

**Remarks by Justice Alan C. Page
RiverBank Fall Forum
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Thank you for that kind introduction and for your warm welcome. Thank you also for inviting me to the RiverBank Fall Forum and allowing me to share my thoughts with you this morning. The focus for this morning is leadership and ethics.

In preparing for this morning's talk, I was reminded of law school where I learned some important lessons about being prepared in my contracts class at the University of Texas. Instead of lecturing, my professor believed strongly in the Socratic method, which, as you all know, entails asking questions of those who are under-enlightened to help lead them to enlightenment—and includes a little intimidation along the way. I still have memories of the day the professor brought one of the guys in the class to tears. Even though I always came to class relatively well prepared and had performed as a football player in front of hundreds of thousands of people, I was panicked that he would call on me.

Making myself small and inconspicuous was not one of the choices. So what could I do?

After surviving the first few days without being called on, I noticed that the professor only called on students who looked afraid. He never called on those who raised their hands. So I started raising my hand. For a while, that tactic was rewarded. But then finally, one day I raised my hand and, as luck would have it, he called on me. Without thinking, I stood up to answer the question... and my mind... went... blank. And it stayed blank.

As I scrambled for a cohesive thought, I had momentary empathy for all those quarterbacks I'd been chasing for a living... and then somehow, it hit me—I had to say something. Anything was better than silence. So I started speaking. Whatever I said, it must have been okay.

The lessons that I learned are these: first, that preparation is critical to success. And while good preparation in that context means coming to class with your assignments done, it also means being able to size up a situation and respond appropriately. Second, I learned that we sometimes create our own greatest obstacles: that our fears—rather than the actual situation—may be what limits us. And third, even if our fears cause us to stumble, good preparation will allow you to pick yourself up. While these lessons have served me well, I believe they can serve many people well.

Some of you may be saying to yourselves, wait a minute, what is wrong with this picture. How is it that we have this former football player standing in front of us talking about leadership and ethics? After all, we know that football players are really nothing more than dumb jocks, and defensive lineman have all been hit in the head at least one too many times.

Thus, to the extent that I have been identified by others as having leadership or ethical qualities, a little background is in order. I grew up in Canton, Ohio, in the 1950s, a child of parents who knew and understood the importance of education. They made sure that I knew and understood its importance also. In their own way, they also understood the importance of seeking excellence. I can't tell you how many times I heard them say "no matter what you do, do it as well as you can. If you are going to be a garbage collector, be the best garbage collector you can be. If you're going to be a doctor, be the best doctor you can be." In addition, my parents made sure I understood that I had to be a good citizen.

As you likely know, Canton, Ohio, is the home of the NFL Hall of Fame. Growing up in that community, I noticed of couple of things early on. One was the conflict between athletics and academics. The other was stories about how lawyers drove big fancy cars and spent Wednesday afternoons playing golf. I loved watching Perry Mason. This was all long before I had any interest in football, so when people asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up I would say I wanted to be a lawyer. There was also another aspect to my interest in the law.

I have vivid memories of reading newspaper articles about *Brown vs. Board of Education* as a nine-year-old. From those articles, I developed a sense of the real power that judges have and the importance of what they do. For me, that power was hope. Hope that, if an educational system could be changed in the South, it could be changed anywhere. Hope that fairness

could prevail and that issues related to equality of opportunity might one day be resolved. Hope that the legal system and the law were something I could trust.

As I look back, some of the ideals I developed as a child may have been naïve, but, as I continued to learn about the law, I came to believe even more deeply in the principle of “equal justice under the law.” These weren’t just words to me. They had meaning . . . they still do.

Now, with that background, what I’d like to do is talk about leadership. Over the years, I have been asked by a number of people—what makes a leader? Implicit in the question is the notion that I, at some point, set out to become a leader and have been successful. To be completely honest, however, being a leader for the sake of being a leader has never been a goal of mine. My goals have been more focused on doing what I do to the best of my ability and trying to make this world a better place. Thus, I am not sure that I am qualified to answer the question—what makes a leader.

John Quincy Adams summed up what leadership is all about when he said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

However one becomes a leader, you have to be yourself and, as John Quincy Adams’ quote suggests, it’s how you act, not what you say, that determines your success.

Real leaders aren’t focused on being leaders. They’re not out trying to lead—they’re out acting on what they believe and what they think is right—and doing it the best they can.

Qualities that relate to leadership and also success are: *hard work, focus, critical thinking, and preparation*. It is necessary to be able to focus on the task at hand and not be distracted by things that don’t allow, or help, you accomplish whatever your task is. For example, football is a simple game. The key to on-field success is maintaining field position and possession of the football. If you do those two things, your chances of winning increase dramatically.

For a defensive lineman that means tackling the runner, sacking the quarterback, or knocking down the pass. Simple right? Right, except when

it is 95 degrees, you're in the 12th play of a critical drive, you're overheated and sucking air, and your opponent punches you or steps on you. At that point, there is a tendency to want to retaliate. Retaliation may make you feel better, but it won't do anything to help you with the task at hand—which is to stop the other team without them scoring by tackling the runner, sacking the quarterback, or knocking the pass down. If anything, such a loss of focus will detract you from your task because it's likely to draw a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. So much for field position and possession.

In addition, to focus you have to be able to analyze situations, think critically about the problem presented, and act in a decisive manner. And, you have to be prepared—not only prepared for success, but also prepared for the inevitability of failure. Don't be afraid to fail. As Bobby Kennedy once said— “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.”

Moreover, failure isn't the worst thing that can happen to a person. We are all human, we all make mistakes—and we all have the capacity to learn from our mistakes. It's not whether we make a mistake or somehow fail, it's what we learn from the experience that matters.

Let me switch gears and talk about ethical behavior for a moment. I'd like to do that in the context of character.

In this day and age, sometimes when we look at the world around us it seems that things are all topsy-turvy. Rampant greed, athletes who seem more interested in taunting or showing up their opponent, and politicians saying one thing but then doing something different. In my view, all of this reflects, and is symptomatic of, a real decline in our individual and national character.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines “character” as “moral or ethical strength, integrity, fortitude.” In a sense, character is who we are at our core. It's what determines what we believe and how we choose to respond in any given situation. Character is not something we are born with, nor does it develop automatically—it must be consciously developed. Nor is it something that is static. Whether you're 50 or 15, 5 or 75... whether you're a Gonzaga student, a member of the Spokane business community, or a Supreme Court Justice... you will be forced to re-evaluate and renew your

character again and again. How we act today, and every day for the rest of our lives, defines who we are.

People of character take responsibility for who they are and what they do. To resist the pressures and temptations that seduce us... to make the easy choices rather than the right choices... to be a person of character... takes a strong person. I don't mean strong in the physical sense, for physical stature has nothing at all to do with character. I do mean "strong" in the sense of believing that each one of us has an obligation to act in a way that builds, rather than diminishes, our character and the character of those around us.

That means we must be honest and trustworthy—saying what we mean and meaning what we say. It means keeping our promises, avoiding the arrogance of power, playing fairly, telling the truth, making decisions with others in mind, always treating people with respect, and respecting ourselves. It means working to figure out the difference between right and wrong, and then acting accordingly.

The fact that I was once considered to be a great football player or that I am a Supreme Court Justice doesn't, by itself, mean that I am a man of good character. The fact that the color of my skin may be different from yours doesn't mean I am not a man of good character. The fact that your language or religion may be different from mine doesn't make either one of our characters better or worse. The outward differences, which identify us as individuals, do not define the content of our character. Our character, as individuals and as a society, will be determined on an ongoing basis by how each of us chooses to act.

Each of us has the ability to determine not only our personal, but also our national character. Not someone else... you and me. As individuals, we tend to want to look outward to see where the problem lies. However, if we are to change our character as a nation—each of us—as individuals, must change.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't note that, along with our humanity, comes the obligation to try to make this world a better place. Grabbing what we can for ourselves and ignoring everyone else is simply not acceptable. For me, that obligation has meant helping children understand the importance of education, motivating them in their educational pursuits,

and working to provide educational opportunity through the Page Education Foundation. I happen to believe that children are the future, and that the future is about hope. If we are to have hope for the future—our children's and ours—we must educate our children. I also happen to believe the best way to do that is one school at a time, one classroom at a time, one child at a time.

But what can you do, especially in these most difficult economic times? After all, you already have plenty to do: work, school, family, and social obligations. Besides, what can one person do?

Because the problems we face are complex, we tend to think in terms of complex solutions. Or we think it's someone else's problem. As a result, individual effort seems insignificant. But I believe that the steps we take individually can be significant. Ultimately, the problems we face are people problems and the solutions will be found in the involvement of people like me and people like you. Whether it is volunteering at a homeless shelter or food shelf, or assisting the disabled or working with children in schools as I do, whatever it may be, you, each and every one of you, have the power to change the future.

Some would say no, the problems are too big and too complex for one person to impact. I believe those people are wrong. You don't need to be a Supreme Court Justice or even a football hero to make change happen. Everyone here, and I emphasize everyone, has the ability, the opportunity, and I believe the obligation, to make this world a better place. All we have to do is act—and act we must.

A quote from Robert F. Kennedy, taken from a speech he gave in 1966 at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, symbolizes for me the impact that individuals can have. It has special meaning when we consider the changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1966. What he said was this: "Each time a man [and I would add a woman] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope—and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

When we put our hearts... and our minds... and our bodies to the task, when we act, we can change both our personal and our national character,

we can improve the lot of those less fortunate, and at the same time, “inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more.”

That is the challenge I leave with you.

Thank you.