

Carol Whitten: It is now my pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker, Mr. D.J. Eagle Bear Vanas. Our featured speaker for the closing plenary session, D.J. Eagle Bear Vanas is an internationally acclaimed motivational storyteller and coach. He uses traditional warrior concepts and colorful wisdom found in Native American culture to inspire others to achieve their best in life, in school, and in their careers. He is the author of the book, *The Tiny Warrior: A Path to Personal Discovery and Achievement*, available in bookstores nationwide.

D.J. believes that dreams are not what you want and work – I'm sorry – dreams are what you want and work is how you get to them. We look forward to having him help us in discovering the warrior within each us as we come to the end of this extraordinary experience of learning and sharing that we have called this Institute. Please join me in a warm welcome for our keynote speaker, Mr. D.J. Eagle Bear Vanas. (Applause)

D.J. Eagle Bear Vanas: Boozhoo anishinaabe.... Hello, my fellow human beings. Thank you. Glad my family members are up here – no, just kidding. Now, be honest, is this the group – I think it is – this is the group that stayed to the bitter end? The group that wanted it all, right? (Laughter and applause) The group that wanted every golden nugget, every pearl that could come out of this experience, to squeeze all the good stuff, right? Or is this just the group whose flight doesn't leave till tonight? (Laughter)

I know why you're here. I know why you stayed. And I applaud you for doing that because this conference, *The Father Factor*, is so critically important to the success of our young people that I wish we would have had a couple million here instead of a couple thousand. (Applause) This impacts our communities every day. In the work that I do in our Native American communities from coast to coast, and the work I've been doing in twelve years, I've seen something missing throughout so many young people's lives, and it's the father factor.

That's why this conference is so important, and I appreciate you all being here. I really do. And one of the things I want to do during the time that we have to share together is to focus on you. You had the trainings, you had the new policies, you've had new ways of doing things that were taught to you this week – maybe things that you've heard before, maybe something new. But what I want you to understand is this: the conference doesn't end today. It starts.

To take something home with you, to take it back to your community to the people that you serve, to make them stronger – that's what this conference is all about. We hope that you had fun – everybody does – everybody worked hard to put this event on. We hope that you enjoyed the time in Dallas. But we want you to make sure you take something home to benefit the people who couldn't be here. That's what this is all about. Link up with somebody else. Accountability partners are great at conferences. Call each other two weeks from now, and say, “How's it going? Are you trying that new idea?”

What challenges have you run into so far?” And will you run into challenges? Absolutely. Somebody's going, “Oh, yeah.” You know it. There's going to be challenges when you get home. And don't try to do everything that you learned here, for crying out loud, don't do it – you'll go crazy. I talked to a few people in the lobby last night, and I asked them how the conference was going and the word kept coming up over and over again, “It was great. It was intense. It was intense.” Now, I know what that means.

That means ideas are coming a million miles an hour, and it's going to be tempting to try to do them all. Don't try to do them all. Pick four. Pick five. And then go home, and fight the good fight until you can make it a reality. That's why we come to these events, to improve – not just ourselves – but the people that we take care of, the people that we serve. And I know everybody wants to do a good job or else you wouldn't have made the time and effort to come to an event like this.

I know everybody wants to achieve their best and to serve the people that they take care of in the best possible way, but I think one of the things we overlook sometimes is how powerful we are as people, how much talent, how much ability we've been instilled with from the moment we were born. That's the gift that we got from the creator, and we've

all got it. We've seen examples through our history. One person can change the world.

But sometimes we overlook our own talent and our own ability, and we run into those challenges, and we get lost, and we say, "Well, maybe it's not going to happen," instead of looking deep within us at things we've already got laying under the surface. You know, we appreciate that we all have talent and ability, but a lot of times we don't understand it. When we appreciate an idea, we look at it from a distance, and we go, "Yeah, that thing has value. That's important." But when we understand it, it's part of us. It's part of who we are. It guides our decisions. It guides our thoughts.

And there's a difference between that – to appreciate something or to understand it – and I'm learning this firsthand. When my wife and I had our daughter over three years ago – Gabi – my wife decided she would breastfeed. And any woman who's ever breastfed, or who knows a woman who's breastfed, knows that is a sacrifice of time, effort, and comfort, right? And any man who's ever seen the mother of his child breastfeed, you know that you feel about as useless as a bump on a log.

You come in, you see this beautiful bonding moment going on that you're not part of, you walk in and you go, "Do you need anything? Want me to turn on the TV, or...?" You're at a total loss. (Laughter) And I appreciated what my wife was doing, but I didn't understand it. One morning my wife was getting ready in the shower. She's taking a shower, and I'm laying in bed with Gabi, got my shirt off, singing her a little song. Now, she rolls over and decides it's time for breakfast, and she latched on.

(Laughter) Now, when I regained consciousness it was probably maybe four, maybe five, minutes later, I woke up screaming, "Oh god, why, why?" And my wife jumps out of the shower. She hears all this commotion going on. Right on the bed is Gabi, crying her eyes out, and right next to her is me, crying my eyes out. (Laughter) I had to reach down with my thumb and wedge the jaws of my daughter off of my chest. And then I had to look down to see if that part was still attached. (Laughter) You guys ever bring home a brand-new pickle jar, and you open that lid and hear that sound [sucking sound]?

(Laughter) Oh yeah, feel the pain. But I tell you what, it changed the way I thought about it. I no longer just appreciated what my wife was going through, I understood it just a little bit more. So every time after that, when it was time to feed Gabi, I was in there with bells on. I'd run in, "You need anything? Want me to bake a cake, paint the house, what can I do?" (Laughter) I was ready to serve. So don't just appreciate what you have, don't just appreciate what you bring to the table. Learn to understand it, because there are people out there who are depending on you to do a great job at what you do.

Not a good job, a great job. And to get fathers involved in the community and in the lives of their children is going to take you doing a great job. Gabi got this little puzzle book for Valentine's Day this year. And in this little puzzle book, it had connect-the-dots, it had a little maze. And this maze – she was looking at it, she flipped the page, and my wife said, "No, give it a try, Gabi." She goes, "No, no, it's too hard." She goes, "Just try it out. Just see if you can do it."

And she goes, "OK," and she sat down at her desk, and she had her pen, and she's really focused, and after a few minutes, she actually got it. And she jumped up and down and she said, "I did it! I did it!" And then she said something that knocked our socks off. She said, "I knew I could do it, but I ignored myself." (Laughter) Now, such wisdom from the mouth of a three-year-old, and we wonder in our native cultures why we call our children "our sacred ones." You know, there's a Native saying that goes like this: "If you want wisdom, talk to an elder.

If you want the truth, talk to a child." Now, I've heard that throughout the years, and I believe that with all my heart. They remind us of the things that we've forgotten. They teach us the things we may not have learned that we need to learn, and if they're going to be strong, we need to get everybody involved in raising them the right way. You know, when I was born, I was born into poverty – teenage parents that didn't have a clue on what to do, no parenting experience, no education, and they were scared. Hardly had two nickels to rub together. Everything they owned could fit in the trunk of a car.

But they did one thing that I'll always be grateful for. When me, and then my sister, later, was born, they made us

number one. They made us number one. And now I do that with my daughter. My parents are still together after all these years. My mom has gone back and got her college degree, became a nurse, and has been for over twenty years, and works with the Head Start program, and has for almost, for over five years now. (Applause) My dad retired military, now works for Intel.

They've made me really proud, and they showed me that no matter how rough our start is, no matter how tough the road may get, our past doesn't have to define our present or our future. And that's one of the things they taught me through their actions. (Applause) But making me number one was one of those things that I'll always be grateful for, I'll always be grateful for. And now that I do that with my daughter, I look back at the things, the times that we've shared together, and I look at what my parents and how little they had to work with, but how much they did.

My mom always jokes around, she says, she goes, "Yeah, back then," she goes, "we were dumb and poor. I don't know how we made it." And I always joke back with her, and I say, "No, mom. No, you were rich and smart in the best of ways." I said, "You were smart enough to know that your kids needed a hundred percent unconditional love every day of their lives. Not just sometimes. Not just once every six months. Every day. And you were rich enough to provide it."

And that's one thing I will forever be grateful to my parents, and my father who when we went through those times where we were butting heads, there's not a day that goes by I'm not grateful for him being in my life. He helped shape me to be the man that I am today, the father that I am today, the husband that I am today. That's one thing I'll never forget. (Applause) I do understand this, too – I understand the work that you do out there – why it's so important. And I also understand this. I understand that what you do out there and why you do it isn't for the big bucks.

I understand that why you do it isn't to have your name in lights. I understand that why you do it is because you have a heart that's big enough to think beyond yourself. And I know you don't hear it enough, and I know that doing a great job at what you do may sometimes feel like wetting your pants in a dark suit – may make you feel warm and tingly inside, but nobody else really notices that much. (Laughter) I understand that, but I want to say to you – all of you up there in the stands, you down here – from the bottom of my heart, che miigwech, thank you very much for what you do.

(Applause) Thank you, for everything. You don't hear it nearly enough. But there's impacts you're having – and I know that we live in a society now where we want instant feedback. We want to know that – we work hard and we want to see the results. And you know when you work with people, it doesn't happen that way. We have to stay focused, and we have to stay committed, and those results will come. In the summer of 1997, I was going through my fourth year of the Lakota Sun Dance.

This is a traditional and very old, very powerful ceremony that the Plains tribes do in the areas of Montana, South Dakota, those areas. Even though my tribe is Odawa, or Ottawa, if you've heard that, from Michigan, my dad and I were invited into this circle to participate in this ceremony, which we were very honored to do. And this ceremony is done for a lot of different reasons, a lot of different reasons, but one of the biggest is to give thanks for all the things that we take for granted in life.

Number one, the spirit that brought us the pipe to pray with, and to give thanks for all the other things: food, water, shelter, our friends and family. So we go without those things for four days. On the third day, they bring us up to a tree. This takes place in an outdoor arbor about the size of the bottom floor here, and in the middle of that arbor is a tree that we put in the center, and it's called the Tree of Life, and it's kind of like our antenna to the creator for those four days.

And our medicine people lead us up to the tree on the third day, and they lay us on a buffalo robe, and they come up on either side of us, and they cut our chest open. Now, to even talk about this – just like any life changing experience, when you talk about it, you breathe life back into it. And every time I talk about this, I can smell the sage and the sweet grass burning in the air. I can hear the throb of that drum in the distance, [beating sounds], the heartbeat. I can feel the cactus needles in my feet as we dance from sunup to sundown, praying for everyone and everything in the world except ourselves.

I remember what it was like to go without water for a couple of days at a time during a hundred degree days. And when those piercings happen, and those sticks are inserted in the place of those holes, those are tied to ropes, and those ropes are tied to that Tree of Life, and we go up and back four times. And on the fourth time, we dance backwards until we rip free. Now, the reason why we do that – and I'm getting that reaction from the audience, “Why would you do that? Why would you do that?” Well, it's a good question.

The reason why we do that is because everything in our Native cultures – one of the things I know we all believe in, no matter what tribe, is the concept of balance: day for night, joy for pain, into every life a little rain must fall. And so as women push, push, push to make the world go on by delivering children into this world, we as men pull, pull, pull to balance it out. We show respect for the pain that women go through in childbirth by going through this experience.

Now, before you think that that's a great accomplishment, I was in the delivery room when my wife delivered our daughter, and I would much rather be a Sun Dancer any day of the week, I promise you. So we're not taking anything away from the mothers of the world going through this, we just want to show our respect. And when I finally broke free that fourth year – and you can hear these pops, they sound like firecrackers. You hear pow! pow! They fly to the other side of the arbor.

And I remember looking down, and I prayed for thanks, because the other symbol there is the creator lets us go to start our life over again, to leave our ignorant self, our mistakes, behind us and move forward from this point on. And you don't have to go through Sun Dance to get that experience. Every morning we wake up, we get that chance. But that's how we show respect. And I remember looking down, and I could see the drops of blood making puffs of dust wherever they landed, and praying for thanks that I had been let go.

And all of a sudden, my medicine man came to me and he grabbed me by my sage bracelet, and we started to run – I didn't expect this, I was clearing my head – and we started to run around the inside of this arbor. And as we ran – I had prepared for four years of my life for this, this is a ceremony that's done over four years, and this was my last – and he said something to me that I'll never forget. He didn't say, “Congratulations.” He didn't say “Good job.” He didn't give me a high five. What he said to me, though, has changed who I am as a man, who I am as a husband, as a father.

It affects the work that I do every day of my life. He said one thing to me, and he said it almost under his breath. He said, “Remember, you're a warrior now.” And I felt about that small, because everything that I had learned in that traditional circle of what it means to be a warrior for our people was different than the stuff we see in movies. It's different than the things we read in books, and it's definitely not the things that our youth are listening to in music today. It's not about being the toughest kid on the block. It's not even necessarily about wearing a uniform.

I did that for ten years of my life. It goes to the core of who we are as people, and it's simply this: warriors spent a lifetime developing their talents and abilities so that they could become an asset, a benefit, to the village that they served. Now, whether you're Native or not doesn't matter. This idea transcends that. And whether you live in a traditional village or not – most of us don't, but we all have a village to serve, do we not? Our family, our community, the people we take care of, the state you live in, the country you live in, the planet you live on.

We all have a village to serve. And the burning question that should be on our minds – and that's why events like this are so important – the burning question should be: what am I doing to develop myself so I can have a deeper impact with the people I serve? And just like being on an airplane – when you're on an airliner, those masks drop out, who do they say put the mask on first? Yourself. All right? Because you can't help anybody if you're unconscious. All right? That's why I want to focus on you during the time that we have.

You've had a lot of the policies, you've had a lot of the training, which are all great and important to do the job that you do, to do a great job. But I want to focus on you. Because I want to send you back to your community with that renewed sense of purpose, of passion in what you do. Because it's so critical. People are depending on you to do that, to do a great job. One of the first and most important ideas in this is to understand the power of vision, how things in life start off as just a thought, and we can make them a reality if we're strong enough, if we're focused enough.

But we run into this obstacle in life. Scientists say one out of every four people is some shade of crazy in our society. Do you believe that? Look at the three people next to you. If they look OK, it might be you. (Laughter) I hate to bust your bubble. But here's the thing: if you've ever been called crazy, if you've ever been called stubborn, unrealistic, overly optimistic, whatever label they're going to slap on your forehead, you're in great company. You're rubbing shoulders with the people that changed this planet. They changed technology. They changed education.

They changed social standards. These are the people we read about in history. People like Aristotle, people like Martin Luther King, Jr., people like Sequoyah, Tecumseh, people like Thomas Edison, the Wright Brothers. These people, during their time, were judged to be crackpots, off their rocker, a little not right, however you want to define it, and they're the ones we read about, all right? Because we all deal with that criticism. And there's going to be times when you have a great idea. Now, isn't this funny how it works? For every great idea, there's a critic, isn't there?

Or a whole group of them. And that's ok, there's always going to be somebody there to criticize you or your ideas. Just make sure you're not one of them. I think that's the key to making those visions a reality. And in our Native communities, our tribes, we always took visions and dreams seriously. We would even do special ceremonies to figure out what those things were, because that's how much we believed in them. And any more nowadays, you mention the word "dream" or "vision" and people kind of chuckle a little bit. Did the world turn suddenly cynical? No, it's always been that way.

This has always been our greatest challenge. But what happens is, we have these great ideas, and we say, "Wouldn't it be great? Wouldn't this be a great idea to get fathers involved?" And then we start running into challenges and say, "No, it can't be done," and all of a sudden we start to go, "Ahh, maybe it's not meant to be." And then we start to settle, and this is the danger. We start to settle for good enough. We start to settle for second best.

Here's the thing that I've found working with youth across our country, too, is one of the dangers is simply this: when you settle for second best, eventually you'll settle for third best, and then you'll settle for fourth best. Eventually fifth best won't look so bad, until you're down at the bottom of the barrel and say OK. That's the danger. You guys ever see those new dog collars at work? You bury a wire in the yard. You ever see these? It's like technology at its worst, you know. You bury a wire in the yard, and then you put an electronic box on the dog's collar.

And you feel bad for the dog because he just doesn't see it coming. You open the door, he sees a candy store of opportunity. He sees the neighbor kid that he doesn't like. He sees the neighbor's dog that he does like. He sees the mailman, a car, and – whoosh – he's gone. Runs as fast as he can, [pant, pant] gets to the front zone of that yard, and what happens? Bzzzzt. [Yelp] You'll see a dog go six feet straight up in the air. It's amazing to watch this. And the dog doesn't understand what just happened. He lands, and he goes [growl]. He goes, "Hope nobody saw that."

He runs to the right side of the yard, gets to that zone and what happens? Same thing. Bzzzzt. [Yelp] Now, you can go back on your porch and watch this for hours. Bzzzzt. [Yelp] Bzzzzt. [Yelp] Bzzzzt. [Yelp] (Laughter) But eventually, eventually, the dog gets it. He knows where he can and can't go without getting zapped, without getting hurt. Now, the kicker is this: now you can take the collar off, and the dog still won't go out of the yard. The reason why is that dog has been conditioned to accept limits. He's been trained to accept boundaries.

And the very same thing can happen to you and me on a daily basis, and it happens to a lot of people out there. They start getting conditioned to accept second best. They start getting conditioned to accept good enough. Don't let that happen to you. You're going to bring great ideas back to your community. And what are the ideas that you have that you're not sharing with other people? What idea do you have that could improve all of Head Start across the nation, that could improve the Fatherhood Initiative and how it's carried out?

Because I tell you, those great ideas that you don't share die on the vine. A pen is useless till you write with it. A car is useless until you drive somewhere. And your ideas are going to drift away if you don't share them with somebody else, if you don't get other people behind them and make them a reality. I have a really good friend – we've been buddies now for about seven years – named John. He's Chickasaw Indian.

And when he was growing up, he used to have visions of sitting in a cardboard box – eight years old – and dreamt about blasting off and going into space, used to have this idea over and over again. And he went through the same stuff we all go through – the criticism, the judgment. Who are you? What makes you so special? You're from a small town in Oklahoma. There's no Indian astronauts. And he heard this kind of stuff, so it took away his confidence, his belief in his vision. So by the time he got out of high school, he decided to go to college and just try it out, see what happens.

You know when you go to “try something out,” your heart's not in it, and his wasn't. At the end of the first year, he had below a 2.0. Went to go out into the world, got a construction job, linked up with a mentor who was his boss at the time. He sat him down and asked him one question, and said, “John, what do you want to do with your life?” He hadn't thought about it in years, and he said, “I guess this.” He said, “No. What do you want to do with your life?” That's a profound question – isn't it? – that sometimes we don't focus on.

And this got him excited to go back to college, and this time, he got commissioned, became a pilot in the Navy, went on to get his Master's Degree in Engineering, got selected for the test pilot program. And in 1996, that same eight-year-old boy, that was now a man, became Commander John B. Herrington of the Chickasaw Nation, our first Native American astronaut. (Applause) And the best part is, if you would have watched 2002, November 23rd, you would have seen the first Indian go into space.

Now the reason why I admire John so much – not just because of what he's accomplished, what he's achieved – but it's because of the kind of man that he is. His family comes first. He takes care of his girls like they're the center of his universe, not the space program. That's why I admire him so much. And here's the other thing: we don't all have to be an astronaut to shoot for the stars when it comes to our ideas. He found his vision. What's yours? What's yours?

That's what I want you to focus on – what you're going to bring back to the people who couldn't be here. Now, it's going to be a struggle. It's going to be a challenge. You're going to be told, “There's not enough time. There's not enough money. There's not enough manpower. There's...” You're going to hear the no's, all right? But that conditioned thinking – we've got to break out of that. Everybody knows what a pit bull is, right? A pit bull's not known for being a fast dog, or a strong dog, or a smart dog – not even a very good-looking dog, on the scale of dogs, at least.

But the pit bull is known for a quality that's unlike any other dog. When a pit bull bites, he locks his jaws. Pit bulls are so committed to what they do, they had to wedge the jaws of a pit bull off someone's rear end with a crowbar. That's commitment, right there, that's commitment. (Laughter) Now, if we could inject just a little bit of that into what we do every day, imagine what kind of results we could get. But we've got to hang onto them. We can't let people take them away or shoot them full of holes. It's going to happen, there's going to be times when people will try to do that.

Stay focused. Stay committed. One of the other things that you'll see out there is the power of environment. You see this all the time with the people you work with. How important it is to remember who we surround ourselves with. And when we talk about our young kids – that environment that they're in – having everybody involved, including fathers, is so critically important. We grow – with my tribe – we grow what is called the Three Sisters garden – the Three Sisters because they grow together better than they do alone. The first crop we grow is corn, which grows up in a stalk.

The second crop we grow are beans, which grow better when they vine up something, because they grow in a vine. The third crop is squash, which grows along the ground, and it weaves so tightly that when weeds try to grow, it puts a tendril around them and chokes them out, so it keeps the patch weed free, and they have such big leaves that they lock in the moisture along the ground, which benefits all three plants. Now, the best part of the Three Sisters is this: what one takes out of the soil, the others put back in, and it works that way all the way around. It's called symbiosis.

It's when three things are stronger together than they are apart. And I think one of the greatest challenges in our lives is to be able to create that kind of environment, a give and take environment that keeps us strong. And that's one of the biggest challenges – working with the young people that you work with and the families – is trying to help them build that in their own lives. I had an elder tell me years ago, and I believe this with all my heart, our spirits are like sponges. They soak up whatever they're around. They almost can't help it. That's the way that we're designed.

And we have to be very aware of what's around our environment and help those families build a good one on their own. We always heard this growing up, didn't we? Sticks and stones will break our bones, but, what? [Audience: Words will never hurt us.] Words will never hurt us. That's a lie. Scientific studies have shown that when you are verbally attacked, when you are criticized, it lights up the same areas of your brain as physical pain. That revelation is profound, isn't it?

We wonder why these negative words that come into the ears of these little ones have such a devastating effect, especially when it's coming from somebody that they admire. That environment is critical, it's key, to having us be healthy, to having us be happy in life as we step through this journey – surrounding yourself with the right kind of people, helping families surround themselves with the right resources, the right elements that they need to be strong. We talk about – we use the term *mshki akeh*, which means “medicine” in our Native communities.

And medicine goes beyond just having a pill, it goes beyond any kind of treatment that we tend to look at in a hospital environment. Medicine is everything in our life – people, events, music, books, anything and everything that can keep us healthy and moving in the right direction. That's what medicine is. And you have to understand, if you want to keep doing a great job at what you're doing, find out what your medicine is because when you discover what yours is to keep you healthy and strong, you can share that with others and help them get to that same level.

The other thing I think we tend to overlook, especially when it comes to little ones, and I've seen this with my own daughter, is the power of presence. I saw this with my parents growing up – the power of presence. And your children want your presence – meaning your physical time, your being in the same room with them – more than they want your presents, the toys, the gifts, the stuff. In 1988, Anthony Hembrick, an American, was slated to win the gold medal in Seoul during the Olympics. He had an opportunity to shine in front of the whole world, but he had a problem.

That morning, he missed the bus, he missed his match, and he didn't win the gold medal. The lesson behind there: you have to be present to win. You have to be present to win. And it's the same with our kids, and it's the same with the families that need you, that need your service. We have to be present to win, present in the moment. The things that I remember most fondly from my childhood was never the things that my parents bought me. It was never toys or items. The most precious memories I have growing up are the times that I spent with my parents.

My dad – we had some of the most memorable times of my life – I mean, the conversations we had. Fourteen years old, I'm cleaning the yard with him, we're both raking pine needles, he was stationed in Mississippi. We had to rake pine needles out of our yard and we took a break. We sat up against the house, and my dad talked to me about going to college. He said, “D. J.” He goes, “Your mom and I really want you to go to college.” He goes, “But we won't force you to go.” He goes, “Neither one of us had gone to college, but we both know how important education is, so we would like you to go.”

And here's what he told me, he said, “And if you want to go,” he goes, “we'll sell everything we own to get you through.” Those are the kinds of conversations I remember most growing up, not the things that I got. I remember one summer my family wanted to take us on a family vacation, but they didn't have the money. So we went all the way down the road to the local Holiday Inn. That was one of the best weekends I've ever had in my life. I have been around the world.

I have been to some of the most beautiful cities on the planet, but none of them compare to that weekend at the Holiday Inn because I was with my mom and dad. (Applause) One of the things that we talk about a lot, too, is our attitude. We talk about this all the time. How it affects us, how it affects the people we work with, everything I need to learn about this lesson. And it does. It affects everything. It might not be everything, but it sure affects everything we do. And we tend to overlook that power.

Ten years ago, I was in a little town in Minnesota called Bemidji, and I was working up there. Three people.... Population of Bemidji is at this conference, you have four people.... No, I'm just kidding. Small town, and I got done doing a program, had a great time, had a blast with everybody there, took off out of town, got the rental car, felt like a million bucks. As I'm driving out of the town, there's a hand painted sign that said, “Zoo This Way.” I said, “A zoo?”

In Bemidji?” I said, “I’ve been to zoos in New Orleans, in DC, in Denver.

I said, “I’ve never been to a zoo in a town this size. I got to check it out.” So I pulled over and what I saw shocked me. They had mountain lions and bears and wolves in cages with bars this far apart. You could have stuck your head in there, your leg, a small child could have wiggled their way through. I said, “This looks dangerous.” But what caught my eye was – right up next to the gift shop – was a tall, golden cage, and in that cage was a spider monkey sitting on the perch. He was having one of those kind of days that we have from time to time.

It was hot out, nobody had cleaned his cage in four or five days, and he was kind of slumped over. He’s got a fly crawling across his head. He just looked miserable, and I said, “I wonder if there’s something I could do to pep him up.” And right next to the cage was monkey food for a dollar, it was like these graham crackers. So as soon as I go for it, boy, he perked right up [monkey noises]. He was putting his hand out, he knew the drill. So I started feeding him. He’s eating, I’m happy, he’s happy, everything is going great. Now, I do this a couple of times, and then he grabs my hand. Firmly.

And I got nervous. You guys ever see that movie, Outbreak? (Laughter) Monkeys can carry some funky stuff that none of us want, so I got nervous, but he didn’t bite me. What he did, he was trying to pull me into the cage, and then he grabbed my watch, and he puts his hands on either side of my watch, and he started watching the second hand. (Laughter) I started laughing, I go, “Look, he’s hypnotizing himself.” And then he tries to pull me into the cage, and now we’re three inches away from each other. I’m looking at him, he’s looking at me – in one of those primal bonding moments nobody really understands.

And all of a sudden he sticks his arms out of the cage and puts his hands into my hair and starts going.... (Laughter) Ever see monkeys do that? Ann mentioned it just a minute ago, preening. Monkeys only do that as a sign of affection. Monkeys only do that if they like you, so I knew things were going great. I didn’t know if this meant we were dating or if we were engaged, but things were looking good. (Laughter) Now, at this point, this little guy comes running up the sidewalk – little kid, big glasses, big baseball hat, big backpack – comes running up the sidewalk, screaming, “Monkey! Monkey!”

Grabs the first thing he can get his hand on, which happened to be hanging out of the back of the cage, which was his tail, puts his hands and jerked as hard as he could. I thought he was going to pop his tail off. But what he did is he pulled him so hard that he wedged his little rear end in between two of the bars. And the monkey went nuts. He went from this nice little creature to a wild animal in about half a second. Total transformation. All of a sudden the monkey jumps on his perch and WAAAAAH! You guys ever see monkey teeth up close?

Monkeys have some serious teeth, and I said, “This is not going to end well.” And just when I think he’s losing the battle, the monkey jumps back on his perch and gets focused. And I said, “What the heck is he doing?” And he gets down in this trance, and he has got the look of concentration. And then I realized one of his hands was behind him, under his tail, and after a few seconds, whoop, monkey surprise. A whole handful. The little kid never saw it coming. (Laughter) He’s out in front, “Lalalalala...” Splat! [Crying sound] Took off running.

It got his forehead, his glasses, he was gone, screaming bloody murder. Now, the monkey’s winning the battle. He’s having a ball, now. He’s reloading, he’s ready for war. But now an amazing thing happened. The little guy ran down the sidewalk and as soon as he rounded the corner and was out of the line of sight of the monkey, immediately he changed again. Turned right back around, after he was done dealing with this issue, and turned right back around and went, “OK. Now who had monkey food? Was it you? Was it?” That quick. I have never seen a change like that happen so quick.

And when something like this happens in your life – we all have moments like this, where something is – I had to wipe the tears out of my eyes first – but remember, life’s trying to teach you a lesson at this point. I took two things out of that day that I’ve never forgotten and I never will. Number one, no matter what anybody says, don’t upset a monkey. It’s not worth it. But number two, and more importantly – and how – the thing that’s important to the work you do, is this: life is going to treat you like you treat it first. Life’s going to treat you like you treat it first. (Applause)

We've all felt that, haven't we? You can substitute any word you want in there for life. Relationships, you can substitute career, whatever it is, it's a give and take kind of scenario. It works like a big mirror. We all know that. Everybody tilt your head back really quickly, really quickly, and don't look at the light [noises]. Just pick a spot on the ceiling to focus your attention on. One of the keys to accomplishing anything in life is to focus on one thing at a time in a world of distraction.

Now that you're smiling – smile – smile – the biggest, dumbest grin you ever smiled in your life. You can hang your tongue out, you can drool, it doesn't matter. Now look down at the person next to you. Bunch of crazy people in here all of the sudden. Now, here's the thing. Not everybody did that right. Some of you got into it, I could tell. Some of you didn't. Some of you got into it when you were looking up – [noises] – and I go, “Now look down at the person next to you,” and you go [noises]. (Laughter)

Now, here's the thing. We all know the power of humor, right? The power of humor – it's kind of like greasing the wheels. Our elders have always taught us this, that laughter is good medicine. Having a good attitude is good medicine. But science has proven it. When you laugh, when you smile, you release chemicals in your bloodstream that allow you to learn faster, get along with other people better, boosts your immunities, and lowers your stress. Who wouldn't want that every day of their life? It's free. It doesn't take another budget line item. It's free.

It affects everything and everyone that you come in contact with. It's free. Use it. (Applause) I wanted to read something really quickly for you that makes this point how life works. This is the basic dynamics of life, and we've all experienced it. This is my first book, called *The Tiny Warrior*. And in this book, there is a young man named Justin, who is twenty-seven years old, who loses his way in life. And just like we sometimes do, we get too proud, our ego gets in the way of asking for help. Well, he finally gets to that point and asks his grandfather for help.

And his grandfather starts to tell him these stories of a little Indian boy that lived hundreds of years ago, and through these tales, he starts to see his own life reflected, learning these lessons. And this is one I that want to share, about what we're talking about right now, the importance of attitude, and the little things in life that can make a big difference. Cricket sat there for quite some time and heard his mother's voice, “When you arise in the morning to greet the sun, do so with joy in your heart and the world will return it.”

Cricket felt the warmth of the sun on his back as he walked back to the village. He showed up just in time to see the chief sharing stories and lessons with the children. The chief was a stocky man with kind eyes and a wide smile. He was intent on telling his story. “In my right hand, I have the tiny invisible spirit of a dog. He is cruel, vicious, and mean,” the chief began. “In my left hand, I have the tiny invisible spirit of another dog. This one is loyal, friendly, and kind. Each day when I wake up, the two tiny spirits fight with each other.”

Cricket hung on every word and couldn't wait for the ending. “Which one wins?” Cricket asked in a rush. The chief seemed to beam at Cricket's curiosity. “Whichever one I feed that day,” the chief said with a broad grin. We choose the reflection our spirit will cast the world. It's a choice we get to make every day. Make a great one every time you have the opportunity. (Applause) Now, the last thing I want to leave you with is this: to be patient. To be patient with yourself, to be patient with your efforts, to be patient with the other people that you take care of. Be patient.

I know the speed of life any more is the speed of light. Everybody's got a cell phone, everybody's got a computer. We're moving so fast, so fast, so fast. We live in an era, “lose 50 pounds in a month” pills are on the TV. “Get rich in a month” schemes are on TV. You know? “Why wait for happiness? Go now. You can charge it!” We see the impacts of that, because we live in a society that we're all wanting the shortcut, the quick hit, the immediate response, the immediate feedback. And you know working with people, it doesn't work that way, so we have to be patient.

I've come full circle in my life in one way. At 17 years old, I went 1500 miles away to college, and now I live less than three miles away from my parents, which I love. And I get to spend a lot of time with my dad, doing things. He still cracks me up like nobody else. My parents have the original microwave – the original, old school, first model, twice the size of this speaker, huge. You could clean it out, put furniture in it and have it as a guest bedroom – I mean it's big. But my dad won't get rid of it. He says, “It works, doesn't it?”

“Well, yeah, Dad, it works but when you turn it on, the TV goes out of tune.” They have a little dog named Poncho. They turn this thing on, she goes [yelps], patches of hair falling off – it's sad. But he won't get rid of it because it works. Well, one day, he's heating a piece of pizza up in the microwave and puts thirty seconds on the timer. [Beeping] Start. [Buzzing] Now, he's watching this, and about fifteen seconds into it, he starts going, “Oh, come on!” (Laughter)

And I started laughing. I said, “Aren't we all like that at times?” Haven't you ever been guilty of not being able to wait thirty seconds for something as important as a meal? I've done that before, because that's the way we live. And sometimes it hurts us because we want it all, but we want it all now. It'll come to you. The impacts that you want to have in your community and with the people that you take care of, they'll come. But just not that quick, not at the touch of a mouse.

You guys have seen that biology experiment – the little kid brings home a Styrofoam cup, soil, and a seed, and what's that seed always going to be? A bean, because how long does it take a bean to grow? Twenty-two minutes, right? Twenty-two minutes, tops. No, in two or three days, you got a bean plant. That's why we don't use bamboo in the school systems. First week, first month, first year, nothing. Second year, nope. Third year, uh-uh. Fourth year, not yet. Fifth year – fifth year – that bamboo will break a shoot, and it'll grow ninety feet in six weeks.

You can almost watch it grow. Now, you're probably wondering, smart people that you are, what the heck was it doing for five years? It was growing. You just couldn't see the results. It was putting roots out in every direction so, that when it did grow, it could reach that height. It grew from a strong foundation. This goes directly back to the work that you're doing, getting fathers involved in our communities and with our kids. They need that strong foundation, and they need you to help create it.

Now, we have no limits to how high we can grow, how much we can learn, how much good we can do. In the warrior path that you're on right now, which goes right back to service, taking care of other people besides yourself, you're on that path now. It's a good path to be on, but it's tough. You're going to run into challenges. And the last thing I want to read to you, hopefully will give you strength at a point in time when you need it most.

The path of a warrior is not an easy one. Warriors make mistakes, feel pain, get scared, and they cry. Sometimes they fight with all the fury they can muster only to find out they are fighting themselves. All of this doesn't matter because warriors keep going in spite of it all, in spite of themselves. They persist in fighting to become the person they desperately need to be, a better person for the creator, for their family, friends, community, co-workers, clients, and themselves. Warriors are people like you. (Applause)

Che miigwech. Thank you very much and happy Father's Day to all the fathers out there. Tyrone, happy Father's Day. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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