

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1482 Recognize the Beauty of Purpose

Monday, we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr's birthday, who on January 15th would have been 94 had he lived. Dr. King made his mark in civil rights, but it was a particular speech that he gave several months before he died, that I've always felt was a gift to all of us who populate the workplace. I'm Jerry Roberts and I'll give an excerpt of that speech, plus an encounter I had yesterday that really drives home the key points. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

It was Extra Point #10, almost six years ago, when I gave some of the words spoken to a group of what we today would call middle school students, by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., about six months before he died in April 1968.

It is popularly called the *Street Sweeper Speech*. People in that line of work had it tough. It was dirty, often dangerous work, and society looked down upon those who had those jobs. It goes like this:

"And when you discover what you will be in your life, set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it. Don't just set out to do a good job. Set out to do such a good job that the living, the dead or the unborn couldn't do it any better.

If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

Be a bush if you can't be a tree. If you can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be a sun, be a star. For it isn't by size that you win or fail. Be the best of whatever you are."

After yesterday's program I rushed off to an appointment, then saw the gas tank was on empty, so I pull into the nearest gas station,

the Mobil in the middle of Tamuning. I let the attendant know which grade of gas I wanted, then went inside to pay.

While waiting for the fill-up to finish, I looked out the window to see the attendant washing the windows. He wasn't blazing through the process, and instead was taking great care to do the job.

He used the washing wand like an artist's brush, making precision strokes to first put on the soapy water, then flipping the wand over to use the rubber squeegee side to remove the water and leave the glass sparkling clean.

I saw him go from window to window, smiling as he went. Not only was he doing a very good job with the windows, it looked to me like he was enjoying himself.

I could hear the last line of the King speech, *"Be the best of whatever you are."* The thought that I always get when I hear this timeless classic about work and worth, is that we get to decide not only how well we do our job, but also how we think about it.

I walked up to the man and saw that his name tag read "Eugene". I offered him a small tip, but he waved it off and smiled. I said, "No, please take it." He nodded and accepted it. I got into my car and prepared to drive away.

However, Eugene wasn't done. He reached up with his wand, and approached the driver's side windshield. He must have seen an area he thought needed more attention, and I got to watch him closeup.

It's a beautiful thing to watch someone do a job, when it's obvious that they feel that job is worth extra effort to do it well.

Work can be magical. It can give us fulfillment, purpose, a sense of accomplishment, and even joy.

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Knowing that we're doing work that somebody else thinks is worth paying for can lead to a total mindset change. A total life change.

As I wrote in February of 2018, it's not about what your boss thinks of your work. That's important, but it doesn't define us. What defines us is how we see it, doing our work as well as we can because that's how we see ourselves...that's who we are inside.

Thanks to Eugene for the reminder, and for his excellent service.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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