

The Key To Success

Bill Cosby, born in 1937, was the first black performer to appear in a TV dramatic series, I Spy, in 1965.

His own TV series The Cosby Show, starting in 1984, became the most watched TV show in the United States. Bill Cosby holds a doctorate in education. Cosby was the impetus for the formation of ARISE Detroit!! when, in a January 13, 2005, speech at Wayne County Community College he challenged black Detroiters to stop blaming white people for problems they could solve themselves. "It's not what they're doing to us. It's what we're not doing," the entertainer told the audience of nearly 2,000 people.

Where will we be 45 years from now? I hope we will have overcome the psychological blocks that have hampered us in the past.

Having been told repeatedly that we are inferior, many of us have swallowed that line - and I'm not just talking about poor African-Americans or people of color.

5 The word minority has connotations of weakness, lesser value, self-doubt, tentativeness and powerlessness. Many of us have been a "minority" for so long that we have absorbed that characterization into our personalities without recognizing it. This is a hell of a predicament for African-Americans because it can result in our too readily being resigned to "staying in our place" or accommodating racial misperceptions. Such
10 behavior works to our detriment, frequently without our realizing that we are limiting our options. Indeed, in our own communities, we often feel incapable of running our own small businesses. A "minority" mind-set can deter us from being leaders and entrepreneurs.

15 Black children raised in this atmosphere express self-doubt by asking themselves questions like, "May I? Do I have the ability? Will they [Whites] accept me?" This lack of self-confidence identifies a person who has not been conditioned to take charge of his own fate, who is just one step away from acting like a complete victim. And victims, we know, feel helpless and behave as if their destiny is completely controlled by others. Worse, a victim does not accept responsibility for himself or herself, blaming
20 others for his or her predicaments and failures. A victim's attitude is epitomized by the African-American student who fails a physics exam and blames it on the professor's racism even though the student did not prepare for the examination. Volunteer victims are passive and quite adept at finding excuses for their personal failures. If all African-American people followed their pattern [...] we would all be in sorry shape.

25 Fortunately, many African-Americans have excelled in spite of racism, succeeding against the odds because they exerted control. Inside, they sang to themselves, "I ain't goin' let nobody turn me 'round."

For success in any field, a "take charge" approach is absolutely necessary. The success
30 of African-Americans in sports is the result of their taking control of their fate. Sports figures provide the pattern for an approach that is critical to whatever goals we pursue. Good players reach the top because they work hard and practice for many hours to perfect their skills, to become the best. They do not settle for average.

35 But many African-American students, even at top universities, are satisfied with a mediocre performance as long as they attain the degree -the credential. Indeed, if African-American students put forth the effort in their studies that athletes devote to excelling in sports, we would be much better off. African-Americans face stiff competition in the real world of work. We cannot afford to settle for being just average; we must learn as much as we can to be the best that we can. The key word is education - that's knowledge - education with maximum effort. Without it, we cannot be in charge
40 of ourselves or anyone else.

I hope that in 2035 our goals will have been achieved. No longer will a Black child attack another for being "White" because that child is excelling in his or her studies. I envision a world in which African-American children no longer say, "May I?" They will self-assuredly say, "I will," and know that their highest ambitions and goals are
45 realistic and can be achieved.

(By Bill Cosby, Ebony, November 1990)