

Future Leaders Economic Empowerment in the Changing International Work World

Re-inventing our Future

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I bring you greetings from President, Dr. Rudolf Crew, Provost Augustine Okereke, and a host of Medgar Evers College faculty, staff, and students.

We at Medgar Evers College owe our gratitude to our partner, the National Council of Women of the USA and Mary Singletary, President Emerita. We thank President Emerita Singletary for her vision, inspiration, motivation, and sheer perseverance in convening this workshop.

I will take a few moments of your time today to talk about the charge for new leaders to re-invent the future. Why, re-invent our future because the current trajectory from socio-economic ills such as unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and despair globally is not sustainable. We were told yesterday that the income inequity is worsening - 8 men own half of the wealth in the world and there is no indication that the trend will improve.

The New York Times International edition published an article, "The Future of Not Working," Feb. 24th the day a team of Medgar Edgar College students and faculty were leaving Kenya. In summary the article reinforced the concept that automation and high productivity of new systems may reduce the global demand for labor in the future and alternative income sources for the poor may be needed. The article went on to describe a proof of concept testing universal income currently piloted in one of Kenya's poorest villages. Why Kenya? Paradoxically, Kenya is a leading contributor to the FinTech revolution in mobile application innovation and development. Yet Nairobi, where many multi-national corporations are based, is home to some of the world largest slums. Rural villagers migrated from farms hoping for an improved quality of urban life. What many often find is a lack of a capacity for the local economy to absorb the increased labor in the market and many have few options for survival.

So my friends and colleagues we cannot accept the future as it is written; we must find ways to re-think, re-engineer, re-make a future that will be sustainable for all.

In my time with you I will share our story of changing lives through entrepreneurship; I will share with you stories of those we serve; and finally about the changing world of work and why we desperately need more entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs and job creators globally.

I am reminded of the August 28th, 1963 March on Washington for Jobs & Freedom when the legendary Mahalia Jackson sang the old Negro spiritual, "How I got over". A more contemporary quote from our Brooklyn, New York brother Jay-Z, "difficult takes a day, impossible takes a week."

We started our international study of entrepreneurs last year at StartUp Africa, Nairobi Kenya in January 2016, and launched to do the impossible. We broaden our knowledge of global entrepreneurship by traveling to ten countries; we collaborated with colleagues and published in excess of ten papers; we participated in approximately 10 pitch competitions; we convened two international conferences and participated in many more.

But this was not our story in 2015; I am sharing this with you today because I want you to know that together we can re-write, re-invent, re-invigorate, re-boot, re-start our story any where any day any time.

So let me share with you our 2015 story.

Our students were willing and ready to travel and study abroad but funding was a challenge. In 2015 16 students signed up to travel to the US China Summit of which 6 of our students were prepared to stay for entrepreneurship internships, but as funding was not available, not one student experienced this life changing opportunity.

Today I am grateful for the experience of loss and desperation for it was that pit of impossibility that motivated us to seek, knock, and pray for the opening of doors. I stand before you and testify that last year four MEC students went to Beijing, China in the spring and 10 students were in Beijing, China; Tokyo, Japan and Bangkok, Thailand -- in one trip in

the fall. Our students have studied entrepreneurs in Chile, Costa Rico, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, and Kenya. We have presented our findings at conferences in Paris, London, and Manhattan.

How did we go from our history of no funding, no resources, and no programs?. We never lost faith in the young people we serve; we understood that they are our future – they are the future leaders; they are our hope for survival for the turbulent times to come. During the summer and fall of 2015 we cold called foundations, corporations, and other donors. A few times we were invited to submit proposals.

We told our story over and over. We received rejection after rejection. Finally at the end of 2015 we had three awards, which changed destiny for those young people we serve.... and StartUp Africa 2016 , in Nairobi was our first stop.

Two of my most favorite quotes come from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"Do not go where the path may lead...go instead where there is no path and leave a trail"

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.

Many of our students are trailblazers in their education, careers, and businesses.... for many of them there is no family history of entrepreneurship... they must look deep inside their soul for its passion to guide them, grow them, and sustain them.... we must prepare them to believe in the impossible... then they must work harder than they have ever worked before. They must be creative, resourceful, and intuitive; they must understand that innovation is a necessity because business as usual is a death sentence in a dynamic global economy.

I always speak of my great grandmother from Cat Island, Bahamas—because that is our maternal rock; she was, a

serial entrepreneur, who could not read or write. Later in life she was blind yet --she had vision. I always speak of my own journey of being the first in my family to earn a college degree and now all of my siblings... an even half dozen have college degrees and 4 out of six have advanced degrees.

My family was honored last month at the University of Miami for producing the largest number of graduates from a single family in the history of the University.

For the high school students here today... I want you to know that I almost dropped out of high school; I am old enough such that my secondary schooling was segregated and when they bussed us to an integrated school I did not understand race or class. It was in the 10th grade or 11th grade when I had my first economics and political science courses that changed my personal trajectory... it was then that I re-invented my future... I went from almost dropping out at 14 to a Ph.D. program in economics at 21. Yesterday in the session, we were told that mainstream economic policy has failed and that only 10% of the world economists are women... so young women of the future.... we need you to help view the world economic order through a different prism.

...so no matter where you are on your journey you can determine to change your destiny... and the destiny of those closest to you.

To the young women students, how many of you have brothers? Don't leave them behind... we need them. I only have one brother and I am blessed to have him here with us today. We call him LJ, LJ please stand, I am his eldest sister and his youngest sister is sitting next to him. An abbreviated part of his story... and I am going to tell them LJ... is he did drop out of high school in Miami. .. We... his eldest sister and his youngest sister put our arms around him and plucked him out of Miami and brought him to the Washington DC area where we were... it is there that he finished his high school and later went on to earn a bachelors, masters... and re-invented his future. Ladies we cant afford to leave anyone behind... we need everyone.

Friends and colleagues here today, if there is no path... together we can make one... if we find the way blocked... we can re-tool, seek help, and transform.

Major corporations are transforming worldwide to grow and sustain in a diverse and dynamic global marketplace. Last month I was at Microsoft in NYC and will share with you their vision of corporate transformation:

“We believe in what people make possible

Our mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.”

How do they plan to execute on such a bold vision – their worldview – their soul is Mobile first and cloud first... they want to re-invent productivity and business processes that innovate and disrupt the status quo... they are customer obsessed – focused on the experience of the customer-- not on the experience of the firm

Microsoft has transformed their value system and their culture is one of

1. Growth mindset vs. fixed mindset
2. Diverse and inclusive is part of their identity understanding that varying backgrounds contribute to successes making a difference

So what can we learn from this global technology giant that started a few decades ago with a small group of entrepreneurs?

1. We must have a vision – we must believe in the transformation – we must build and develop teams – but most of all we must believe in our passion to make the journey
2. We must set a mission that is shaped and guided by our collective vision.. it should be clear... and powered by our very souls... because we will have many challenges and obstacles in our path... but if our vision and our souls are aligned... when we fall.... we will rise
3. We must get past the launch mindset. We are here... we are on our path to growth. We must find ways and strategies to nourish and sustain our growth and the growth of the future leaders we serve. We must find ways to mentor them, expand their networks, help them feed their souls.. help them feed their passion.
4. The world of global business is difference. Diversity of cultures, diversity of skills, diversity of disciplines, and diversity of needs. We must find ways to surround ourselves with difference so that we understand the different prisms of opportunity. How can we develop solutions to problems that you don't know exist?

We must be driven and obsessed by the experience of our young leaders. I remember that last year I considered cancelling a trip to a conference. Then one of the students in a candid conversation said that the conference the year before changed her life. So tell me friends and colleagues, how do you calculate the “return on investment” of a changed life? You don’t – you just do it.

5. So in our growth mindset, I encourage you to shed the cloak of usual/ normalcy – we must become extraordinary storytellers delivering our message of excellence on demand, live, digital, and in print. We must have a broad global footprint that shares our story facilitated by digital and other media.

We must become fearless voyagers seeking adventures of the unknown and difference. We must channel our passion to strategies that create, innovate, and disrupt the status quo. We must be willing to fail, as most entrepreneurs fail before they succeed. We must be willing to learn, as we learn we continue to grow and improve our ability to sustain and adapt to change. We must be willing to be comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty for there we will find opportunity. Finally we must be willing to change for in change we will re-invent the future.... that has never existed.

So in the shadows of history, we come humbly before you our institution bearing the name of a heroic leader who helped transform the destiny of many lives. Many of you may have heard of Medgar Evers the man; he was a civil rights and social justice advocate willing to fight for change. He was a believer in the power of a vision for justice. He is quoted as saying, “you can kill a man, but you can’t kill an idea.” Medgar Evers the man was shot down and killed but his vision of change and social justice lives on at Medgar Evers College. I will briefly share our mission through the life of one of our recent graduates.

Christian Waterman. Christian is an only child and has been the only male in his household most of his life. Christian is also a third generation resident of Ebbetts Fields apartments across the street from our campus; between his mother and grandmother they have been residents for almost 40 years –Christian’s dream, as the very first College graduate in his family, is to lift the family out of Ebbetts Fields—the world that they have all known for a lifetime into a new place that will be their home alone.

Christian describes himself as a social entrepreneur.

Tired of guns, drugs and violence in his neighborhood, Christian started his company in order to “ save the world, eliminate poverty and establish peace.” –his words not mine. How do you prepare any student for such broad ambition?

This young man was already thinking of growth and sustainability... But how do you go beyond recognizing the need for growth to executing on growth? As I shared earlier, you seek help; you re-tool; and transform. Christian graduated from Medgar in May 2015. Christian’s business, however continued being supported while he also completed his MBA with honors August 2016. When he was done, he came back to support and help grow the businesses of his fellow peers who are here with you today. Will the members of EEL please rise.

Our students are the living legacy and spirit of Medgar Wiley Evers...seeking a bold vision of social justice and equality ... fortified by a determination not to quit no matter what... and focused on the idea of change for the social good... Our students and the generations that follow will face technology that we have not seen in our life times.

The next generation will experience a new revolution based upon artificial intelligence, nano science, nano technology etc. That will fundamentally change work as we know it today. Many traditional jobs will be replaced by a new generation of robots and highly sophisticated computers. The multi-national corporations of the world don’t have enough capacity to hire all the Christian Waterman’s of the world that Colleges & Universities produce. We must become our own job creators, job innovators, and entrepreneurial disruptors in a world that is not colorblind. Like Medgar Evers, we must be willing to stand tall in our conviction that change must come or the next generation will perish in a growing class of poverty and despair. Education was once the great equalizer... now you will find a growing educated underclass with limited opportunities ... this is not a one college, one country, or one race peril... it is global crises faced in Latin America, Africa, Asia and yes and in North America.

In New York City, specifically, Brooklyn where we are from, Medgar Evers College was founded to serve the needs of the community. We connect to the community through multiple outreach programs.

Pipeline Program, (a kindergarten to career model of education for schools, students, parents and educators); the Center for Black Literature; The Caribbean Research Center; and the Dubois Center for Public Policy and the Center for Law and Social Justice.

You will hear of the re-gentrification / transformation of Brooklyn... know that it is not transforming the same for everyone. Many small business entrepreneurs in our community did not adapt, did not change, did not re-tool, and have been swallowed in a sea of obsolescence and slumber in the graveyard of shutdown storefronts.

In the true spirit of community economic development, Medgar has joined the Brooklyn Navy yard in a partnership to accelerate the growth of tech based businesses through its StartUp New York program and serves as a hub for innovation. In the first cohort there are five Startup NY companies with which we are affiliated. These companies all revolve around technology, biotech and some form of sustainability. Of the five companies, two were started by white males, one by a white female, one by three black males and one by a black female. Talk about diversity!

The college's affiliation with these companies involves four potential relationships: (1) internships leading to 21st century jobs and careers for Medgar students; (2) collaboration with our faculty on economic development initiatives and programmatic research; (3) building through faculty and administrative interconnections new curricula in science, technology, health, business and liberal arts, which will produce interdisciplinary majors benefiting students, faculty and the community of Medgar Evers; (4) certificate and job possibilities offered to community residents who are not students of Medgar but who look to the college as a beacon of economic, intellectual, social and cultural advancement.

Today we come to this workshop with a spirit of mutual collaboration seeking support in our joint goals of job creation

for our children. Within the last six months we have initiated four international agreements with diverse institutions including Kenyatta University because the world we compete in is beyond Brooklyn, beyond New York, beyond the US... it is global... our children, if they are to survive, like Microsoft must walk and talk in diverse cultures, with diverse skills, and be driven by a fearless obsession to understand the experience of those we serve.

So as you think about the Return on your investment (the ROI) for the time you spent here today, Remember we must re-invent and transform our future – then channel the passion in our collective souls to grow and sustain the better and brighter world we live in ..

...but .. If you really want to leverage that ROI.. If you want to change the world... stand with us ...a growing number of dedicated men and women who believe in the vision of global entrepreneurial thinking, creators of opportunity, creators of change... change that transforms destinies of generations to come.

I close with a quote from the great visionary leader Nelson Mandela, "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

We may fall my friends but together we will rise and re-invent our future.

May God bless and keep you strong!

Thank you!