

# True Wisdom

Intelligence holds no real value if one does not utilize it in the best way possible, and, as Benjamin Franklin wrote, “true merit” exists in “an ability to serve mankind, one’s country, friends and family.” The employment of one’s knowledge and learning transforms intelligence into wisdom; as such, all learning should serve a larger purpose than merely the accumulation of facts and information and equations. Instead the fruit of a boy’s education should be service to others, as he employs what he has been taught and what he has discovered in order to better his entire country and those around him. A student’s end goal ought to be one that centers on the betterment of himself and his fellow man rather than simply desiring to know. Not intelligence, but wisdom should be the chief objective of learning.

What constitutes, then, the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Wisdom transcends knowledge, being not the product of learning but rather the intelligent application of learning. Is not the most intelligent application of knowledge the application that aids others to live and to learn? Franklin’s “true merit” lay not in a massive accrual of knowledge for youth, but instead, he stated that it rested in an idea “as consisting in an inclination joined with an ability to serve.” While he did state that this ability should come as the result of learning, he refers to it as “the great aim and end of all learning,” clarifying that, although knowledge stands vitally important to both the individual and to the world, the application of knowledge in service to others is the true desired result.

With all certainty, this writing applies to the modern day just as well as it applied to the time in which Franklin wrote it. Society respects and esteems a man for possessing a great congeries of information and intellectual insight, but what can be said about the man who has that store of knowledge but does not apply it? Does “true merit” really exist in a man whose

learning could exhaust volume upon volume but who does not utilize his propensity for the scientific to discover vaccines or to serve as a family doctor? Conversely, the woman who has a flair for oration, a keen sense of justice, and a logical mind and who serves as a defense lawyer to her community richly deserves commendation for her thoughtful application of her learning. If everyone simply sat in lectures and learned to do complex equations but went on to make no use of his education, the purpose of learning would be nullified. Society never sees the benefits of a person's intelligence, but it deeply appreciates the wisdom of any person as he or she employs that intelligence and that product of erudition.

Benjamin Franklin's "great aim" of learning, then, still holds fast and true in today's society. Knowledge, while imperative and fundamental, cannot ever serve as a stand-in for wisdom; rather, it functions only as a building block from which wisdom can expand as far as possible. In that way, then, this short excerpt that closes Franklin's "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania" outshines the preceding paragraphs in that it presents clearly the most important idea of the document: that merit, in the end, rests not in amassing knowledge but in serving one's fellow man with what one has learned. Today, still, Franklin's statements prove applicable and relevant—education continues, and surely as all teachers proceed, they could do themselves a great service by considering Franklin's definitions and ideas of "true merit" and "the great aim and end of all learning." Indeed, youth should be reminded of the dominating value of wisdom as opposed to pure, unused learning, and they should be presented with Franklin's ideas of what purposes should be served with their education. The utilization of wisdom to help one's country and one's neighbors should be emphasized and underlined, for that, above all, is the true importance of learning.