

HOW TO FIND YOURSELF THROUGH SERVICE

June 13, 2016 by [Dr. Hassan Tetteh](#)

Transcript of Commencement Address to 2016 Graduates of the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health, Health Science Academy.



[Life of Service_AAIUH HSA Commencement](#) from [Dr. Hassan A. Tetteh](#).

Before the Gospel according to John and after the Gospel according to Mark is the Gospel of Luke, and the 48th verse of the 12th chapter of that gospel says, "To whom much is given; much is expected". Your presence here today on this auspicious day in this venue suggests that you all must have received much in life.

The first part of that passage in Luke, "To whom much is given; much is expected" is often quoted– but what is often left out is the end of the paragraph—it says "The more one has had entrusted to him the more he will be required to repay".

Dr. Browne, Dr. Valmont, Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues– and especially the graduates of the Health Science Academy you all have all been entrusted with

much! Get ready to repay! Unfortunately, life does not accept VISA, MasterCard, or American Express- Service is the rent you pay for living in this world.

So, what are you going to do with this one precious life of yours?

I was born here in Brooklyn, graduated from Brooklyn Tech and thought I had things figured out... I wanted to be a doctor. I went to college worked hard, tried to get good grades and struggled... I worried all the while about finding myself, learned lessons about a life of service, and discovered the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

I learned that a commitment to a life of service guarantees 3 things:

1. Great things will happen in your life
2. You will create an enduring legacy
3. You will meet and exceed expectations in your life

I have personally witnessed how answering life's most urgent question "what are you doing for others?" can help you accomplish great things, create an enduring legacy and allow you to exceed expectations.

When I graduated high school; I was prepared to go to college and EXPECTED to go to Morehouse where I was accepted—However, I did not have enough money and could not afford to go, and instead went to SUNY Plattsburgh, a small arts and science state college, far up north by the Canadian border—it was a blessing; being so far from civilization, I didn't have much to do— so I studied.

I also became active in student government and served the student body and as a result met with several school lead administrators that learned about my background. One of the professors, Dr. Skopp, encouraged me to consider a career in public service. As an undergrad, he told me about the Kennedy School and I summarily concluded after sending away for information that I had no chance of ever getting into Harvard— But Dr. Skopp always cared about my career and believed in me. Even after graduating college, he would on occasion contact me, check in, and remind about the Kennedy School.

Many years later, I finally applied and was accepted to the Kennedy School but had lost touch with Dr. Skopp. While in Boston, I learned from another college professor that Dr. Skopp had been diagnosed with an advanced cancer and was not expected to live much longer... I contacted him and learned that he needed a specialist in thoracic surgery, and I had just happen to meet a physician from Boston that was now practicing at Dartmouth close to where Dr. Skopp was- I provided the introduction for Dr. Skopp to the physician and he received excellent care. I am happy to say that now several years after reconnecting with Doug Skopp, (he now insists that I stop calling him Dr. Skopp) and over 20 years after he decided to care, take interest in, and encourage a young kid from Brooklyn- Doug is alive and well. He recently completed a book called [Shadows Walking](#), spends precious days with his grandchildren, and speaks all over the country to individuals about cancer survival! I saw him recently and he sent me an email days ago that ended with he line, "Every day is a gift ... for all of us!" I'm sure Doug could never had done the calculus or predicted how a small act of answering life most urgent question could have come back to help him in so many ways.

When you dedicate your life to service great things will happen in your life...

The powerful effects of answering life's most urgent question became most real to me during serving this country.

After medical school, I joined the Navy; and after general surgery residency EXPECTED to complete a thoracic surgery fellowship—but the Navy had other plans; after 9-11, very few surgeons were allowed to go directly into fellowship, instead most were deployed. I was assigned to a ship as the general surgeon, and remember thinking . . . "I didn't join the Navy to go on a ship".

I spent 22 months on the ship and for 19 of those months we were out to sea. It was the loneliest, difficult, and most stressful time of my life; it was also the greatest time of my life; I served with 6000 other "volunteers" that were dedicated to a cause and felt the same fears I did; Years later I would join thousands others in a different kind of campaign in the deserts of Afghanistan supporting the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Forces . . . "I never EXPECTED that on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, I would be half way around the world in Afghanistan caring for Marines in a tent". I returned from deployment forever changed and inspired to write about my experience that became

the inspiration for my book '[Gifts of the Heart](#)'. It was not what I expected, but our expectations in life very seldom indicate the pathway in which we will travel.

When you dedicate yourself to service you will create an enduring legacy...

While serving overseas I read a lot of books. One of the most influential was about a Jewish psychiatrist that was imprisoned in an Auschwitz concentration camp in the 1940's. He was number 119,104 and he EXPECTED to die. However over time, he began to find meaning in his and his fellow prisoners circumstance. He provided SERVICE to his fellow inmates, encouraged them to have HOPE for a future—since they were still alive, and he even quoted Nietzsche: "Das was uns nich merken wis staker totet"—"That which does not kill me, makes me stronger". The SERVICE he provided to his fellow prisoners undoubtedly helped, but His greatest SERVICE was the contribution he made to mankind. Dr. Viktor Frankl, number 119,104 gave us logo therapy and the book Man's Search for Meaning—

When you dedicate yourself to service, you will meet and exceed expectations...

Dr. Frankl taught me and helped me understand that it -did -not- really -matter what I EXPECTED from life, but rather/What Did Matter/ is what life EXPECTED from me.

Serving on the ship for 22 months or in the desert tent were not necessarily what I EXPECTED, but it WAS in those moments what LIFE expected of me.

THE GREATEST AMONG US ALL RISE and EXCEED ALL EXPECTATIONS because they dedicate themselves to service, leave a legacy, embrace life- become engaged, and take on obstacles as opportunities.

IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM LIFE; BUT WHAT DOES MATTER IS WHAT LIFE EXPECTS FROM YOU...THROUGH your SERVICE.

1. DEDICATE your life to answering life's most urgent question:
2. "WHAT am I doing for others?" By doing so great things will happen in your life, you will create an enduring legacy, and you will exceed expectations.
EXPECT AND PLAN to have challenges and view them all as opportunities, understanding, "Das was uns nich merken wis staker totet"—"that which does not kill me makes me stronger".

3. BE GRATEFUL to all the people who helped you along the way. You are all someone's favorite unfolding story...

Don't wait until you make it to the top to help others. If you wait until you get to the top of the ladder to help others you will be too tired and old to help anyone else. By helping people along your journey they will give you energy, push you, and help you to climb even higher... If you are in high school reach down to middle school, if you are in college reach down and help someone in high school. If you are in medical school reach down and help others... If you are a parent, doctor, or accomplished in your field reach back and help the next generation...

As the great Arthur Ashe once said,

"Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can"... Serve.