

**USING OUR BEST SCIENCE AND BEST MINDS TO IMPROVE THE
HUMAN CONDITION**

BY

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I want first to congratulate RTI on fifty years of pioneering work in turning knowledge into practice. Your reputation for innovation is remarkable and well deserved, but so is your reputation for pioneering a unique model of institutional collaboration that uses cutting edge study and analysis to improve the human condition. While your past is indeed impressive, I am sure that you did not invite me here today that I might simply praise you; so I want to look back to a few of the challenges of 1958 in order to share some observations about why we still need our best science and our best minds to help address some of the challenges we face fifty years later.

In 1958, the American people were concerned with conquering space, so the United States launched its first satellite and the National Advisory Council on Aeronautics was strengthened and renamed NASA. Fifty years later, we are being asked to use our best science and our best minds to help conquer disease and to address health issues in which RTI has been a major player. But while it is critical that we continue to contribute to scientific research and teaching that advance the frontiers of knowledge, a new paradigm of health has emerged that magnifies the need to also examine the increasing role of social and economic factors in shaping a population's health.

A few years ago, a Commission of the World health Organization warned that even when the basic technologies of disease control are clear and universally applicable, each local setting poses its own set of special problems and opportunities that must be uncovered through operational research at the local level. I recall that warning today because during my many years of working and living abroad, I have often been disappointed by the tendency of far too many well meaning people to respond to local needs through their own cultural lens rather than through country specific traditions and practices.

My concern about research for addressing global health issues has also led to a concern about resources. That concern comes out of my experiences as a foundation executive, as President of the Council on Foundations and more recently as a diplomat. I am now persuaded that adequate resources for addressing global health are not likely to be available unless we can make the case that investments in health are investments in economic development: creating more consumers, more markets and more trading partners.

I wish it were possible to increase the national commitment simply because it is right and because it enables people in low wealth communities to live with dignity and hope. But even in the absence of a sense of moral imperative, there are many other reasons for Americans to be concerned about global health. Some of these we in the academic community and our research partners regard as self-evident, but they have not galvanized a national will. You and I know that if you provide people with their basic needs, countries become more stable and less likely to become places where violence will take root. You and I know that diseases like HIV/AIDS are a transnational phenomenon without boundaries. Yet, until the report of the WHO Commission, there were very few important voices making the case on behalf of the world's most voiceless people.

Moreover, the public perception of far too many Americans is that international aid has largely failed. Yet, it is in large part due to foreign aid that world literacy rates rose by nearly fifty percent in the last third of the twentieth century, infant mortality was cut in half, life expectancy tripled and 71 nations became free or partly free. In the late 1940s, more than 15 percent of every U.S. tax dollar was being sent overseas to help rebuild Europe. However, until recent changes that focus primarily on HIV-AIDS, development assistance had dropped to less than one percent of the government's budget. You can, thus, understand why I appeal for help from those who traffic in research and critical analysis to help make the case for increased investments in global health.

Fifty years ago in the United States, Governor Faubus of Arkansas shut down the schools of Little Rock to avoid integration. Fifty years later, we know that the only road out of poverty runs by the schoolhouse door, but we find it difficult to craft public policy and create a public will that will finally take us away from the travails of Little Rock. We seem uncertain, or at least less than clear, about what forming a more perfect union means in the new realities of the many changes taking place.

We need a concept of community much like that expressed a few years ago by the African American mystic, poet and theologian Howard Thurman who was fond of saying "I want to be me without making it difficult for you to be you." Can you imagine how different our world would be if more Americans were able to say "I want to be an American without making it difficult for an Arab to be an Arab, an Asian to be an Asian or an African to be an African?" Can you imagine how different our neighborhoods and

communities would be if more Christians were able to say “I want to be a Christian without making it difficult for a Jew to be a Jew, a Muslim to be a Muslim or a Buddhist to be a Buddhist?”

Fifty years after Faubus and Little Rock, we still need to recognize and protect the dignity of difference. Some in our time look at diversity and want to homogenize it to fit their comfort zone. They fail to understand that the more diverse we are, the richer our culture becomes, and the more expansive our horizon of possibilities. Jonathon Sacks, the British Rabbi who wrote the book, *The Home We Build Together*, argues that if we were all the same we would have nothing unique to contribute, nor any thing to learn from each other. Yet, if we were completely different we could not communicate and if we were exactly alike, we would have nothing to say. So the Rabbi concludes that we need to see our differences as gifts to the common good, for without a compelling sense of the common good, difference spells discord and creates, not music, but noise. Research will need to play a leadership role in persuading others that diversity need not divide; that pluralism rightly understood and rightly practiced is a benefit not a burden; that the fear of difference is a fear of the future.

Fifty years ago, Nikita Khrushchev became Premier of the Soviet Union and voters in France named Charles de Gaulle, the new President. It was a time of the romanticizing of the military/manufacturing model of leadership as command and control. Fifty years later as the baby boomer generation prepares to pass the mantle of leadership to the so-called generation Xers, researchers tell us that we can expect a style of leadership that is more collegial and with more emphasis on being than on knowing and doing. I have seen that style of leadership up close and I can tell you that we have nothing to fear.

It was my good fortune during my years as the United States Ambassador to South Africa to work with Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest leaders of the modern era. Heads of State and royalty from around the world still beat a path to his door to seek his advice on the issues of our time and, of course, to seek a photo op so that they can prove that they have been in the presence of this great and wise man. President Clinton once said of him that when he entered a room, we all stood a little taller. We all felt a little bigger, for in our best moments we wanted to be like him.

This is high praise for a man who had been incarcerated for twenty seven years, a man who went from political prisoner to president. He was in prison while the world economy was becoming interdependent. He was in prison while we were developing the internet. He was in prison while we were learning the potential of the cell phone. He was in prison while we were being seduced by the notion that experience trumps wisdom and judgment. But he came out of prison, took over the leadership of his party and his country and never missed a beat because for him leadership was not just about knowing and doing. It was for him a way of being. His influence came not from the size of South Africa's military or its GNP, but from the strength of his ideals, the elegance of his humanity, the quality of his judgment and the power of his commitment to the well-being of others.

Fifty years ago, President Eisenhower sent troops to Lebanon, Venezuela imposed restrictions on U.S. oil companies and rioters attacked Vice President Nixon. Fifty years later, we are once again concerned about our image abroad, the dependence on foreign oil and what war is doing to the soul of our nation at home. As one who a few years ago chaired a federal task force to examine the potential of oil shale as a source of energy, I was very pleased to see RTI receive a large contract recently to address the challenges of high scale hydrogen production from coal/biomass mixtures. This will be an important contribution to science, but it will also address the anxiety so many Americans feel about energy security.

Yet, that anxiety goes far beyond energy, climate, health or leadership. The dominant mood of our time is what psychologists now call a "free-floating anxiety." The immediate aftermath of 9/11 was such a moment. For those who were around in the sixties, the period following the assassination of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy was such a moment. Americans and indeed people around the world are feeling that sort of anxiety again. It is not the result of an event, but a confluence of events. Some feel a deep level of concern about the volatility of the stock market and the mortgage melt down. For others, the anxiety may come from the high price of fuel, the almost daily announcements that medicines we thought were safe are not, the disconnect between work and reward, and, of course, the frequent hurricanes that remind us that disasters are no longer an aberration or an abnormal event, but they are in fact the new normal.

We have reached the point where anxiety feeds on anxiety and we become anxious about the fact that we are anxious. Yet, deep within we want to

believe that this too shall pass away, that we can look beyond the evidence and see alternative possibilities. This is a moment when those who traffic in cutting edge research and study need to ask how can we provide hope as well as well as help.

Hope is not optimism based on what you see. Hope allows us to see beyond what is and to imagine what can and what ought to be. It is not so much an act of memory as it is an act of imagination and courage. It is an acknowledgement that what you can imagine you can probably create. There is something both unique and irresistible about the capacity to transcend history, to see reality and still be able to look beyond to see something different and deeper.

Some observers of the human condition adopt the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better. RTI, on the other hand, has for fifty years enacted the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the prevailing evidence in order to find new evidence of how to make things better. Research, therefore, is a purveyor of hope as well as help; and as Vaclav Havel is fond of saying “The gift of hope is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.” It is thus my sincere wish that when this celebration is over and you look forward to the next fifty years you will remember that the gift of hope is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.