

Tech education builds character and workforce

(ADAPTED FROM COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS BY DR. JABARI SIMAMA, PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA PIEDMONT TECHNICAL COLLEGE)

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I want to speak with you briefly about the hand, the head, and the heart. Your instructors have made sure that your course of study has been hands-on and practical. We have no doubt that you are skilled of the hand. So, when you accept a job as a certified nurse assistant, for example, I know your hands will be healing hands. I know you will be skillful in what you do, but don't be satisfied with just getting a job—always strive to be the best. Let your job propel you into a career that sustains you and your loved ones. In this regard, your hands may take you even farther than your feet.

In the classroom, as an early childhood teacher, handle students in a manner that instills in them a lifelong thirst for learning. Awaken the

knowledge within them and learn from their purity of hearts. How you handle these precious souls, definitely will impact who, and what, they become in the future.

Financial accountants, be careful with the hand that you don't miscalculate and give to another, more than one deserves. But likewise, be accurate, because many whom you will serve, will have already been given much. They deserved all that they have earned.

When I was in the third grade, I learned to do something that helped create a paradigm of success that affected my future successes—I learned how to play the drums—read notes and all. It gave me great pride in learning a skill, that at the time, I thought was of the hand.

But now let me say a few words, now, about the head.

As graduates who have learned one or more technical skills, you know that to acquire knowledge, you really have to read, analyze what you have read, and often apply knowledge to a specific function. Can you imagine how dangerous society would be if police officers didn't use their heads more often than their guns?

How many firefighters would lose their lives if they ran into a blazing fire without thinking first? In fact, I cannot think of any skill that one applies that does not require deep knowledge of the subject matter. Can you really become a great film director without knowledge? An optician or an emergency medical technician?

Let your minds rule your heads, and you will be much better at what you do. Real education is about freeing the mind.

So back to my story about drumming; at first I thought it was about how loud I could play my snare drum or how well I could execute a drum roll. Then, when I began to read sheet music, I discovered I had to pay attention to accent marks, crescendos, time, and the difference between quarter and 16th notes. And when the composition wanted me to rest . . . that is, to not play at all, it spoke to me through a written symbol.

I was beginning to learn that to become a great drummer, I had to use more than my hands. I had to use my head. I had to think about what I was doing.

But now, let me say a thing or two about the heart.

You could have completed a degree in automotive technology and never discussed the heart. You could have earned six certifications in welding and never discussed the heart. You could have taken two years to complete your GED, and never discussed the heart. You could be a cosmetologist or a practical nurse, and never have discussed the heart.

If we have not mentioned the heart, we have done you a disservice.

The heart is what being *work ready* really means. What being a fully developed human being—ready for life, is really all about.

The first mechanic I took my car to was the one who loved the cars he worked on.

The instructors who work on motorcycles at Georgia Piedmont love the machines. The drafters at our college love what they do. But the lines on paper are meaningless without the shapes and forms created from the heart.

So to conclude the story about my drumming...I learned that great drumming was about more than the hands and the mind—it, too, was about the heart. I learned to feel the music, to play not just with sticks in my hands, but with my whole body. In order to perform great music, it had to come from inside out. It had to come from the heart.

So, I became the number one drummer, not because I executed the best drum roll, but because I approached my music in an integrated fashion. Playing the drums became more than the technical execution of syncopated beats that kept time for music. My heart and soul had to become one with the drum.

James Brown once said to his musicians that every instrument is a drum.

Be every instrument. Be a beautiful drum, beating out the rhythms of your life. Integrate the hands, with the head, and the heart.

Be artists and artisans in all that you do. Create the practical and the beautiful.

And being of the heart, moreover, involves being committed to something larger than yourselves. It means letting all you have learned make you a force for good in your families, communities, and in society. You are not an educated human being...unless you are a good human being.

Let this day commence a new period in your lives where you commit yourselves to helping to awaken the “somebodiness” in your brothers and sisters. Let this be the day that commences the spirit of the Sankofa Bird in us all—“I will return home to ensure that no one is left behind.” Let this be the day that commences a belief in “unbuntu” – “I am, because we are, and we are, because I am.”