

Windy Hill: It's now my pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker for this evening. Stedman Graham has a strong and demonstrated commitment to education, lifelong learning, and the empowerment of individuals and communities. His roots go back to Whitesboro, New Jersey, a working class community where life was probably not always easy. No doubt those early experiences helped to shape his values and outlook. His bestselling book, *You Can Make It Happen*, deals with his philosophy for personal growth.

He has also written *You Can Make It Happen Everyday*, a motivational pocketbook, and he's written *Teens Can Make It Happen*, and *Build Your Own Life Brand!*. An accomplished speaker and lecturer, Mr. Graham has delivered the messages of his books to over one hundred corporations, colleges, universities, high schools, and nonprofit organizations. He is a founder of Chicago's Leadership Institute. He is also a founder and executive director of *Athletes Against Drugs*, a nonprofit organization devoted to developing leadership in youth.

When we approached Mr. Graham about speaking at the National Head Start Institute on Father Involvement, his response was immediate and unequivocal, "Yes". So we are quite honored to have him with us. Please join me in welcoming Stedman Graham. (applause)

Stedman Graham: Thank you, Windy, so much for that. It's a pleasure to be here at the National Head Start Institute on Father Involvement. And also, I know we'll be celebrating Father's Day soon, it's not far away. I have a 28-year-old daughter, graduate of Wellesley College, now working in New York in the advertising industry. I'm glad she has a job. So I understand the process of what it takes to try and do your best as a father. We live in a very complex world today.

Many of our schools are broken, dropout rates are high, unemployment's high, we're at war, and we live in a global village. Leadership is at an all-time low at all levels. It's hard to tell what is real and what is an illusion. (applause) I had a great experience working for Goodwill Industries in Chicago for their fatherhood program for two years, training Hispanic and African-American men who were trying to obtain their GED and who were very high risk. So what did I learn from that experience? I learned that everybody needs care when you're trying to help someone.

Organizations must care, teachers and trainers must care, leadership must care. I learned that what they thought was strength, was fear. I learned that mentorship and one-on-one training is where the best learning takes place. I learned that men need to validate men. I learned that when you don't know how to do anything or you don't want to work, it is probably because you are a mama's boy. You are still waiting for mama to do it. I learned that they want to take care of their child and be somebody, but they don't know how.

So what is the answer? No, it is not the answer, it is first the question. And the question is: "Do you know who you are?" That's the question. Do you know who you are? Turn to your neighbor and ask your neighbor, "Neighbor, do you know who you are?" (Voices) I picked that up from somewhere. (Laughter) So it took me a long time to understand that the world is a collection of unlimited wealth and resources. Often we limit our potential by moving in our own small circles because of our fears.

If we change the way we view the world, if we change the way we see the world, there is nothing we cannot accomplish. It took me a long time to understand that. I grew up in an all-black town surrounded by a white county called Whitesboro, New Jersey. Thanks for mentioning my town. And the thing was, in my town, nothing ever good comes out of Whitesboro. We had a lot of good that came out of Whitesboro. I grew up with a race-based consciousness. Do you know what a race-based consciousness is? Anybody know what that is? Hands? Who knows what a race-based consciousness is?

It's when you live your whole life focusing on what? Race. And I grew up in a family situation a little tough. I grew up with low self-esteem, a lack of confidence in myself, grew up with two disabled brothers in my family. Tough situation and as a child, you know what happens? You get teased. You get called all kinds of names. They call you crazy and your family crazy and all that.

And I remember there was a defining moment in my life. And everybody has a moment where it's defining. At this particular time in my life I was about 13 or 14 years of age. We go down to this place, this store. The town of Whitesboro is only about 1200 or 1300 people. Small town. So we had one store in my town. And the owner of that store was named Mr. Teay. Mr. Teay is the big man in our town. Thirteen or fourteen years of age and we went down there, and I'm a pretty good basketball player, I'm all East Coast and I'm All-State and all of that, and I was getting scholarship offers twice every week or so.

I kind of uphold the banner for my family, I'm trying to uphold all the negative stuff, I'm trying to carry the torch. And so I'm kind of bragadocious, and I say, "Mr. Teay, guess what, I'm going to college." Mr. Teay says, "You're not going to no college. Your family's too stupid. You're too dumb." And I was hurt. The only leader we have in our town, and he's going to tell me I'm not going to college, your family's too stupid, and you're too dumb. I was hurt for awhile, but you know what? I got mad.

I said, "I'm going to fix that Mr. Teay. Guess what I'm going to do. I'm going to go to college, and I'm going to get my degree, and I'm going to bring it back, and I'm going to show Mr. Teay that I'm somebody." (Applause) It's tough in college. You're trying to play ball, you're trying to play hoops, and you got to come back and study. We'd get home late at night off of a two or sometimes three-day trip, and I'd have a test the next day. But I stayed up all night long. You know why? Because I got to take my degree back and show Mr. Teay that I'm somebody.

Then I said, "You know what? I'm going to really fix Mr. Teay. I got something for Mr. Teay. I'm going to really fix him now. I'm going to go get my Master's Degree and show Mr. Teay that I'm really a big man now." I worked in the prison system for five years. Now, I didn't say I was in the prison system for five years. I don't want to see that in the Dallas morning paper tomorrow: "Stedman Graham in the prison system for five years." (Laughter) Worked in public relations and marketing. When I was coming up early on, I didn't understand the meaning of

My country 'tis of thee Sweet land of liberty Of thee I sing

Land where our fathers died Land of the pilgrim's pride From every mountainside Let freedom ring

See, I didn't get that. I didn't understand that freedom thing. And it took me a long time before I realized, this freedom thing, what is this freedom thing, we talk about this freedom thing. I asked myself, "Are we free?" When I found that freedom thing, I'd been looking for that my whole life, trying to fill up that hole in my heart all of my life. And I finally found it. And I realized that we live in a world where we get up at 5:00, 6:00 in the morning.

We wash our face, we brush our teeth, we get breakfast, we get the kids off, we come back home, we get some dinner, we spend some time with the family, we go to bed, maybe we dream. That's Monday. What do we do on Tuesday? This is interactive. What do we do on Wednesday? Same thing. [Audience: "Same thing."] Same thing. What do we do on Thursday? [Audience: "Same thing."] Same thing. What do we do on Friday? [Audience: "Same thing."] Friday we may go out, right? Saturday what do we do? We wash, we sleep in, we clean up, we cut the lawn, we watch television, we go out Saturday night maybe, out a little bit.

Sunday we all go to church, and we eat chicken dinners in the afternoon, and we get ready for what? [Audience: "Monday."] Monday. And how long – not you all – but how long can some people do that for? All their lives. All their lives. Thirty years, some people say. And they look back and they say, "You know what? I've been doing this for thirty years. I have no more in the end than I had in the beginning." So if I ask you a question – you all are smart, you all are smart – if you did the same as you did yesterday, as you will do today, as you will do tomorrow, what have you done? Nothing.

If you did the same as you did yesterday, as you will do today, as you will do tomorrow, what have you done? Nothing, because you've already done it. Zero. Why can't we move? Why can't we build further than we are? And you know what? I discovered the answer. Because we never get a chance to do what? T-H-I-N-K. We never get a chance to think. Why? Because we're always defined by the outside. The world says, "You know what? I'm going to define you. I'm going to define you by your color and tell you what your limitations are."

And what they do is they say, "You know what? You're black, and you're nothing, you're never going to be anything." And we buy into it. How many people in this country believe they can't make it because of the color of their skin? African-Americans? We got some in here. How many? What? 20 percent? Can I get 30? Can I get 40? Any 50s? 60s? Any 80s? 90 here. Ninety percent of the world, African-Americans believe they can't make it. Why? Because they have been programmed to turn their power over to somebody else to define their existence.

Let's move past African-Americans. How about Hispanics? How many Hispanics in this world believe they can't make it because of what? Because of somebody else's definition. And do they buy into it? Let's move from Hispanics. Let's talk about women. A lot of women here. How many women believe they can't make it, what? Because they're a woman, and they live in a man's world, and they're confined and put into a box. If you step out of that box, what happens? "What you doing, thinking? What you doing stepping outside that box? You better get back in line."

And so, you could be white and do what, been told what? "You're nothing and you're never going to be anything," or "You're not the right class, you're not in the right class, you don't come from the right background." You buy into it. What happens? You perform based on what? The definition given to you. Even in relationships, what happens? I'm sure some of you, some of you try to define me by what? My relationship, right? (Laughter) I know you all, don't say you all didn't say it. I know you all said it. "Who's coming to speak to you all this afternoon, who's the keynote?"

"Oh, I think Oprah Winfrey's boyfriend is going to speak to you this afternoon." I know you all said it, don't say you all didn't say it. Windy, I'm so glad you didn't introduce me as Oprah Winfrey's boyfriend this afternoon. (Laughter) And so what you don't realize is, ladies and gentlemen, I define myself. (Applause) I can't rely on you to define me, because you always want to make me less than you. See, I got to take the power back. See, I got to buy myself back from the plantation.

And so we get stuck in this slave mentality. I'm not talking about color. I'm talking about trying to own yourself. But the world doesn't want you to own yourself. They want to control everything that you do. Why? Because they don't want you to think. The educational system teaches us what? How to memorize. Take tests. Repeat the information back. You get labeled with a grade and, based on that grade, you determine your worth and your value.

And you get a degree, you get a piece of paper, and if I ask you what you learned, if I asked you what you read two weeks later after you read it, what would you say? "I don't know. I forgot." So how in the world can you grow? How can you grow? How in the world can you maximize your potential based on the information in this world if it doesn't stick to your heart and soul? If you can't transfer it to your mind, and you can't apply it to the American free enterprise system or the world's enterprise system, how can you possibly grow? How can you possibly build a foundation? And how can you possibly know who you are?

And so the world says, "You know what? You don't know who you are? Guess what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell you and I'm going to define you." And I said, "How in the world can you talk about freedom when we're still on the plantation?" We moved from what? From the field to the house and now we're town slaves. We can go downtown now, right? And so what am I talking about? I'm not talking about race. I'm talking about labels. I'm talking about owning yourself based on what? Your potential as a human being. Do you know how powerful that is? [Applause] So the question is, how do you do that?

"You're talking today, you're here keynoting to us. How do you do it?" I discovered that – I said, "Oh my goodness, this is what everyone is looking for. They're looking for value." And I realized the value you give yourself is the value the world gives you. You give yourself no value, guess what? The world sees you exactly how you see yourself. Walk down like this, guess what?

The world says, "Oh, you must not think very good of yourself." So the challenge every day is what, ladies and gentlemen? Guess what? Everybody's equal. You know why is everybody equal? Everybody's got 24 hours. What is the question? What do you do with the 24 hours that you have? You can either be a follower or you can be a leader. You know what the beautiful thing about it is?

All of you have it. Everybody has it. And so, what's the first step? I wrote a nine-step process and put it in a book

called *You Can Make It Happen*, a New York Times bestseller, that talks about freedom. And the first step is: Check your ID. That's the first step: Check your ID. What's that mean? Well, we talk about your strengths. That's the first step. Don't tell me about your weaknesses. I don't want to hear about what you did, what your past is like.

Don't tell me about your history. I'm looking for folks, I want you to move out of your history and into what? Into your imagination. I want you to talk about innovation and development and creativity. I'm not talking about going back and living in your history. What happens when you live in your history? You get stuck. And so I realized one day, you know what? I don't have to be like my mother or father. I can separate myself from them. They did the best they could based on what they knew. If they'd have knew better they would have what? Done better.

So when I go back home, I look and I say, "That's why I do this. That's where I got that from. That's where I picked that up." If I like it I can keep it, but if I don't like it, what do I have to do with it? I got to figure out how in the world do I change that behavior. Eighteen years, nineteen years, in a household with somebody that says, "You know what? You're nothing and you're never going to be anything." How do you change that? You got to recreate some new thoughts. You got to be able to look at yourself differently.

Mind is the master-power that makes and molds And man is mind, and evermore he or she takes The tool of thought, and, shaping what he wills Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills

He or she thinks in secret, and it comes to pass Environment is but our looking-glass So we are what we think. So what's my challenge for where I came from? I got to what? Put some new thoughts in my mind, every single day in the 24 hours that I have. Why? Because the world is trying to take you out. And if you don't find the first step, you will always be average. You'll only be average.

The first step is based on the most powerful word in the world, and what is that? What is that, ladies and gentlemen? It's spelled L-O-V-E, love. If you find love, you find the first step. Somebody said something profound to me last week. They said, "You know what? Yeah, I got it. It's about loving yourself." So, if you can find the love in yourself, you can self-actualize potential. So, if I ask you to write down – I do seminars for young people. I spend six hours with young people, high school kids, talking about what? Them.

That's the only way you can spend six hours in a classroom, talking about them. You can't start talking about yourself. That won't work. We talk about, "What can you do? How do we invest in you based on what you love? I want you to write down everything that you love." And you know what they do? They write down 50 things. They write down 100 things. They can go on and on. What kinds of food do I love? Do I love to travel? What kind of work do I love? What kind of courses do I love?

I say to them, "Now what I want you to do is I want you to write down everything that you love, and I want you to take your 24 hours that you have and build a life around everything that you love. I don't want you to look at this as a job." Anybody ever had a job before? What's a job like? A job is tough. There's no energy in a lot of jobs. Sometimes you get a job that's great. But a job is tough. So when you find out something that you love, then you can self-actualize that every single day and improve on that, and that becomes a part of who you are, guess what? You can't take that from me.

You can't destroy me, you have to destroy me before I give it up. So when you get that passion – anybody got that passion? It takes passion to do this work that you are doing. (Applause) The most successful people in this business are what? People that what? That love their jobs. It takes passion to deal with folks in Job Corps. Passion to deal with folks in Goodwill. You've got to love them. They see it in your eyes when you walk in. You don't have to worry about whether you're going to be successful or not. You get that passion and people recognize that passion.

Second step: Create your vision. Where there is no vision, the people what? Perish. The vision is about dreaming, the vision is about innovation, the vision is about what? Creativity. Disney is about vision, had a vision for what? How to take some cartoons and make what out of them? Stories. Somebody had a dream. See, Dr. King had a dream. He had a wonderful, wonderful dream. He was a great man. He did wonderful things. Dr. King did pretty good. I bet you in Dallas we got some Dr. King streets and center, don't we, in Dallas? But guess what? That was Dr. King's dream. He

did pretty good with his dream.

The question I ask you is, "Where is your dream? What can you self-actualize?" So, vision, what you believe in. Third step: Develop your travel plan. Now we understand who we are based on love. We can map it all out, what we want to do. We have passion. We have vision, we can see it. We can believe it. We can build a life's destination of where we want to go. Now what do we have to do? We have to create an action plan based on what? Based on what we believe we can do. But if you can't believe it – someone once said, "If you can't believe it, you can't achieve it."

Once you believe it and you see it, now you can self-actualize it every single day and take the information that you have, apply it to your heart and soul, and turn to the American free enterprise system and say, "You know what, it's been done before. This is not new. I didn't create this because somebody else has done it." OK, travel plan, third step. Fourth step: Master the rules of the road, your guiding principles. What are your guiding principles? Integrity, work? Hard to work hard if you're working on something that you hate. Positive attitude.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you don't get anything out of this – I want to call it seminar – this session, remember this: keep a positive attitude, even if you have to fake it. Fake one, because you know what it does? When you have a negative attitude, your window of opportunity is about that big. You can fit about two people in there and maybe one can put up with your mess. But when you have a what? A positive attitude, what happens? You open up the whole world. Step 5: Step Into the Outer Limits. There's only two emotions. There's fear and there's love. What do you live by? What do you live by?

You live by fear or love? Can you take risks? You can take risks if you're passionate, right? You don't mind, you know, hitting a couple of walls. You don't mind having to go this way if you really care about what you want to do and you have a vision of where you want to go. Step 6: Pilot the seasons of change, not so much what happens to you, but how you respond to it. Lot of folks in prison today because somebody stepped on their what? Toe. Didn't have the internal capacity to deal with change. How many changes do you have to go through in the work that you do every single day? Lots of changes.

If you can't deal with it, what happens? You can't last. You're in the wrong business. Step 7: Build your dream team. No one makes it alone. No man or woman is an island unto themselves. It takes a team. You can't do it by yourself. Nobody does it by themselves. There is something called the "good old boys club" and the "good old girls club" now that's trying to hang in there, that's been alive and well for how many years?

And you may not be able to get in the good old boys club. And if you can't get in, what happens? You don't get the money, you don't get the deals, you don't get the opportunity. But there's a club who only lets people in who what? Who are free. So when you're free and you can transcend race and say, "You know what, I'm not focused on the color.

I'm not focused on the label. I'm focused on what? The human spirit." When you take your sweet spirit and you match it up with somebody else's sweet spirit, guess what you have? You have a team. It's a beautiful thing when you can just say, "You know what? I like you for you." You know how powerful that is to be the same person all time?

Whether you are talking to the President of the United States or a homeless person on the street, you are no different. You talk about power? You get that power and you got something. Step 8: Win by decision. Life is about choices. The choices that you make are based on information. Step 9: Win by decision – Win by decision, Step 8. Step 9: You know, sustain your vision. Sustain your vision. Commit to your vision. We talked about the nine-step process, we talked about passion, we talked about vision, we talked about the game plan. Can you develop a program that you can sustain over a long period of time?

Can you stay in the game? How long can you stay in the game? And so this freedom stuff, ladies and gentlemen, when you get this freedom stuff, it's a powerful thing. See, when you get this freedom stuff you can really sing that song.

My country 'tis of thee Sweet land of liberty Of thee I sing

Land where, what? our fathers died Land of the pilgrim's pride From where? from every mountainside What? Let

freedom ring

What I want you to do is I want you to, when you go back to your respective places, I want you to – every person you come in contact with, I want you to let your freedom ring. And in your travels, if you happen to run into a guy named Mr. Teay, tell him I said thank you. (Laughter) Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. Thank you so much. (Applause)

-- End of Video --