

Robert F. Smith: You Are Enough

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Robert F. Smith Commencement Address to Morehouse College on May 19, 2019

Robert F. Smith's speech at the 135th Commence...



President Thomas, board of Trustees. Faculty, staff, and Morehouse alumni.

The extraordinary Angela Bassett, and the distinguished Professor Doctor Edmund Gordon.

Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, family, and friends.

And most of all, Morehouse College Class of 2019: Congratulations!

Earning a college degree is one of the greatest and most impressive of life's accomplishments.

But success has many parents – and as hard as each of you has worked to achieve what you all have achieved today, you've had a lot of help along the way. We are the products of a community, a village, a team. And many of those who have made contributions for you to arrive at this very moment are here with you today.

So, first and foremost, graduates of the class of 2019, please stand and join me in recognizing the love and commitment of those who have been with you on this long and hard journey!

Graduates, standing here before you is one of the great honors of my life. And I am so proud to share it with my mother, Dr. Sylvia Smith, a lifelong educator and the greatest role model of my life, who is here today.

This is the first of three graduations in my family this week. One of my daughters graduates from NYU, another graduates from high school and is headed off to Barnard in the fall, and my niece is graduating from my alma mater, Cornell, next weekend. So I want to thank the Morehouse administration for perfectly timing today's festivities in advance of them so that I could be here.

Morehouse was built to demand excellence and spur the advancement and development of African American men. I have always been drawn to its rich history, and I am optimistic for its bright future.

The brothers from Morehouse I've met – or revered at a distance – understand the power of this education and the responsibility that comes with it. Willie Woods, Morehouse's Chairman of the Board, is one such man. Thank you, Chairman Woods.

In our shared history – as a people, and as a country – the Morehouse campus is a special place. The path you walked along Brown Street this morning to reach this commencement site was paved by men of intellect, character, and determination.

These men understood that when Dr. King said that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, he wasn't saying it bends on its own accord. It bends because we choose to put our shoulders into it together and push.

The degree you earn today is one of the most elite credentials that America has to offer. But I don't want you to think of it as a document that hangs on a wall and reflects what you've accomplished up till now.

No.

That degree is a contract – a social contract – that calls on you to devote your talents and energies to honoring those legends on whose shoulders you and I stand.

Lord knows you are graduating into a complex world. Think about what we have faced in just the years you spent as Morehouse students:

We have seen the rise of Black Lives Matter, lending voice to critical issues that have been ignored by too many for too long.

We've seen the Me Too movement, shining a spotlight on how far we still have to go to achieve real gender equality.

We've also seen the unapologetic public airing of hate doctrines by various groups.

We've seen the implications of climate change become impossible to ignore and become ever more severe.

Our connected world has grappled with new questions about security, privacy, and the role of intelligent machines in our work and lives.

And we've witnessed the very foundation of our political system shaken by the blurring of the sacred line between fact and fiction... right and wrong.

Yes, this is an uncertain hour for our democracy and our fragile world order. But uncertainty is nothing new for our community.

Like many of yours, my family has been in the United States for 8 or 9 generations. We have nourished this soil with our blood. Sown this land with our sweat. Protected this country with our bodies. And contributed to the physical, cultural, and intellectual fabric of this country with our minds and our talent. And yet, I am the first generation of my family to have secured all my rights as an American.

Think about it:

1865 was the first time that most African American families had a hint of access to the first and until now, greatest wealth-generating platform of America – land.

The Freedmen's Bureau was supposed to deliver 850,000 acres of land to the formerly enslaved, a program that was then canceled and replaced with a Freedman's Savings Bank...which was then looted.

Essentially that recompense was reneged upon. We didn't have broad access to the Homestead Act nor Southern Homestead Act where 10% of the land in the U.S. was distributed for no more than a filing fee.

It wasn't until 1868, after the passing the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the 14th amendment, that my family actually had a birthright to be American Citizens.

Then, when America decided to create a social safety net for its citizens in 1935, they created a Social Security program.

Yet that program excluded two categories of workers: maids and farmworkers, which effectively denied benefits to two-thirds of African Americans, and 80% of Southern African Americans.

It wasn't until 1954 that my family had a right to equal education under protection of the law – guaranteed by Brown v. Board of Education.

And while the 15th Amendment gave my family the right to vote – the men, at least – starting in 1890, those rights were rolled back in the South and remained suppressed until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Even today, more than a half-century after that, the struggle to ensure true integrity at the ballot box is still very much alive.

All of these landmark extensions of our rights – and subsequent retrenchments – set the stage for a new policy of forced desegregation utilizing school bussing that went into effect when I reached the first grade in my hometown of Denver, Colorado.

Our family lived in North East Denver, and back then, Denver, like most other American cities, remained extremely divided by race, both politically and geographically.

In my community, my neighbors were mostly educated, proud, hard-working, and ambitious. They were dentists, teachers, politicians, lawyers, Pullman porters, contractors, small business owners and pharmacists.

They were focused on serving the African-American community and providing a safe and nurturing environment for the kids in our neighborhood.

They were on the front lines of the Civil Rights movement. They were sacrificing their sons to the Vietnam War. They mourned the death of a King, two Kennedys and an X.

Despite all they gave, they had yet to achieve the fullness of the American Dream. But they continued to believe it was only a matter of time – if not for them, then surely for their children.

I was among a small number of the kids from my neighborhood who were bussed across town to a high-performing, predominantly white elementary school in South East Denver. Every morning we were loaded up on bus number 13 – I'll never forget it –and taken across town to Carson Elementary.

That policy of bussing only lasted through my fifth-grade year, when intense protests and political pressure brought an end to forced bussing. But those five years drastically changed the trajectory of my life.

The teachers at Carson were extraordinary. They embraced me and challenged me to think critically and start to move toward my full potential. I, in turn, came to realize at a young age that the white kids and the black kids, the Jewish kids and the one Asian kid were all pretty much the same.

And it wasn't just the school itself – it was my community back home that embraced and supported our opportunity. Since most of the parents in my neighborhood worked, a whole bunch of us walked to Mrs. Brown's house after school and stayed there until our parents returned home from work.

Mrs. Brown was incredible. She kept us safe, made sure we did our homework the right way, gave us nutritious after school snacks, and taught us about responsibility. And because her house was filled with children of all ages, I suddenly had older kids as role models who were studying hard and who believed in themselves. Mrs. Brown also happened to be married to the first black Lt. Governor of our state, so we saw the possibilities first hand.

Amazingly, almost every single student on that number 13 bus went on to become a professional. I am still in touch with many as they make up the bedrock of their communities today. They are elected officials, doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, professors, community organizers, and business leaders.

An incredible concentration of successful black men and women from the same working-class neighborhood. Yet when I look at my other folks from the extended neighborhood – those who didn't get a spot-on bus number 13 – their success rate was far lower – and the connection is inescapable.

Everything about my life changed because of those few short years. But the window closed for others just as fast as it had opened for me.

That's part of the story of the black experience in America: getting a fleeting glimpse of opportunity and success just before the window is slammed shut.

The cycle of resistance to oppression, followed by favorable legislation, followed by the weakening of those laws, followed by more oppression, and more resistance, has affected and afflicted every generation.

And even as we've seen some major barriers come crashing down in recent years, we would be doing ourselves a disservice if we didn't acknowledge just how many injustices persist.

Where you live shouldn't determine whether you get educated. Where you go to school shouldn't determine whether you get textbooks. The opportunity you access should be determined by the fierceness of your intellect, the courage of your creativity, and the grit that allows you to overcome expectations that weren't set high enough.

We've seen remarkable breakthroughs in medical research, yet race-based disparities in health outcomes still persist. You are 41% more likely to die of breast cancer if you are an African-American woman in America today than if you are white.

You are 2.3 times more likely to die of prostate cancer if you are an African-American man than if you are white.

If you are African-American, you are more likely to be stopped by the police, more likely to be issued a ticket after being stopped, and more likely to be threatened with the use of force than if you are white.

This is our reality. This is the world you are inheriting.

Now, I am not telling you these things because I am bitter or because I want you to be bitter.

I don't call upon you to be bitter, I call upon you to make things better. Because the great lesson of my life is that despite the challenges we face, America is an extraordinary country. Our world is getting smaller by the day. And you are equipped with every tool to make it your own.

Today, for the first time in human history, success requires no prerequisite of wealth or capital – no ownership of land, or natural resources, or people.

Today, success can be created solely through the power of one's mind, ideas, and courage. Intellectual capital can be cultivated, monetized, and instantaneously distributed across the globe.

Intellectual capital has become the new currency of business and finance – and the promise of brainpower to move people from poverty to prosperity has never been more possible.

Technology is creating a whole new set of on ramps to the 21st century economy, and together we will help assure that African Americans will acquire the tech skills and be the beneficiaries in sectors that are being automated.

Black men understand that securing the bag is just the beginning – that success is only real if our community is protected, if our potential is realized and if our most valuable assets – our people – find strength in owning the businesses that provide economic stability in our community.

This is your moment, graduates. Between doubt and destiny is action. Between our community and the American Dream is leadership. Your leadership. Your destiny.

This doesn't mean ignoring injustice, it means using your strength to restore order.

And when you are confronted with racism, listen to the words of Guy Johnson, the son of Maya Angelou, who once said that, "Racism is like gravity, you got to keep pushing against it without spending too much time thinking about it."

So...how do you seize your American Dream? Let me get specific. Let me give you five rules that I live by.

The first rule you need to know is that nothing replaces actually doing the work.

Whenever a young person tells me they aspire to be an entrepreneur, I ask them why. For many, they think of it as a great way to get rich quick. Invent an app, sell a company, make a few million before you're 25.

Look, that can happen, but it's awfully rare. The usual scenario is that successful entrepreneurs spend endless hours, days, and years toiling away for little pay and zero glamor.

And in all honesty, that is where the joy of success actually resides. Before I ever got into private equity, I was a chemical engineer, and I spent pretty much every waking hour in windowless labs doing the work that helped me become an expert in my field.

It was only after I put in the time to develop this expertise and the discipline of the scientific process that I was able to apply my knowledge beyond the lab.

Greatness is born out of the grind. Embrace the grind. A thoughtful and intentional approach to “the grind” will help you to become an expert in your craft. When I meet a black man or woman who is at the top of their industry, I see the highest form of execution. That’s no accident. There’s a good chance it took that black leader a whole lot more grinding to get to where they are.

I look at the current and former black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies whom I admire, and they blow me away every time I met with them. Bernard Tyson, Ken Frazier, Ken Chenault, Dick Parsons, Ursula Burns, the late Barry Rand. They may not have attended Morehouse, but they have the Morehouse attitude.

They knew that being the best means grinding every day. It means putting in the ten thousand-plus hours necessary to become a master of your craft.

Muhammad Ali once said, “I hated every minute of training, But I thought to myself, suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.”

Grind it out – and live your life as a champion.

My second rule to live by is to take thoughtful risks.

My Granddad took a particular interest in my career, and he couldn’t have been prouder of my stable engineering job at Kraft-General Foods. For him, to have that kind of job security at my age was a dream come true.

When I told him I was thinking of leaving for graduate school, he was beyond worried. Then, you can imagine how he worried some years later when I told him I was going to leave Goldman Sachs, where I had achieved a good level of success, to start my own private equity firm focused on enterprise software.

I respected my Granddad and his wisdom, his thoughtfulness, and his protectiveness over me. But I had also done my homework. I calculated my odds of success, and importantly, I knew that one of the fundamental design points of achieving the American Dream was to be a business owner.

So I decided with confidence that I was willing to make a big bet on the one asset I had the most knowledge of: myself.

There are always reasons to be risk-averse. Graduating from Morehouse can make you risk-averse, because the path you're on, if you stick to the more conservative choices, is still pretty darn good.

That doesn't mean you should gamble with your career or career from job to job just because the grass appears to be greener. But it does mean that you should evaluate options for taking business and career risks...do the analysis, and trust your instincts.

When you bet on yourself – that's likely to be a pretty good bet!

My third rule is to be intentional about the words you choose.

I know Morehouse has taught you that you what you say carries with it enormous power.

Be intentional about the words you speak.

How you define yourself.

What you call each other.

The people you spend time with.

And the love you create.

All of this matters immensely. It will define you.

My fourth rule – which is my favorite – is to always know that you are enough.

I mentioned that before going into investment banking at Goldman Sachs, I worked in applied engineering for Kraft General Foods. And I loved it!

Until one day I was at a meeting with a number of department heads in my division and as we went around the conference table discussing the divisions most important strategic initiatives, I realized that of the top six, I was leading five of them.

I was half the age of everyone, yet I knew I was making just a third as much as anyone else in the room. And I said to myself, I'm either doing something very right or very wrong. Truthfully it was a bit of both. So, it became a lesson in realizing my worth and self-worth.

It isn't just about salary, though that always matters. It's also about demanding respect from others – and from yourself. A realization and respect for all of the skills and talents you bring to the table.

When you have confidence in your own worth, you'll become the one to raise your hand for the hard assignment that may mean putting in time on nights and weekends, but also means you'll be gaining incremental skills and experiences to enhance your craftsmanship.

Earn your respect through your body of work. Let the quality of your work product speak of your capabilities.

Know that you are only bound by the limits of your own conviction.

You are Morehouse Men. There is no room on this earth you can't enter with your head held high. You will likely encounter people in your life, as I have, who want to make you feel like you don't belong... but when you respect your own body of work, that is all the respect you need.

In the words of the great Quincy Jones and Ray Charles, "Not one drop of my self worth depends on your acceptance of me."

You are enough.

The fifth lesson and final lesson for today is as follows:

We all have the responsibility to liberate others so that they can become their best selves – in human rights, the arts, business, and in life.

The fact is, as the next generation of African-American leaders, you won't just be on the bus, you must own it, drive it, and pick up as many as you can carry along the way.

More than the money we make, the awards, or recognition, or titles we earn, each of us will be measured by how much we contribute to the success of the people around us.

How many people will you get onto your bus number 13?

We need you to become the elected officials who step up and fix the laws that engender discrimination and who set a tone of respect in our public discourse.

We need you to become the c-suite executives who change corporate culture, build sustainable business models, and make diversity and inclusion a core and unshakeable value.

We need you to become the entrepreneurs who will innovate inclusively, expand wages for all Americans, and lower the unemployment rate in our communities.

We need you to be the educators who set the highest standards and demand the resources needed to deliver on them and inspire the next generation.

We need you to invest in the real estate and businesses in our communities and create value for all in that community.

No matter what profession you choose, each of you must be a community builder. No matter how far you travel, you can't ever forget where you came from.

You are responsible for building strong, safe places where our young brothers and sisters can grow with confidence... watch and learn from positive role models, and believe that, they too, are entitled to the American Dream.

You Men of Morehouse are already doing this. Your own Student Government, in fact, sends students on a bus to underserved communities around the country to empower young black men and women to seize their own narrative and find power in their voices.

This is exactly the kind of leadership I'm talking about.

Remember that building community doesn't always have to be about sweeping change. But it does have to be intentional.

You can't just be a role model sometimes. I'm cognizant of the fact that whenever I'm out in public, people are observing my actions. The same goes for you.

Building community can't be insular.

The world has never been smaller, so we need to help our communities think bigger.

I've invested particularly in internship programs, because I've observed the power of exposing young minds to the opportunity out there that they don't see in their own neighborhoods.

Help those around you see the beauty of the vast world out there, and help them believe that they, too, can capture that dream.

And remember that community can be anywhere.

Back in the 1960s and '70s, community was a few blocks around where I grew up. Today, we, you can create communities of people anywhere in the world. Merging the physical and digital communities will be one of the great opportunities you have and you will have in the years going forward.

Finally, don't forget that community thrives in the smallest of gestures. Be the first to congratulate a friend on a new job, buy their new product first, and post on social media about how great it is, and also be the first to console them when they face adversity.

Treat all people with dignity, even if you can't see how they can be of help to you.

And most important of all, whatever it takes, never, ever forget to call your mother. And I do mean call – don't text, a text doesn't count!

Speaking of mothers, allow me a point of personal privilege to end with a story that speaks volumes about mine.

In the summer of 1963, when I was just nine months old, my mother hauled my brother and me 1,700 miles from Denver to Washington, DC so that we could be there for a Morehouse Man's historic speech.

My mother knew that her boys would be too young to remember that speech, but she believed that the history we witnessed that day on the National Mall would always be a part of the men we would one day become.

And Mom was right, as usual. I still feel that day in my bones, and it echoes all around us here at Morehouse.

Decades after that cross-country trip, I had the privilege to take my granddad with me to the opposite side of the National Mall to celebrate the inauguration of the first African-American president.

As we sat in the audience on that cold morning, he pointed to a window just behind the flag, in the Capitol Building and he said, "You know, grandson, when I was a teenager I used to work in that room

right there, in the Senate Lounge, I used to serve coffee and tea and take hats and coats for the senators.” He said, “I recall looking out that window during Franklin Roosevelt’s inauguration.”

He said, “Son, I did not see one black face in the crowd that day – so here we are, you and I, watching this.”

He said, “Grandson, you can see how America can change when people have the will to make change.”

The beautiful symmetry of our return to the Nation’s Capital under such different circumstances was not lost on us – the poetry of time and soul that Lincoln called the “mystic chords of memory” resonated in both of our hearts.

You cannot have witnessed the history I have, or walked the halls of Morehouse for four years as you have, without profound respect for the unsung everyday heroes who, generation after generation, little by little, nudged, shoved, and ultimately bent that “arc of the moral universe” a little closer to justice.

This is the history and heritage you inherit today. This is the responsibility that now lies upon your broad shoulders.

True wealth comes from contributing to the liberation of people. The liberation of the communities we come from depends on the grit and greatness inside you.

Use your skills, your knowledge, your instincts to serve – to change the world in the way that only you can.

You great Morehouse Men are bound only by the limits of your conviction and creativity. You have the power within you to be great, be you. Be unstoppable, be undeniable, and accomplish the things no one ever thought you could.

You are well on your way. I’m counting on you to load up your bus and share that journey.

Let’s never forget what Dr. King said in the final moments of his famous sermon at Ebenezer Baptist, “I want to be on your right side or your left side, in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world...a new world.”

Graduates, look to your right side and your left. Actually, take a moment. Stand up, give each other a hug. I am going to wait.

Men of Morehouse, you are surrounded by a community of people who have helped you arrive at this sacred place on this sacred day.

On behalf of the eight generations of my family who have been in this country, we are going to put a little fuel in your bus.

Now, we've got the alumni over there. This is a challenge for you.

This is my class – 2019. And my family is making a grant to eliminate their student loans. Now, I know my class will make sure they pay this forward. And I want my class to look at these alumni, these beautiful Morehouse brothers – and let's make sure every class has the same opportunity moving forward – because we are enough to take care of our own community.

We are enough to ensure we have all the opportunities of the American Dream. And we will show it to each other through our actions, through our words, and through our deeds.

So, class of 2019:

May the sun always shine upon you.

May the wind always be at your back.

And may God always hold you in the cradle of Her hands.

Now go forth and make this old world new.

Congratulations!

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2017 Graduate Commencement



University of Denver - 2017 Graduate Commencement

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COMMENCEMENT REMARKS BY ROBERT F. SMITH

2017 University of Denver Commencement



Commencement remarks by Robert F. Smith at the Graduate Ceremony of The University Of Denver on Friday, June 9th, 2017

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[📄](#) ROBERT FREDERICK SMITH COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, UNIVERSITY OF DENVER,
TRANSCRIPT OF ROBERT F. SMITH COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, VISTA EQUITY PARTNERS

Q&A with Robert Smith: Forbes second wealthiest African American and Denver native

Smith was back in his hometown to deliver a convocation speech at the University of Denver

[Article by Danika Worthington published on June 9, 2017 in the Denver Post](#)



Robert Smith has had quite a journey from hounding Bell Labs for an internship as an East High School junior to founding a private equity firm that has earned him \$2.5 billion, making him [the second wealthiest African American](#) behind Oprah Winfrey, by Forbes' accounting.

He was back in his hometown Friday, giving a convocation speech to graduate students at the University of Denver, where his father earned bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees.

Before Smith — whose company Vista Equity Partners is a major investor in several local businesses including [Ping Identity](#), [Vertafore](#), and [Granicus](#) — spoke to graduates, he talked with The Denver Post about his own journey, his advice for graduates and what makes him want to invest in his hometown.

Robert Smith's responses have been edited for brevity.

Advice from Robert Smith Forbes' second-wealthi...



DENVER POST: What message do you want to impart on graduating students?

ROBERT SMITH: In today's age, one of the things I think is important is that they understand that they must take a stand, they must be purposeful. Now, I'm addressing the graduate students so they kind of already laid their bets as to this is the profession that they want to focus on and the real question is how do you make sure

Now, I'm addressing the graduate students so they kind of already laid their bets as to "this is the profession that they want to focus on" and the real question is how do you make sure you make a change in the world, in your community, leveraging your profession.

If you're an engineer, there are certain things you can do, if you're a teacher, there are other things you can do and different things you can do. I think it's important that you pick a cause and have an effect as opposed to meander without direction and kind of glance through different sets of economic opportunities.

DP: So with the graduate students, what are some things that they're going to be facing that may be different from when you graduated?

RS: Don't say I'm that old. Oh my goodness. From way back in the day?

The biggest dynamic that they have to embrace is the pace of change has accelerated. Truly, intellectual property, intellectual capital is now the currency of business and it is the currency of engagement, the ideas, the thoughts, how free flowing and how quickly they flow and the impact they have in the communities and businesses in which they operate.

Their minds have to be, frankly, a lot more accelerated and also need to understand that the impact of what they say can reverberate a lot faster, with a lot more force.

They have to be conscious that what might be an innocuous tweet in the middle of the night can create massive reverberations for other communities on the other side of the world.

That's very different than the day when I was coming out of college. Things would happen and it'd take a while for it to proliferate throughout communities but now it's instantaneous. There's good to that and there's bad. And I think it's important that these graduates understand that there are both sides and they're responsible and thoughtful about their activities and their actions.

DP: You have a very interesting story from when you were in high school and you were trying to get an internship. Do you mind walking us through that story?

RS: I'm fourth generation Coloradan. I went to Denver East, my father went to Denver East and a number of my relatives also went to East.

They were actually introducing computers for the first time. I was asking my instructor, "Well, how does this actually work?" And he was telling me about the transistor. It was developed at this place called Bell Labs and I found out there was one in Colorado.

I called them and said, "I would love to get an internship, do you have them?" And they said, "Yes, if you're between your junior and senior year of college." I said, "That's great. I'm a junior in high school taking AP classes, that's just like being in college." And they said, "Well, no it isn't."

I called every day for two weeks. They stopped taking the call the second day. And I called every Monday for about five months. And one day they called back and said, "A student from MIT didn't show up, we have an extra slot and if you'd be interested. We're not guaranteeing you a job — you can come and interview." Remember, they never met me.

So I put on the one suit I owned and put two dollars of gas in my car, drove out there and got the job. Basically worked there for the next three and a half, four years as an intern.

There's a bunch of lessons there. One of them is at the time of technology, I'm sure I'm the only one they had a valid telephone number for because no one had cell phones then. And two, I think they appreciated the fact that I really wanted that job and I really wanted to better myself.



DP: How has Denver changed since you were a kid? How often do you come back here? Do you have family here?

RS: Denver is my home. I went to Harrington then Carson Elementary then I went to Gove Junior High School — when there was a Gove — and then East.

I bought a ranch a few years back called Lincoln Hills. It is the oldest African-American resort community founded by African-Americans. And it was founded in 1922. The person who ran it, his wife

was my grandmother's best friend. So my dad and his siblings basically spent every summer at this ranch.

Now, I have the wonderful occasion to offer a number of programs with partners in this area. Last summer, we had over 5,400 inner city kids at our ranch. We had about 200-300 wounded veterans who fly fish. I've got ADA ramps, I've got ADA graded facilities so they can fly fish. I've got tractors for paraplegics where they can actually get on the tractors and go in the water. And we have a program with Craig Hospital for quadriplegics where they can actually fish with blow tubes. And we have an inner city program for girls for equestrian riding.

And one of the other programs I like that we've had for seven years is called Team Works where we partner with a group. We basically take 15 or 20 inner city youth and 15 or 20 mountain youth and put them together and they work all summer. As you can imagine, at the beginning of the summer, they view each other with suspicion. And at the end of the summer, they realize that they are each other's best friends. That's one of the most marvelous sets of transformational activities that I think that we do.

We spend a good part of the summer at the ranch and I really like to see all of the fabric that develops there because it makes Colorado a better place.

DP: I know that you have invested in a lot of companies here. Do you do that because of your Colorado roots or because of the quality companies?

RS: We invest in enterprise software companies so these are business-to-business companies that really solve the biggest challenges that people have. The wonderful thing about software is it can be developed almost anywhere so you're looking for really the smartest people, with a great work ethic, with a great idea and help to build out their capabilities so they can run those businesses more effectively.

We've just been very fortunate in finding a number of those companies here in Colorado. I think in total over the last 15 years or so, I've had well over 1,500 employees in different constructs of companies that we've either bought or sold. Today we own three businesses that are headquartered here or are moving folks here and I think about 600 employees in total and we will continue to rapidly expand that.

We've always found the workforce here to be a very effective one. You typically can find people who are driven, who are focused, who really enjoy solving the problems that our companies are posed with and solving for their customers.

DP: There are a lot of start-ups here and sometimes they don't always find the investment here. Can Denver grow to be a smaller Silicon Valley?

RS: Everyone asks that question around the world. How can we be the next Silicon Valley? You can't. What Denver has to be is the next Denver. Silicon Valley has a fabric it's developed frankly over the last 50, 60, 70 years that really started from the semiconductor industry and the sets of relationships that built the layers of that fabric. Denver has a different dynamic here.

What Denver can do is figure out how to be the best Denver as opposed to be the next Silicon Valley. Denver has attributes that no other place on the planet has. You have a high influx of people. It's a wonderful place to live. It's a reasonable cost of living. You have planned communities that actually function quite well. The school systems are actually effective in K-12, for the most part. You have a wonderful university system, obviously.

I think the real answer is to look to the attributes that Denver has and help to build the public and private partnerships. Take advantage of all the people in this community, not just some of the people in this community, and enable them to be effective participants in the economic opportunity that is Denver.

We're sitting here in DU. They're called the Pioneers. Denver needs to be the pioneer in the development of technology and technological pursuits and they have the capacity and capability and I know they have the people.

🔗 10TH JUNE 2017

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Robert F. Smith Challenges Baltimore's NPower Graduating Class to Give Back, Offers Incentives for Community Investment

First-ever NPower program in Baltimore offered tuition-free training in information technology for young adults in underserved communities.

BALTIMORE, MD (PRWEB) DECEMBER 13, 2016

Robert F. Smith, Founder, Chairman and CEO of Vista Equity Partners and Founding Director and President of the Fund II Foundation, delivered a commencement address to NPower Baltimore's first graduating class of 24 young adults who recently completed NPower's 22-week IT training program.

Congratulating the students, Mr. Smith reminded the students that they will have the opportunity to pursue careers in technology that can lift up not only themselves and their families, but also their entire communities. He noted, “You will not face challenges alone, you are a part of NPower’s first graduating class, Class 1, you now have a family, and that includes me. We’re all in this together.”

Mr. Smith also personally offered several incentives for students who commit to neighborhood reinvestment in Baltimore: \$1,000.00 to every student who becomes a homeowner in their community within five years, \$10,000.00 to be split equally between the students once they achieve 100% ComTIA A+ certification – which covers technology topics including servers, software, cyber security, networking and troubleshooting – and \$100,000.00 to be split equally if 100% of the class become homeowners in Baltimore in a 10 year time frame. Smith implored the graduates to “Join civic associations, help others, act as role models, be a homeowner – all the things that rebuild the social fabric of a community.”

NPower Baltimore was made possible in large part due to funding from Fund II Foundation. Other major funders include Abell Foundation and Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, both also in attendance for the graduation, as well as the France-Merrick Foundation. The NPower program has also been acknowledged by Congressman Elijah E. Cummings as a valuable service to the Baltimore community.

“NPower gives young people the tools they need to take charge of their lives,” said U.S. Representative Elijah Cummings. “I am confident that each graduate of NPower Class 1 will go on to make great contributions to the Baltimore community. I am very proud to see them change their life trajectories and commit to making a positive economic and civic impact in our communities.”

“The students who graduated this past week in Baltimore have achieved a great deal in a very short amount of time,” said Dan Petrozzo, Chairman of NPower’s Board of Directors. “They took a chance on NPower and put their lives on hold to pursue something better for themselves and that alone should be commended. We owe it to these individuals to back them with the necessary support to succeed both in their careers but also as members of the community of Baltimore. Robert Smith leads the way in helping them set aspirational goals and committing to financial rewards.”

The training program aims to meet the needs of students both in and outside of the classroom. NPower has partnered with several community organizations and the University of Maryland BioPark to help facilitate recruitment and to address a range of social issues the young adult participants face.

“We are inspired by the support we have received from the Baltimore community, and by the Fund II Foundation and other generous funders, since we opened in July. Success for us means finding jobs for our students and a number of visionary organizations have given our students their first professional IT opportunity,” said Bertina Ceccarelli, Chief Executive Officer of NPower. She continued, “Our students were hired as interns at a number of exceptional organizations: Under Armour, TD Ameritrade, DNS

Technology Group, Greater Baltimore Urban League, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Data Flow Computers, Black Men Achieving Greatness, The Sand Gallery, Loyal Services Unlimited, and the Black Mental Health Alliance for Education and Consultation.”

In closing, Mr. Smith let the graduates know that he and NPower were here to help them activate their minds to create solutions in their community. He encouraged graduates to occasionally “put down your devices” and engage in conversation with one another, with friends and family, in order to meaningfully explore the issues of the day.

About NPower

NPower is a national nonprofit that creates pathways to economic prosperity by launching digital careers for military veterans and young adults from underserved communities. We empower under-represented talent to pursue tech futures by teaching the digital and professional skills demanded by the marketplace, and engaging corporations, volunteers and nonprofits in the long-term success of our students.

NPower is the link between non-traditional job seekers and companies hiring diverse technology workers, creating an alternative fast-track to IT jobs on a national scale and engaging employers in our curriculum design. Over 80% of our graduates are employed full time or enrolled in higher education within one year of completing our program, which is offered at no cost to qualified students.

For more information, visit [NPower.org](https://www.npower.org) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About Fund II Foundation

Fund II Foundation is a charitable foundation, at the heart of which is a deep commitment to advance social change, create opportunity, respect and protect the environment, and preserve our culture. Fund II Foundation is focused on improving lives and opportunities for African-American and other vulnerable populations. For more information on Fund II Foundation, visit <http://www.fund2foundation.org>

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Robert F. Smith Speeches

SIS Commencement Speake...

Dedication of the Robert Fre...



7TH NOVEMBER 2016 PRINT EMAIL

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Dedication of the Robert Frederick Smith School of ...



Robert Frederick Smith's speech during the dedication ceremony of the [Robert Frederick Smith School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at Cornell University](#) on Friday, October 21, 2016.

7TH NOVEMBER 2016 1 NOTE

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SIS Commencement Speaker Robert F. Smith



Listen to businessman and entrepreneur Robert F Smith address the graduating class of American University's School of International Studies after receiving an honorary Doctorate of International Affairs from. You can read the transcript here: www.bit.ly/rfsAUSISTrans Robert F. Smith's bio: www.bit.ly/rfsBios A photo of Mr. Smith: www.bit.ly/rfsPhoto

 13TH MAY 2015

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“You Are Enough” Segments

"You Are Enough" -- Robert F. Smith



You Are Enough, You Must Integrate Your Whole ...



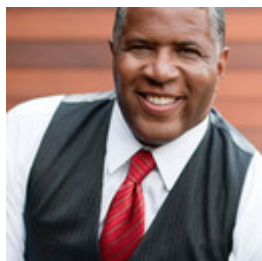
You Are Enough and You Have a Destiny



You Are Enough. We Need You, We Are Counting ...



QUOTE



"I'm here to tell you that you are enough" —Robert F. Smith

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