

LDS Business College Forum

“On the Subject of ‘Becoming’”

by G. Andrew Barfuss

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It's an honor for my wife and me to be here today. I am really delighted to have Julie by my side. We do have quite a few children running around. Our youngest is still in elementary school. So we've got our hands full, and we have some kids that are in junior high and in high school, and two in college, and one on a mission. So I think that, at this point, we about cover the gamut. And it's really been fun to watch them grow up. I love having my sweetheart with me, and am grateful for that opportunity today.

I love LDS Business College. It seems like every time I come here, I can't help but feel touched by the quality of the kids who are here, as well as the faculty and the leadership. My wife and I were privileged to be here a few weeks ago, when the new facilities here at LDS Business College were dedicated. We sat in the first few rows and just kind of really soaked in that event. I told President Woodhouse and Sister Woodhouse, the food wasn't nearly as good in this room today as it was a few weeks ago. They had all kinds of wonderful food there.

But President Woodhouse told the story at the dedication that most of you probably heard, that really touched me. Think of how significant it is, in a world that now has passed 6 ½ billion people as of the last few months. We're over 6 ½ billion on this planet, and there's over 11 million members of the Church. And here at LDS Business College, as I understand it, there are about 1300 students. And the prophet, who has responsibility over that entire purview, would call up President Woodhouse and say, "I've been thinking about LDS Business College. And I've got an idea that would ensure the viability and the future of the College for the next 50 years."

I think that's significant, don't you? That of all of those people, the prophet had been thinking about you. And I think it says something about you that is material in meaning and important.

Well, Brother Poelman talked about my entrepreneurial adventures, and it reminds me of Don Livingstone at BYU who is the director of the Center for Entrepreneurship there, called me a "serial entrepreneur." And I think that's a little bit like being a serial killer; I'm not sure. You've probably not had one of those speak here at these forum meetings before. But I have

loved my business career, and I've loved my church experience as well. I do have a very unique perspective on business. I have never ascribed to the "blood and guts, beat the next guy at all costs" kind of philosophy. What I have loved about business more than anything else has been the opportunity of creating and growing organizations that build people. And that is a very exciting thing for me, to see people that we could hire—and it's now been thousands of them through the years—where we've been able to bring them in. And whenever I hire somebody, I would say, "My goal is to have you be a better person when you leave here someday, than you are today."

I think so many times in the workplace, that people are minimized. I think one of the things that inspired me in this direction early on was a job I had as a banker, and Larry Richards could relate to this. I had a job as a banker and the head of the bank was asked to have kind of a fireside, if they would, and to get together with all the people and kind of build them up and let them know what the leadership of the bank was saying. And so the leader of this bank called everybody into this room, and was talking to them about how well the business was doing, and how grand its future would be. And this was a very old business here in Salt Lake. Somebody raised their hand and said, "Could you tell us, please, how you feel about people who have worked for this institution for many years?"

And his answer just blew me away. He said, "Well, I think that old employees are a lot like old equipment, and they need to be replaced over time." That was his answer. And he got his just rewards. The business is now out of business, and he got his fondest wish; none of them worked there anymore, because the business doesn't exist.

But I would tell you that it's a really wonderful thing, in the hard, competitive world that's out there, to create an environment that builds people. And just as a secret between us, I would tell you that it's also the smartest business thing I've ever discovered. Because if you can create a business situation where everybody is there—not just with their bodies, not just with their wallets, but also with their hearts—it's really an unstoppable dynamic that makes businesses prosper and grow. And so, I've tried to create an environment where people—and I claim no unique authorship—I think those ideas really came from being a member of the Church, where I saw what motivated people, and I saw the joy people took in doing things well and in doing their very best work. And for me, what a privilege to take the workplace, where people spend so many hours, and so often it degrades people, it degenerates them, it demoralizes them. Every one of us knows somebody who hates their job. Don't we? We all do. And they feel trapped.

I have a friend who is a very wealthy stockbroker, and he and I were mission companions together. He came to me a few years ago and said, "Andy, I really need your help. I want to find another job."

And I said, “But you’re making so much money!”

And he said, “I know. I’m trapped.” He said, “My lifestyle has risen to my income; I could never duplicate my income anywhere else. I cannot leave, and I hate what I do.” He said, “Nobody appreciates me. They don’t respect me.”

Anyway, I would just tell you: In whatever thing you choose to do—whether it’s to be an interior designer based on Miles’ training and help from others, Larry Richards, whoever else at this College that will be training and teaching you—I hope you will understand that you have a lot more say and control of your life than you think you do. And I believe that there is joy in becoming something great. So I’d like to say a few words today on this subject of “Becoming.”

Becoming is something we all are about, if you think about it. And whether we are becoming closer to God—more like God, a better person—or whether we’re going the other direction is really the result of the choices we’re making in our lives today. One of the things I love about LDS Business College is that so many of you are first-generation college students. I don’t know what the percentage is exactly; I understand that President Woodhouse asks often at graduation, “How many of you are the first in your family to have graduated from a secondary educational institution?” And I hear it’s 20, 25, 30 %--some fairly good, meaningful percentage. Well, I would just say, what a wonderful and meaningful thing that is for you, in that you are fighting and striving to become someone better. And I think, really, that’s the joy of our lives. The whole point of our existence here on this earth is to become somebody new. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says this: “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; and behold, all things become new.”

So it’s all about becoming, isn’t it? Becoming somebody different, becoming somebody new. I think as you get older, you will see, and many of you are probably already familiar with people who feel like their lives are not their own. And it happens that way. They become victims of their circumstances. Somebody is ill. Somebody loses their job. There’s some other external force that’s happening to them. A bad marriage. A difficult child. Any one of those things. And I guess I would just like to say today that, to the degree that we really understand the power our Father in Heaven has given us, I think we will understand that we can become who we were meant to be, in spite of these external forces that weigh on us. I really believe that.

We’ve been involved a little bit here at LDS Business College, with some of the single moms’ scholarships. And I had a chance to see them at our meeting, where there were a number of single moms that came and talked a little bit about their experience at LDS Business College. And I remember thinking how challenging their life must be. We learned about Stella Oaks, Elder Oaks’ mother, and the challenges she faced. She had a nervous breakdown at one point, trying to raise her children after her husband had died. But somehow, she found the strength, and I believe an endowment of power was given to her—just like I believe it can be to all of

those other single moms who are here at this school—to do what she needed to do, and to become who she was meant to become.

So I'd like to just share four points if I can, on this subject of Becoming, with you in the few minutes we have together. And the first one is this: you need to understand the purpose of the exercise. In other words, why are we here? Why are we experiencing what we are? And what's happening to us?

The second one is the importance of eternal law, and we'll talk a little bit more about that. The third one is the idea to find your strengths and to become your best self. And the fourth one is service. Okay. So we'll talk about those in the spirit of Becoming.

Well, let me say this. One of our sons, as he's been growing up, has encountered some challenges, at school, with peers—the normal things that I think all of us have dealt with, peer pressure, sometimes we've all felt a little bit on the outside of that circle, health challenges, and a number of other things. And at one point I was speaking with a friend about him and about my concerns with him, and this friend is very wise man, and he said, “You know, Andy? There are two ways that you can look at it. One is to say, ‘He's got some struggles and challenges in his life.’ But” he said, “I have found it very meaningful in my life to ask the question, ‘What can I learn from this experience?’”

And I would just say there is no power that I know of like the power of learning in the context of a spiritual education. What I mean by that is, all learning, we're told, that is meaningful comes through the power of the Holy Ghost. You are in an institution now, where the idea of education and the power of the Spirit are intrinsically married together. Do you realize how unique that is—in any learning institution in the world, to have those two powers combined? You are entitled to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are a lucidity of thought, the ability to understand, to learn, to have things resonate at a deeper level with you. That does not come with secular learning alone. Therefore, I would say that the kids who are a part of this institution and the other church institutions should be able to learn in a deeper and more profound and more lasting kind of way.

So I think you can ask the question, “What can I learn from the experiences that are happening to me—the good ones and the bad ones?” Sometimes I think we all have experiences happen in our lives that take our breath away.

I had a day like that yesterday. I won't give you all the details, because our time is limited. And it may take two or three days, I don't know. But it seemed like so many things were kind of coming at me from different directions, I finally had to sit down and take a deep breath and count my blessings and say, “What can I learn from this?” Because it really took me a minute to gain my strength. And when I did that, I remembered what I'd learned, and one of the benefits of being my age—I'm not that old, I'm 47—but being old enough that my wife and I with our

seven kids, we've learned this lesson, and that is we're never without hope. And sometimes things that seem so oppressive and challenging to us, they just kind of work themselves out.

I'm so impressed with what King Benjamin says about the "nothingness" of man. (See Mosiah 4:11) Our power is so very limited, and to me that could be a cause for despair, and yet it's a cause for great hope, because I realize that where our ability to solve problems and to deal with challenges is so completely weak and anemic, Heavenly Father's is absolutely complete. So by asking the question and understanding the purpose of the exercise, it makes it a lot easier for me.

What is the purpose of this exercise, anyway? Why are we here? We all know the answer to this. It has to do with the plan of salvation. We are not here to become doctors or lawyers, or as Elder Maxwell says, if we're a mortician, it's a pretty sure thing that our job is not going to mean a lot in the next life, right? And I would say that that's true with so many of our careers. The things that we experience and invest and, as the scriptures say, the things that we "waste and wear out our lives" (D&C 123:13) on, so many of them are transitory. They're passing.

But we are here. The purpose of the exercise is to learn to become like God. And so everything that happens to you can be viewed in that context. Having children. One of the most incredible things about having a family is that it's a natural teacher that naturally helps us to become like God. We learn to become unselfish, we learn to bear another's burdens, we learn to teach, we learn to deal with tough problems that aren't totally in our control. Aren't those things all great training for this ultimate purpose of why we are here?

So let me suggest, in your Becoming, that you remember why all of this is happening to you. And when you deal with big challenges and have big concerns in your lives, understand you're not alone. You're in a much bigger school experience than the one you see and notice and feel on a daily basis. And that's the school of teaching you to become like God, because that's the ultimate point of all of this.

I'm going to tell you something that might sound a little funny. When I think about what my ultimate goals in life are, I have had kind of a strange idea that at the end of the day I want my countenance to radiate light, in every aspect of what I do and say, and who I am. And often, when I look at people, that's the way I judge them. Is that a dark countenance, or is that a light countenance? But my kids will laugh. I'll say, "How were his eyes? How did they look to you?"

My kids are pretty good. They'll say, "His eyes were clear," or "They have light in them." Or they'll say, "He had the darkest, cloudiest eyes, Dad, that I've ever seen." And I would just say that, for me, has been a real motivator. And what I've tried to do, I've tried to make sure that my decisions have fed light into who I am. Because at the end of the day, I want to look like a

lot of those temple workers you've met, who've been in the temple, and you just look at them and say, "Don't they just glow?" They just have such a nice countenance about them.

I would say this: Any aspiration you have, in this larger picture of why we're here, and the purpose of this larger exercise that doesn't really lead us toward this larger goal is a secondary consideration. We need to remember that.

I'm old enough that I lived through the dot-com boom. That's when the internet first rolled out—1998, 1999, 2000. And at the time I owned a technology company that was internet-based, and so we were working hard kind of in that environment. And somebody developed the term "dog years." And it's that during that internet, dot-com era, what happened is, people were working so hard that one year was the equivalent of a dog year, which is seven, right? And I saw that happen. What happened was companies said, "We've got to hurry, because there's this new technology. We've got to capture it. If we don't hurry, we're going to miss the window." So what they did is literally, they came out and doubled salaries, a lot of these technology companies did. But the exchange—it was a devil's agreement, because the exchange was, "We own you. You no longer have a life. Your family doesn't matter, and any external interest doesn't matter. We're going to pay you an unbelievable amount of money, more than you ever thought possible, but your life is no longer your own."

And I saw people through that two- or three- or four-year era have nervous breakdowns because they had no balance in their lives. I saw two people that I know of who made a conscious decision to leave their families to pursue this dot-com, dog-year kind of era. And [they] poured themselves into these businesses, and eventually I started to see the light go out of their faces. I saw them go dark. And I saw them putting in the hours, but I saw their productivity drop way off. And pretty soon the light, the real heart, the spirit of those people was weakened and damaged and gone, and too many of them, at the end of the day, woke up and said, "Where's my family? Where are those people that I loved and that I cared about and who cared for me?" And too often, they found that they had moved on, and were now in a different place. Because they made a choice. They forgot the purpose of the exercise, and they made the choice to choose a lesser thing at the expense of a greater and an eternal thing. And I would say to you, in your Becoming, don't make that mistake in what you do.

I'll make one final comment on this idea of understanding the purpose of the exercise. Brother Poelman mentioned some of our work in the Philippines. We have a school there. It's a great place. There's a great spirit there, a lot like what I think I find here. In the Philippines, there are no jobs, or there are very few jobs. In my last trip there a few months ago, I spoke with a man, a senior missionary who works at the Employment Center in Manila. And he was there only about two months and he said, "Andy, I've discovered the most scary thing in this culture."

I said, "What is that?"

He said, “There is such an abundance of labor that if you are 33 years old and you’re Filipino, and you don’t have your career established, you will not find a job the rest of your life. It’s over at 33.”

They have a funny law that’s meant to protect workers in the Philippines that says if somebody works for you more than six months, longer than a six-month period of time, then it’s very difficult to fire them forever after. And someone thought, “What a great, magnanimous gesture.” It’s almost job security or job employment. But the way the economics work, can you think of where that might have lead? What do you think is happening now?

Well, what happens now, this ERC (Employment Resource Center) gentleman said, “Well, what’s happening is companies all over are giving five-month-and-twenty-day contracts to employees, and then they fire them, and they’re gone. So,” he said, “the Employment Resource Center here in Manila is very challenged, because we can show that we’re placing people, but the vast majority of them are on sub-six-month contracts.”

And so the Academy for Creating Enterprise was formed, and we have four-volume curriculum, some of which we’ve all delved in and helped write. It’s the only MGL like it that has four volumes of dedicated curriculum to what we call micro-entrepreneurship. It’s basically starting business on a shoestring. And basically, the title of these is “Where There Are No Jobs.” It’s a very common problem in many Third World countries around the world. Twenty-five returned missionaries, hand-picked, come in. One of them, a few weeks ago when I was over there, we asked this girl—sharp looking, they all look like they’re fifteen, I don’t know why—but anyway, we said, “So what are you doing?”

And she said, “I herd sheep for my father.”

And we said, “That’s great! Good for you! What do you want to do when you get a job, or start at your own business?” Anyway, in asking her these questions, it turns out that this girl has a PhD in chemical engineering, and has no job and no hope for a job. And so she’s in the Academy, and trying to learn. We now have 1,000 Filipino returned missionaries who have gone through that experience and have created thousands of jobs as a result of that, all in an entrepreneurship kind of a way. We’re pioneering a new idea that for us is very exciting, called micro-franchising, which is basically a McDonald’s kind of an idea for less than about \$2,000.00. And we’re coming up with businesses that hopefully we can replicate throughout the Philippines, so they can get synergies of branding, of distribution, economies of scale, all the benefits that a big company would have, and they just plug in as a franchisee and assist them. And so, anyway, that’s what’s happening.

The hardest thing we have to do in the Philippines is the same thing that I think you have to deal with here, and that is this: The Filipinos, for generations, have been poor. And so your father lived from day to day by catching fish, and his father did the same, and his father before

him. And now we bring 25 of these Filipino returned missionaries into a classroom and say, “Guess what? It doesn’t have to be that way any more. You can be self-reliant. You can create a living for your family that will allow you to do what you really want to do, which is serve in the Church, be with your family, and have some feeling that there is a future for you beyond the next fishing expedition.”

And we initially thought, “We can teach all of this in four weeks. Let’s take our MTC-like residential experience and cut it from eight weeks to four weeks, and then we can run twice as many returned missionaries through the system.” And as we thought and pondered and prayed about that, we realized the most difficult thing we have to do with the Filipino returned missionaries is help them to understand that their life really can be different than it has been for generations. And I would suggest, in understanding the purpose of the exercise, as you’re becoming something new, you have the same problem.

You have to see yourself as being different than maybe every generation of your family that’s gone before you. You have to understand that you have the potential to really make a contribution and become somebody that you haven’t ever seen in your family, maybe, or around you. And I’d like to challenge you to be like these Filipino returned missionaries. Have the faith to see yourself as a new creature, and to see what you can become. And if you do that in the context of this grand exercise of becoming like God, I think you will really understand that there is something very special and wonderful about this hard classroom we call earth life.

Well, the second point—the importance of eternal law. We teach at the Academy something we call “rules of thumb.” It’s not particularly unique, but these rules of thumb are things like “Start small; think big,” and “Be nice later.” In the Philippines, if anyone has anything, it automatically belongs to the entire family. And so what happens is, if you’re a business person and you have what’s called the “Sari-sari Store” and you have a bunch of coconuts or mangoes, the family is entitled, traditionally, culturally, to come and just take advantage of that. And so we’ve had to teach them to “be nice later.” If you realize, you know, you can hold onto those things; they belong to the business, they don’t belong to you, then you can be very nice to your family later on. But if not, you’ll just go back to catching fish like you have been.

Well, the 130th section of the Doctrine and Covenants has such an important principle. Verses 20 and 21, anybody who has been through the seminary program knows this scripture, right? Do you know what it is? “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God,”—*any blessing*—“it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”

Let me give you an example if I can. You’ve seen people who choose to observe the Sabbath day and those who haven’t. Okay. Well, I would say those who choose not to obey the

Sabbath day may say, “Boy, I wonder if they noticed that I didn’t go to church today,” or “I wonder if they saw me driving down the road with my boat.” You know? They may say that. But what I would say is there’s a much more important principle at play here, and that is, it really doesn’t matter what anybody else notices or thinks, there is a set of unique promises to obeying the Sabbath that you either receive the blessings from or you don’t. So if you’re driving down the road with your boat, it doesn’t matter if anybody saw. What matters is, did you get more light in your countenance, or did you become a little bit darker today?

So if you understand that principle, it becomes very motivational. You don’t have to think about anybody else, you have to think about what’s right. And when you think about obeying the commandments, and you think about doing what’s right, you say, “I’m either feeding the light in me, or I’m diminishing it by this choice that I’m making.” We limit ourselves by our thoughts and our expectations. And some people aren’t willing to be great. They aren’t willing to receive that light simply because they don’t see themselves as being capable of being that kind of a person.

So let’s move on to the third one, which is find your strengths and be your best self. I learned a long time ago that I will never be tall, dark and handsome. It just is not possible for me. I don’t think the best plastic surgeon in the world could really do much at this point. And I have the problem that someone told me once—I’m vertically challenged or vertically disadvantaged. They came up to do a sound check before I spoke today, and he said, “Let’s have you stand up.” And I said, “Don’t worry, just go down.” Because that’s the way it always works for me.

I remember when I was in elementary they used to take pictures of all of the kids and they’d wind down the camera. I was always the last kid in the row because the camera kept going down and down and down. And what I would say is that I just discovered that I would never have the ability to be a smooth talker or to sway somebody just by charisma, along the way. But I also learned that I have some strengths.

In the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, it talks about gifts, right? Spiritual gifts. One of the things we learn in the 46th section is this: not every man has every gift, but every man has some gift. (See verse 11) And I would say most of us have multiple gifts. So I don’t know about you, but I’ve wasted way too much of my life thinking, “Gosh, I just don’t quite measure up.” I have thought that, for whatever reason, I wasn’t as good playing sports, or I couldn’t speak as well as someone else, or I wasn’t as smart as the guys in Math. I had a miserable time in Math.

I remember just dwelling on all of the problems that I had and constantly seeing kind of the empty part of the glass. And I think I have learned, and if I can share this thought with you, I would say this: Do not compare yourself with anybody else. You weren’t meant to be like

everybody else. You were meant to be you. And the sooner you can find out who you are, and be the best you you can be, the sooner you're going to be an impacter on your family and friends, and you will be at harmony and peace in your own life.

Marjorie Hinckley in her book *Small and Simple Things* said this: "Fifty was my favorite age. It takes about that long to learn to quit competing, to be yourself and settle down to living. It is the age I would like to be through all eternity." I'm not quite fifty, but I am learning that lesson.

It really doesn't matter if you are as tall, dark and handsome or as smart in math or as good at soccer or whatever. You're good at something, I guarantee you, because you are a son or a daughter of God and He gave you a gift. And yours is the challenge to recognize what you already have, and what He gave you. And in your *Becoming*, my challenge to you is to seek out what that gift is, or what those multiple gifts are. You have them. They are yours. Nobody else has them quite in the package or in the combination that you do. And in your *Becoming*, you must find those gifts, and if you focus on those, I think you'll find out that your weaknesses kind of dwindle away, and they won't mean quite so much anymore.

One principle that I'll teach very quickly in the interest of time is what I'm going to call the "As If" principle. In the Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting a few years ago, someone—a counselor to a bishop in a developing area of the Church—asked the question, "How can I get people in ward counsel to listen to me, and to feel like what I say matters and that I really am their leader, after all?"

That's an interesting question, isn't it? And Elder Eyring's answer was just profound. He said, "How do you get people to feel like you're an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ? I don't know any way except to be sure yourself that you know you are. Then you just act in a way that conveys to them that you come as a servant of the Lord, and the Holy Ghost does it for you. I don't think you make it happen."

And can I relate that to you? I would just say if you understand the purpose of this exercise, and you want to be your very best self along the way, and you've discovered your gifts, now what you need to do is just act as if you're the person you want to become. And I believe over time it is a true principle that we become that person. And so in a way we're all fakes, maybe. You know? We're just trying to become somebody else. But I suppose that's a righteous kind of a striving and I think the Lord is not offended. It's not hypocritical if we act as if we are that righteous person we want and desire and yearn to become.

Well, the final thing that I would say today is service. I was talking to Larry before the meeting began today, and I would say this. In 1996, I was able to sell a business that I had worked on since 1989. And my poor wife lived through that with me, and I could see my poor children starving on the side of the street, you know. I asked my son—we were talking one day

about what we should have in the food storage, and he said, “Dad, I think we need a good piece of cardboard.”

And I said, “How come?”

And he said, “If things get really tough, we’re going to need a sign that says, ‘Will work for food.’” And so he thought that was part of our two-year storage. But I would just say, at the time of that early business, I was ready to buy the cardboard. I thought I could write a book one time that would say, “To the Brink and Back.” But I wasn’t sure about the “And Back” portion for a while.

We sold this business in 1996. It had been as the result of so much prayer. I thought Heavenly Father had just blessed us so much, and we had overcome some huge challenges, and it was a big win for us. And I just remember feeling profoundly grateful that it had worked out the way it had worked out. And when I told the kids we had sold the business, their first question was, “Is there going to be any Christmas this year, Dad?” Because they didn’t understand what that all meant, and they thought I had just lost my job.

I remember on my mission, thinking that if I serve a faithful mission, it will be a tithe on my life—so two years out of the roughly 21, at that time. And I remember thinking, “I want to tithe the rest of my life as well.” When we sold that business in 1996, I really made the decision at that time, I did not want to take the sacred blessing my Father in Heaven had given me of free agency—I no longer had the excuse of saying, “I’ve got to go to work, because I’ve got bills to pay” right? I couldn’t say that anymore. I knew that I was going to be held to a higher standard, and I made a commitment at that point I would dedicate a very meaningful portion of my life to something that had nothing to do with making money, but just doing good and lifting other people up. And I would just say it’s been a great blessing for me. It’s brought far more meaning to my life than the next business venture, although I’ve enjoyed those as well and they’ve been a great blessing.

I do want you to know that I know that our Father in Heaven lives. I know that He loves you. I know that. And I know He loves me as well. We have more power, I think, to control our lives and our futures than we can hardly imagine. But it’s power that comes by following these eternal principles that no variation will bring us the blessings we need and that we seek. And my prayer is that all of us will have that blessing in our lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.