about it: what point is there to being free if you are alone in your liberty?

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You will want your family and friends to enjoy the same ease and independence that you yourself have attained. And how are they to get it? Through you, who now reach down to pull them up the last few rungs of the ladder, higher and higher until they stand with you at the peak of liberation. There, they behold the full beauty of the world they live in; they breathe the fresh air; and they realize how desperately they have secretly yearned for such a feeling as freedom.

There is nothing quite like it—not in all the books, technology, and riches in the world. Who would give up a chance like that? To be able to do what you want, trust others, and govern yourself—it is the highest state of living. Americans have no idea just how lucky they are to have been born into it.

It hurts me sometimes to see how others so carelessly abuse their freedom simply because “it’s funny” or “nobody cares.” I want to yell at them that *I care*, *I* can see what it’s doing to them, even though they can’t see it themselves . . . and it’s painful to watch. I think of the way things used to be for America before we had this freedom, and I wonder if my country even realizes how close we are to being that way again. Do they remember what it was like to be under the jurisdiction of Great Britain and its king across the sea? Do they remember how bad things got when monopolies started taking over everything? Do they remember the hardships and pains of the African-American slaves?

Do they remember anything?

There is an old adage that says, “You never know how good you have it until it’s gone”; I fear that is happening to the United States. Americans no longer comprehend the blessing they have been given by the Founding Fathers. They have forgotten what it’s really like to be free, and they may not recall it until it’s too late and freedom is beyond their reach. What then would become of this nation, once so great and wonderful, once a place where people around the globe wished someday to live? It would take decades at least to return it to its former glory—if ever it was destined to become as it once was.

George Washington also told us, “The name of American . . . must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any

appellation derived from local discriminations.” This cannot be the case if we have not worked to earn our liberty. In place of that pride which should be there, we would feel the shame of our own failure: failure to try, failure to feel, failure to act when we had the chance.

As I think about how far we have fallen, I begin to realize something: If observing the nation is so difficult for me, how much more difficult must it be for our Founding Fathers, who set us on this path to greatness? They did so much for us, paving the way for prolonged independence and happiness, because they loved us. But, do we deserve their love, or have we earned only their disappointment? I can only hope that the answer is the former.

These great figures are some of the most inspirational people I have ever encountered in history. I believe their names are justly given: the *Father* of the Constitution, the *Father* of our Country, the Founding *Fathers*. These men really were fathers to us. A father does whatever he can to continue the growth and learning of his child; likewise, through their words and actions, the Founders gave us advice, encouragement, support, and suggestions for improvement. They have given us everything—from a country to call our own, to a working and efficient government, to their own devotion and service—and now it is our turn to return the favor. We must keep this country running as they would want it. We must protect and ensure the viability of our government and Constitution, which they worked so hard to create. We must not let their efforts go to waste.

Preserve this nation. Climb the ladder! Show the Founding Fathers how profoundly grateful you are for what they did. Prove to the world that America still stands, and that she will continue to stand long after you are gone because there will always be patriots left to protect her. Say the Pledge with conviction and devotion, boldly proclaiming to the world that “I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all” (“Pledge”).

So take the dare. Become the hero you were always meant to be. I know you can, and your friend can, and the woman down the street can—we all *can*. It’s time we *do*.

Why They Were Giants

Madeleine Touchette

“I Shall add nothing more at present as I have several Letters to write, but to desire you will remember me to Milly...” (Washington). In present times people writing between family or close friends would not end a letter this way, or more likely a text. In fact if someone did, their friend would be hard pressed to understand them. It is far more likely that you would read this less formal dialoged, “Hey say hi to Milly for me. I’m busy, catch ya latter.” Even this would still be shortened into the many abbreviations used in texting, and lack the punctuation. So why is there such a difference? Why were the early Americans so centered on formality, grammar and the use of large words? Colonists believed that these skills were important tools to be used not only in important documents, such as our Constitution, but to each other in the everyday life. There could be many reasons for this. It could be blamed on our schooling system. It could be the growth in human laziness, or blamed on the advent of technology, but if we wish to understand the giants of old we must first understand why they were giants.

Since Colonial times there has been an extreme change in the way we teach our children. At a very early age, parents would begin to teach their children to read, usually from the bible

or almanacs. Even as late as the 1920’s some intelligent children could read to a small extent at five years old (Isaac). Today however, parents who teach their children before kindergarten are frowned upon for spoiling their child’s future education by teaching them wrong. Because of this many parents just leave their children to fend for themselves during school, which does not encourage the child to take interest in their schooling. From experience, I know that a parent who encourages you to try your hardest and takes an interest in your education, as early American parents took an interest and assisted in the general education, and in their child’s choosing of a trade. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in describing American scholars states that “. . . the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature [meaning environment].” When a today’s children are surrounded by people who think education is the means to get a job, can we expect anyone to learn just to know? In early America anything a person did in the way of scholarly pursuits was something to be shared with others from the community. Therefore it had to be in a standard that everyone would understand. In medieval times the scholarly language was Latin, but as fewer and fewer people learned Latin, documents were translated to the languages of the

people in different regions. So that people from all the different dialects spoken in the region would be able to understand, the most proper of grammar would have been used. When a person becomes used to reading the proper grammar that appears in the commonly read documents of the time, the language spills over into their own vocabularies. Therefore the colonists who read scholarly works, used the precise, fluid grammar; as people of today speak using words from the low level books that they do read, because they have no reason to read the challenging books. A drastic change in the schooling system of America could bring back the impressive language of our forefathers.

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” (John F. Kennedy). This famous quote by one of America’s presidents truly defines the attitude of early American citizens. As noticed by Alexis de Tocqueville “...Every imagination... were upon stretch to invent means of increasing the wealth and satisfying the wants of [the rest of the country].” When you are trying to better the public, you must first know what the public needs. In order to do know this one must take an interest not only the small community around you but also in the communities two states over or on the other coast. Cultures in different regions of America have developed differently over the years and with them the English language. A South Westerner could say something perfectly natural to a New Englander and have himself misunderstood because if the different ways English is used. While possibly more prevalent today, colonists were also faced with this problem. New immigrants would come over from other countries and as they learned the proper grammar they also learned the little deviations for their region. When writing documents meant to be shared with more than only themselves, it was necessary to use the widely recognized dialect. As everyone was trying to improve the country it was very common to write documents for this purpose, and the proper grammar could very easily have flowed over into their personal writings from sheer habit of usage. Today unfortunately, it is more common to hear “What do I get out of it?” or “What can you do for me?” With this mind set, when people do write it is more often for a specific audience, usually a class or to friends, allowing the writer to use a somewhat less formal tone, causing the informal tone to become

habit. The mental attitude of an individual plays an important role in the individual’s language.

The advent of technology has helped to lower the standards of communication. The automobile, and trains, though novelties at first, soon became centered on getting from point a to point b as fast as possible. As cars became more popular, highways were built. Planes were invented, faster even than cars. You could expect someone on the opposite coast to receive your letter before the week was out, rather than in a couple of months or not at all. With society focusing on the speed of all things, can it be too much to assume that the old grammar that could take a paragraph to get one idea across should be shortened also? The flowery methods of oratory have been abandoned by all but the politicians, who use them only when they want to say very little and sound like they are saying a lot. It takes much too long to type “...to hear from your own pen...” and even still too long for “stay in touch” instead the average teen will type into their phone “SIT”. In colonial times it if you sent someone a letter you could not be sure when they would receive it, and there would be a long gap between each letter because of the necessary travel time. So when you sat down to write your friends or loved ones, you made a project of it, all your work would be laid aside and you would spend all your energies in your message. Now messages are given out like candy, with little thought put in to them in general. Though technology has helped human kind in many ways, nothing is without its faults.

The giants of early America were so because they invested in the education on not only themselves but of each other. They worked for the people instead of wanting the country to work for them, and they did not mind taking the scenic route occasionally. So what has changed? Can we ever again be as big as our ancestors were? Americans in general do not focus on education as the key to happiness, but as the key to a good job. We have decided that speed and quantity are more important than quality. And we embrace the two sided gift of a government that does things for us. If we rely less on our smart phones, and our government; spend less time with our electronics; and encourage each other to improve our minds, we may be able to grow a couple of paragraphs in the history books.

Founders

Ethan Berglund

Twelve score years ago, in a time of despotism and strife, a seed was planted. Many took part in its initial sowing, and since then, many have helped it, cared for it, and guided its growth. These men, these planters and caretakers, are Founders. Men like Thomas Paine and Patrick Henry, whose words of liberty and revolution ignited the spark of freedom in the breast of so many. Men such as Jefferson, Franklin, and Madison; who saw to it the sprouting plant had everything it would ever need for life and blossom. And Men like Washington and Lincoln, men who sacrificed their lives for the continuance of the growing flame of liberty and independence. Every man, woman, and child who has ever laid down his life for his nation, the brave soldiers of Saratoga, of Gettysburg, of San Juan Hill, the Second battle of the Marne, of Normandy and Guadalcanal, of Korea and Vietnam, or Iraq and Afghanistan; all of them have Founder’s blood within them. Every man who built America, every woman who raised a patriot, every teacher who taught of America’s greatness, all bear the burden and blessing of Founders blood coursing in their veins. And that is what makes this Great Experiment extraordinary. Its roots, its continuance, lie with every one of us. We are all Founders.

The Constitution is our birthright, this Republic our inheritance. We, the people of these United States, must choose. Do we continue down the path to Boston, where chains can be heard across the plain, or do we take the road to Lexington, to Concord, and finally to Yorktown? Let 2014 become the renewed 1776, and let the coming age, the coming epoch, be known as the time of America. Let us take a stand, on the shoulders of those who came before us, and be heard around the world saying: “Government of the people is not dead, is not gone, but reforged, stronger than before!”

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