George Mason University's Moment of Obligation

What is at the root of your passion for social change? One student during each class will share a "moment of obligation," a story about an experience that committed you to doing something to address a problem that you care about. The story (no more than 5-7 minutes) will illustrate how your life experiences have inspired and motivated you to become passionate about this particular social issue. Students will sign up to present each week at the beginning of the semester. Students will be able to utilize a Be Bold worksheet to help them create their story.

Be Bold Worksheets

i. The First Step: Finding Your Truest Self

Truly getting to know yourself is a challenging (and lifelong) process. One of the most powerful ways to jump start this effort, especially while you are young, is to take risks and test yourself, being aware of what works, what feels right, and what doesn't. Asking a lot of questions of yourself is a wonderful way to understand and check in with yourself. For example, "What excites me? What are my particular talents? What lessons did I learn from that experience?" Being reflective requires you to analyze your motives and actions, strategize and plan your next steps, and seek honest input and feedback from peers, family members, and mentors. It's an intense process but a worthwhile one. Reflection can reveal what makes you happy, help you understand how you see yourself, and allow you to envision your place in the world. To get started, answer the following:

1. What does your "hair down/shoes off" self look like? What are you doing during these moments?

2. What actions have you taken in your life that best reflect what's meaningful to you? Why were they meaningful?

3. What do you do that makes you feel most alive?

4. If you had one word tattooed on your body, what would it be and why?

ii. Your Inspiration: Moment of Obligation

A *moment of obligation* entails committing to what means the most to you and accepting responsibility for your dreams. Whether you recognize it now or not, you have likely experienced *moments of obligation* but may have not acted on them. No one can know better than you what you want, but too often, fear, pride, and the expectations of other people get in the way. Learn to trust yourself, your instincts, and your feelings as you begin to think about and navigate your career path. Answering these questions will help.

1. What truly inspires you? What are you drawn toward? What moves you? Get very, very specific. (You can list a social issue, task, role, emotion, or something else.)

- 2. How do you know these things inspire/draw/move you? What happens?
- 3. Whom have you learned the most from? Why are these people your most influential teachers? What have they taught you?

4. Trace the decisions you made in your life that have led you to where you are today.

5. Now think about these decisions as possible *moments of obligation*. Does that change the way you see them? If so, in what ways?

6. Describe your most significant *moment of obligation*. How do you know it was a *moment of obligation*?

7. As you think about a possible role for yourself in creating social change, think about what inspires/draws/moves you. How might that link to your career or your next job?

iii. Larger Than Life: Gall to Think Big

When you have the *gall to think big*, you aren't afraid to go for it. Big problems in the world don't scare you. Rather, they motivate you. You are confident, solution oriented, and strategic as you tackle large issues. You operate beyond others' expectations of you and rely on your own internal compass to drive you forward. Most important, you understand that you are part of something larger than yourself. Answering these questions will help you think of your career as a way to take on big issues and problems about which you care deeply.

1. Which social movements, from today or from any point in history, resonate the most with you? Why? Have you been involved in any work that you would define as part of a social movement?

2. If your career (in its entirety—think long term) allowed you to tackle a few big problems in the world (e.g., educational inequity, poverty), what would they be?

3. As a change maker, write down your most ambitious goal. How would you begin achieving this goal?

4. What would the world look like if you achieved the goal laid out in question three?

5. How would your work impact your grandchildren?

iv. Finding Solutions: New and Untested

New and untested is the process of innovating for the greater good. It is coming up with new ideas, new strategies, and new methodologies to tackle and solve tough problems. This requires a great deal of courage, in part because your new approach may challenge the status quo. *New and untested* is a different way of thinking. It requires you to question the way things *are* and imagine the way things *could be*. Answering the following questions can help you draw on your ability to innovate and be creative.

1. What are some of the most creative things you have done (could be anything—from a pottery project to organizing a rally)? What skills did you draw on to accomplish that creative thing?

2. What is the biggest risk you have ever taken? This could be doing something new, putting yourself out there, taking an unpopular stance, or anything else you define as a risk. Was it worth it? How did taking the risk make you feel? What was the result?

3. Is risk taking something that you do on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis, or never?

4. If you were to take more risks in your educational or professional career, what types of things would you do?

5. What are a few issues in your community or our world that frustrate you? For example, maybe you don't understand why a certain system is so inefficient, or perhaps you wonder why something is the way it is when it could be so much better.

- 6. Choose one of the issues you identified in the last question and outline the current approaches being used to address it. Brainstorm one or two new ways you might go about attacking and even solving that problem.
- 7. This month, practice skepticism regularly. When you look at an issue or a problem, try to understand what's really going on and why things remain the way they are. Challenge yourself to ask "why" questions every day and see what you learn. Note how your approach to problems changes after you complete this exercise.

v. Visioning: Seeing Possibilities

Seeing possibilities first requires that you not walk away from or past a problem. Once you are committed to working on that problem, use your imagination to create solutions and envision what a world free of that problem would look like. At its core, *seeing possibilities* is about having hope and turning hope into action by developing your own personal vision of change in the world. Work in the nonprofit sector can be very challenging. There is always more to be done. The tasks can seem endless and frustrating and the change incremental. But nonprofit work can also be exhilarating and fulfilling. It allows you to be involved in the important issues of the day and make a significant difference in the world. *Seeing possibilities* is the reason you get up

every morning and the reason we all believe in a better tomorrow. Here are some questions to explore.

1. Look back at what you have written thus far. Now answer: What do you wish for yourself, your community (however you define it), and the world? Include your thoughts on your professional career.

- 2. Lay out the steps you need to take in order to achieve your professional vision.
- 3. It takes most of us a lot of time to figure out what really captures our attention. Make a list of five experiences you will pursue in the next year to explore what your long-term focus might be.

4. When historians write your biography, what do you want them to say about you? For what do you want to be remembered?

vi. Dare to Live Boldly

The questions in this chapter are meant to help you uncover your hopes, dreams, and passions. These are the sources of your power. If you choose to own this power, just imagine what you can accomplish. Nothing is beyond your reach, not even the ability to change the world. Complete these statements:

1. My moment of obligation has led me to:

2. By acknowledging this moment of obligation, I have the gall to think big about:

3. If I were to act on my *gall to think big* and develop a *new and untested idea*, it would be:

4. If my *new and untested* idea were fully enacted, I *see possibilities* that the world would be better in the following ways: