

New Mexico State University
College of Education
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The Change Begins with **Me**
Policy Paper: A Proposal

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Introduction:

A curious thing occurs as we grow older; we grow selectively empowered. In group projects during elementary school, we all argued over who got to color the poster or present the work to the rest of the class. We took pride in every picture we drew and anything else we participated in doing. When given the chance to play outside, we ran as fast as we could and jumped as high as we could. We understood the worth of the contents in our piggybank, and that once we saved a little bit more money we could buy that toy we had been eyeing. We were empowered in every aspect of our life. As we grow up, we begin focusing our energies as time and resources are finite. We may focus on our jobs and opportunities that arise, but neglect our bodies by failing to exercise regularly. We may excel in our schoolwork, but spend money not in our piggybank. If the empowerment we exhibit in certain areas of our life instead became the foundation of every aspect of our life, the power of change would not be limited to jobs, projects, or anything else, but would rather permeate every facet of the world we encounter.

Vision:

As Mahatma Gandhi once said “You must be the change you wish to see in the world (Yates, 2010)”. This is essentially my vision, that we would take the initiative and make empowerment a lifestyle instead of an approach to a goal, job, or task. I believe that if we choose to take personal ownership in making the change a ubiquitous one in our lives, then we will no longer be selectively empowered. The demise of selective empowerment to whole empowerment would result in our ability to “be the change we wish to see in the world”, not just in the workplace or schoolroom. Teachers, employers, and coaches have long seen the benefits of empowering their students, employees, and

players. Until they are empowered as a whole person instead of just as a student, employee, or player, they are unable to live out the empowerment that would result in dramatic change permeating their entire life and the world around them.

Just as you have to fill your car with gas before you attempt to reach your destination, you must make entertain internal and external considerations before the benefits of being fully empowered can flow from you into the surrounding world.

You first must focus on your internal considerations. These include talents, faith, finances, values, nutrition and exercise, and aspirations. Everyone has talents that are unique to him or her. Whether you are gifted musically, mathematically, socially, or any sort of combination, you must acknowledge, accept, and find ways to employ your talents. Using the unique talents to their fullest extent will yield higher rates of satisfaction, as well as self-confidence.

Faith is a critical factor in the empowerment formula. As for me, my faith pertains to my relationship with God. I fully acknowledge that not everyone shares that faith, but I strongly encourage everyone to find faith in something as it is a huge source of encouragement, hope, and strength in both good and bad times. Whether it is exploring faith in a religious setting or just faith that things will improve, it is absolutely critical to empowerment as it helps lay the foundation for what you believe in and stand for.

It is very difficult to be fully empowered when one is drowning in debt, thus taking a look at one's finances is absolutely essential. The stress that debt ensues on its holders can cast a dark shadow on the energy and enthusiasm one has in life. It can cripple one's likelihood of taking the initiative to be the change they wish to see in the world. According to the Wall Street Journal, the average debt of Americans is a

staggering \$43,874 per person (Whitehouse, 2010). Once you look at your finances and get/keep them on the right track, a sense of accomplishment and control over your assets will develop. It will be easier to fund the passions that move you towards change.

Without identifying and acting upon your values, full empowerment cannot occur. You have to know what you stand for. Just as the authors of The Leadership Challenge said, “Values are guides—they give you direction... Values empower you (Kouzes, *et al.* 2007).” Without a compass, sailors would be lost; without values, you will be lost.

Even with current movements like the altering of the food pyramid to include exercise, people still miss the importance of a balanced diet and staying fit. This is evident in that a poor diet coupled with lack of exercise is indirectly (through preventable diseases like heart disease and diabetes) the second leading cause of death (Hampl, *et al.* 2007). A balanced diet is critical to developing and maintaining an optimal state of health. The Mayo Clinic has identified several benefits to exercise, all of which have direct influences on empowerment of the individual (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2009). First off, they have found that exercise can improve your mood by releasing endorphins. An improved mood results in a more positive, proactive approach to life. They also found that regular exercise combat chronic diseases like heart disease and osteoporosis, and help you manage your weight. When you are physically healthy, you can spend less time and money trying to get well, and more resources on causes in which you believe. You have fewer excuses to not accomplish what you are passionate about. In addition, they found that exercising increases your energy level and promotes better sleep. Energetic, well rested people are unstoppable. Increased energy in an empowered person is essential

and effective, because just like the authors of *The Leadership Challenge* stated, “Enthusiasm is infectious (Kouzes, *et al.* 2007).”

You can know your talents, have a strong foundation in faith, be sitting healthy financially and physically, and know what you stand for, but if you do not identify your aspirations, you will still not be fully empowered. You can be selectively empowered in your job, schoolwork, or anything else, but it will not become an all-encompassing lifestyle until you acknowledge and act on your aspirations. This is a very personal task. It is what you want to accomplish; the change you want to catalyze; what you want to be known for. It is a daunting task, but a critical step in the move to full empowerment.

After you have entertained internal considerations, the focus must shift to the external. The external considerations include progress, opportunities, the status quo categorical imperative, relationships, and culture.

Progress, opportunities, and the status quo all go hand-in-hand. It is vital to your empowerment to acknowledge the strides you have made to get to where you are. It acts as motivation and encouragement to keep going. It is also important to evaluate your current standing. Only after analyzing the status quo can you decide whether your routine is breeding complacency. This recognition makes you much more aware and open to the opportunities that are available to you.

The concept of the categorical imperative means asking yourself to what the large-scale effects of something you are considering doing would be (Beatty, *et al.* 2008). You must ask yourself, “If everyone did what I am considering doing, would it create the type of world I want to live in?” This forces you to take responsibility for your actions and consider your impact on others.

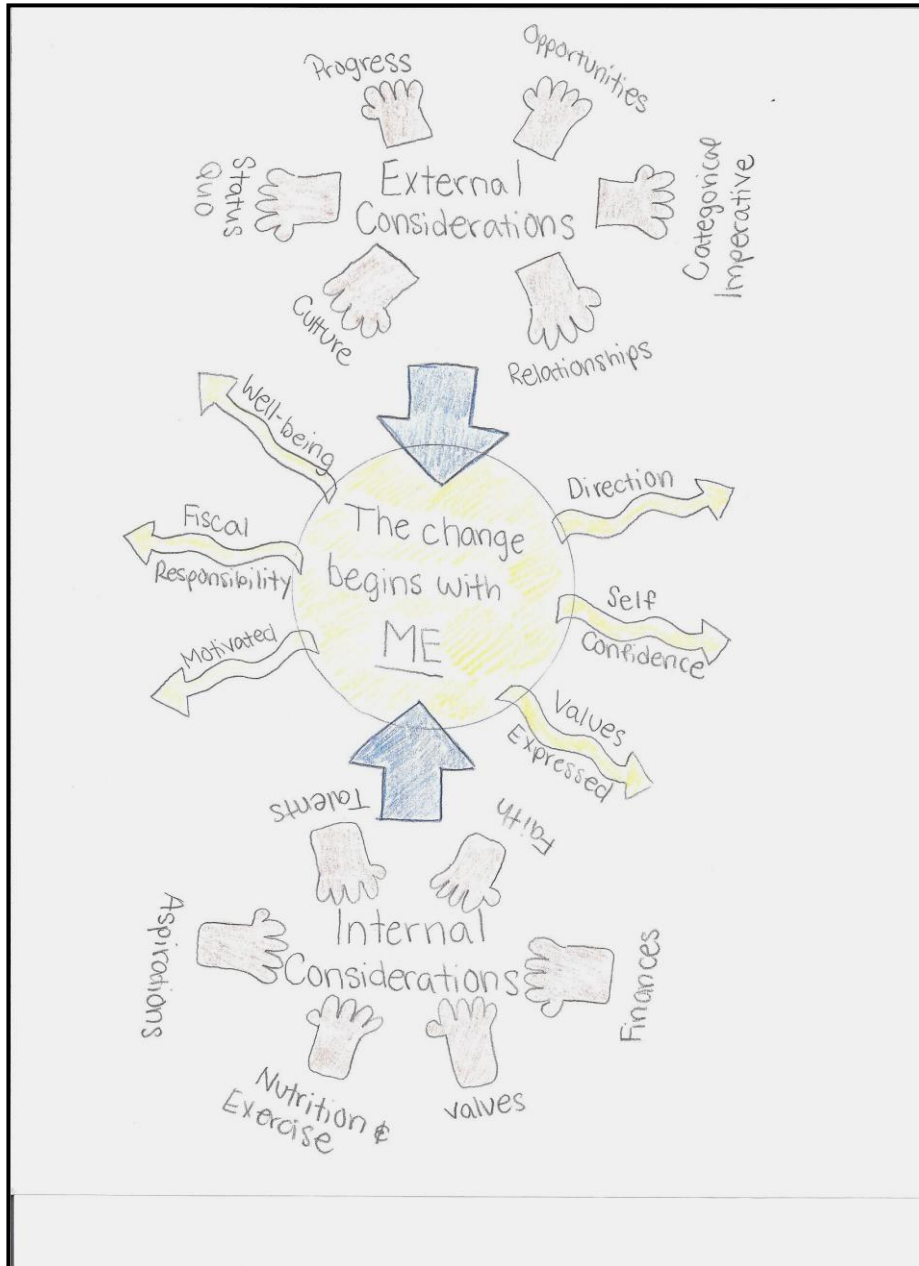
Relationships and culture are interrelated in reference to your full empowerment. Depending on whether you are from an individualistic culture like America or a collectivist culture like those in Asia, your relationships with others could have a moderate to significant affect on you (Hockenbury, *et al.* 2007). Evaluating these concepts essentially makes the categorical imperative more personal; it forces you to consider your decisions' impact on those closest to you. It can also help you develop a stronger sense of self.

The natural response of a person who has become wholly empowered as a result of making these considerations include: well-being, fiscal responsibility, motivation, direction, self-confidence, and expression of values. All of the considerations uniquely contribute to the response of full empowerment. It is no longer specifically related to one or a few goals; it is the basis for a completely different lifestyle.

Conclusion:

Through consideration of internal and external factors, the individual gains a sense of self and purpose that results in full, rather than selective, empowerment of that individual. By focusing on the person as a whole and not just in terms of a goal, job, industry, or project, this empowerment becomes a lifestyle that affects every aspect of that individual. Just as we did when we were children, the individual takes pride in everything he/she does, believes in themselves, and truly becomes “the change [he/she] wished to see in the world.”

Appendix 1:
Graphic of My Vision:



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