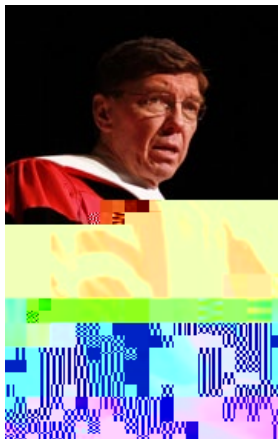


THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT QUESTION

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To get to the point of graduation, you've endured an almost endless sequence of measurements of your intelligence and knowledge, in the form of tests. You have taken more tests than you hope to remember. The role of faculty here and other teachers earlier was to define the questions. Your role, as students, was to provide the right answers.

Many in education, however, have overlooked a frightening fact: finding the right *answer* is impossible unless we have asked the right *question*. Unfortunately our teaching system focuses little attention on teaching us how to ask the right questions. As a scholar, father, and advisor, I have slowly realized that asking the right question is the rare and valuable skill. At done, getting the right answer is typically quite straightforward.

In my remarks today I'd like to describe three instances where people like us have plunged into implementing an answer, without taking the care to define the salient question to which we need good answers. Two are of national scope; the third is personal. My prayer is for each of you – students, graduates, families and faculty – is to see learning to frame questions as a critical part of your work.

The first important question emerged from my work for the leaders of Singapore and an interaction with a friend from China. The answer is that if a society wants peace and prosperity, you need a government that articulates appropriate rules and ensures that people follow them. Individuals must be held accountable if they break the law. I will describe the answers more deeply, and then pose the questions.

There are two ways to get peace and prosperity. The first is to follow Singapore. The founder of that small nation, Lee Kuan Yew, pulled together a diverse set of ethnic enemies, laid out a set of clear rules, and then ruled the nation with an honest and very strong fist. He set a system in place that could identify people who broke the rules; held them immediately accountable; and dispensed fast and memorable penalties. Singapore is a marvelous country – safe and prosperous. The vast majority of people obey the laws because of the established system.

The other option is democracy. The problem of democracy is that the government doesn't look over your shoulder or into your homes to catch you breaking the rules. And if you are suspected of breaking a rule, it takes a very long time to determine whether you must be held accountable. There are juries and appeals – there are no iron fists. So how can democracy work to bring peace and prosperity to a nation?

I asked my friend, who is a Marxist economist from China who came to Boston on a Fulbright Scholarship to study democracy, if he had learned anything about democracy that was surprising or unexpected. His response was immediate and profound: "I had no idea how critical religion is to the functioning of democracy." I had never made this association between religion and democracy, so I was surprised but he continued to explain,

of his countrymen. Why, I asked Nixon, would you establish a relationship with such an evil enemy?

Nixon explained:

Whenever in the history of American foreign affairs we have attempted to isolate a nation that is governed by a totalitarian dictator, isolation has had the effect of strengthening the tyrant – because it enabled him to control

when my life is over, the fact that I held the title of a professor at Harvard won't even come up in the conversation. Rather, God will say, "I put you in that situation,