

What Makes People Exceptional

This is the edited transcription of Larry Bell's address to the Schiller Institute conference in Morristown, N.J. on Feb. 16, 2019. Mr. Bell is an endowed professor in the University of Houston's Hines College of Architecture and founding director of the Sasakawa International Center for Space Architecture at the College of Engineering, University of Houston. His name was on the first rocket that took Americans up to the Space Station with the Russians.

I think the title of my talk tonight is quite appropriate. We've heard a lot about an exceptional person today, and that was very interesting to me; a pretty remarkable person. I've had the good fortune to know a lot of remarkable people, including most of the Apollo astronauts and the people who built that program. I'm pitch-hitting tonight. Walt Cunningham, Apollo 7 astronaut, was supposed to speak here tonight. So, I got a call from Tom Wismuller a couple of days ago, and he said, "Do you want to go to New Jersey?" I said, "It's a lot warmer in Houston." So, Walt couldn't come. He's a dear friend of mine; we've been friends for many years. He had an appointment with the doctor, and he said, "I want you to please tell everybody, I really wanted to come." It was very genuine.

People in the space program like to deal with complex stuff. That can get us into a lot of trouble, because climate is complex stuff; it's very challenging. I know Tom also from the Climate Camp; a lot of people that Tom helped organize at the Johnson Space Center are applying their analyses that they developed and their technological approaches to problem-solving to look at how climate works and how the media doesn't. So, a lot of us became "climate junkies" as well.

Climate of Corruption

I wrote a couple of books on climate. One is called *Climate of Corruption; The Politics and Power Behind the Global Warming Hoax*, which gives you a pretty good idea of what the book is about. It was dedicated to Al Gore, and the dedication said, "Dedicated to Al Gore, whose invention of the Internet made this book possible, and whose invention of facts made it necessary." I didn't get a publisher right away, because most of them are located on the East Coast and the West Coast. I had to go to Austin to get an agent.

But anyway, I got in enough trouble on that book that some of my scientific friends said, would I write another book? I write a lot; I've written coming up on 600 articles for Forbes Newsmag, on a lot of different topics. I guess I'm coming up on nine books, just in the past few years.

Remarkable People

The book I'm working on now is being co-edited with someone you just saw, Buzz Aldrin. *Beyond Footprints and Flagpoles* is the name of the book. Buzz really wants to go to Mars, and he thinks we should go one-way. He says, after we go to all the cost of taking people to Mars, why in the world would we bring them back? And he's serious; Buzz is passionate. Buzz is one my very closest friends; has been for 40 years—house-guest and friend and buddy. There are two things he cares about: He cares about space, and he cares about his family. He's really a remarkable person. I didn't go to see the "First Man" movie for two reasons. One, because it was the first *men*, not the first man.

The Apollo program, and that landing in particular, involved three astronauts. Two of them went to the surface, and they got there, their butts hit the ground at the same time. They took the same risk, and they're both outstanding people, and I knew them both. I know one of them, and I knew the other one. Quite different kind of people, but they're marvelous people. You think of the history: They were jet pilots in the Korean War. Neil nearly got shot down, and lost a wing, and Buzz shot down two Soviet MiG fighter jets. Both of the pilots ejected, and he's pleased that that happened. But Buzz actually sat in his class at West Point; he's not a dummy. He got his PhD at MIT in orbital mechanics.

These are remarkable people. I look at the astronauts, and I look at NASA, and I know so many of these people. And they're a bunch of grown-up Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; they are so straight arrow you wouldn't believe it. But they're different also; they have different personalities, they have different views, but they have some other important things in common.

So, I was very pleased, I knew nothing about this conference. I'm very pleased to be invited. I'm equally pleased at what I saw today. It was inspiring to me; it was interesting to me, the people I meet—you people.

I write a lot, and writing is very solitary. I sit in my office, and I type with two fingers. I figure when I write a book, it's like 100 pages; I figured out a 300-page book is 100,000 words. There are about five letters in a word, and then I miss every three words. So, I figure it's a million keystrokes. My finger was this much longer before I started doing this, and I never learned how to type because when I was in high school, only the dorky guys would take typing. Unless you wanted to pick up a girl, why else would you take typing? And look at me; do I look like I needed to go to that level? Come on.

But this conference has been really an eye-opener for me, and a mind-opener, and I think a soul-opener. I thought the music today was absolutely wonderful. I've never gone to a conference where they had a concert before; certainly not NASA.

The Wrong Climate Stuff

I write about many things—and the climate stuff is one. NASA does wonderful things, but they do crappy climate science. They've got this little office in a Manhattan office building called the Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Now that is a travesty; Goddard is the father of space flight. Whenever you hear “the warmest day in 100 years” and all that stuff, it's coming out of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies. They have the audacity to attribute it to NASA, and it's disgusting.

So, in my first book, which got me into some trouble, but it's good trouble, Walt Cunningham—I'll share some words with you—he wrote a tribute on the back of my book. This goes back a few years. Here's what Walt said:

Those of us fortunate enough to have traveled in space, bet our lives on the competence, the dedication, and integrity of the science and technology professionals who made our missions possible. In the last twenty years, I have watched high standards being violated by a few influential climate scientists—including some at NASA—while some special interest opportunities have dangerously abused our public trust... This important book shines light on these self-serving agendas, shady political dealings behind the global warming hoax. We absolutely must change while there is still time.

Commercialization of Space

Science got us to the Moon. We didn't always know we were right, but we wouldn't have gone if we didn't think we were right. I have links both in the government side of things, also the commercial side of things. One

of the companies I started was with Maxime Faget, chief engineer at the Johnson Space Center, who started the Shuttle program. Then, two of the former directors of the Johnson Space Center were on our board, as well as Neil Armstrong and so on. That company grew to over 8,000 people, was on the New York Exchange, and then General Dynamics bought us.

So, I believe in commercialization of space. I believe that there are opportunities, I'm excited that we see what Elon Musk is doing. I don't like all his dealings with Tesla and our tax subsidized cars that we're doing for him, and some of this other stuff. But they are making progress. We see now Jeff Bezos and others who are making progress, and I think we're going to see the cost of entry to space greatly improved, which will make everything much more economically reasonable with the commercial sector really now being involved. Right now, I think it's mostly NASA's out-sourcing of work, rather than really going there for the gold. But hopefully that will come. Certainly the satellite business came out of the space program, and your GPS and everything else that came out of that is attributable to the space program.

I want to pick up on a comment that was made earlier today, and this is out of sequence, but it was a discussion of pessimism. And that word I think is such an important one at this conference and I think in our country. But I would like to add, my comment is that pessimism has been weaponized by identity politics. We've heard from LaRouche and others that we should look forward and pick a tall flagpole to direct our planning to, beyond our children, perhaps beyond their children, and guide ourselves by that longer flag. I think the notion that we can do things, that we can believe that we can accomplish things, is just terribly important.

Whole-Brain Thinking

I wrote a book, *Thinking Whole: Rejecting Half-Witted Left & Right Brain Limitations*, on what it is that makes people really exceptional; which is the topic of my talk. And I'm going to have to cut this short. In that book, I look at personal friends of mine—Jane Goodall is a good friend, and she went to Africa and tried to find out what we can learn from chimpanzees that made us more human. And found out that no, they kill each other and bite each other's faces off. So, we have to depend on ourselves rather than chimpanzees. Chimpanzees are cute; I have nothing against chimpanzees.

In my book, I broke it down into five categories of things that people care about. One is that they're observers; they care enough about the world and what's

going on around them—that they observe things that are going on around them. I think creativity is an analog activity; you see something here that you notice, and you apply it to something over here. And someone says, “Yeah, but that was purple, and this is red.” And you say, “Yeah, but they walk differently.” It’s the ability to observe things; and we all observe different things from our own perspective and our own background. But being tuned in to what’s around you is so important, politically and naturally and everything else.

The other thing that I think defines people, that makes them incredibly successful—it doesn’t always end well for them, but we learn from them—is that they have the capacity to care about something. They really, really care; which is why it makes them persistent. The reason they keep getting up and they keep doing things is because they really care. I broke this into five categories, from looking at my friends and people from history and so on. One category is the humanitarians. Humanitarians are very caring; they’re people people. You see them as hospice workers and doctors and teachers and people who really put themselves out there and connect with other people. Any of us who have been to the hospital a few times know what that means.

The second category I put are the visualists. We saw some of them today playing music for us and so on. I don’t call them artists, because people think art is something you hang on a wall. It’s the visionaries, the ones who have the vision of the music, the vision of the beauty, the vision of humanity and so on. They’re sculptors, they’re architects, they’re people who have a vision you can’t really quantify, but you feel it.

The third category I have are the scientists. The scientists want to solve how does quantum theory work? It violates Newtonian physics: How can it work? But it works. And now we have quantum computing right now that shows that it works.

Space Provides Us with So Much

I wrote another book, *Reinventing Ourselves; How Information Technology Is Rapidly and Radically Transforming Humanity*. Some of it is really scary. We can Skype now with grandma, and we can do these things. My analogy is, it’s the boiling frog analogy. We’re submersed in this water, there’s technology around us; we have social media, we have all these other things. Our bodies keep adjusting to the temperature, the water keeps increasing in temperature. They say, “Well, we’ll give you more security cameras everywhere. Never mind that Siri is listening to you and so

on—oh, I forgot; she’s here. Never mind this; just give us a little more of your privacy, and we’ll give you more security, we’ll give you more convenience.”

Pretty soon you can’t jump out of the pan, and you boil. I think that’s where we’re heading; so I wrote the book. I thought: Is this my worst nightmare, or an exciting dream? With technology, I can now telecommute to work; I don’t have to drive to work, I can do stuff.

We have a choice. We can look at space, and we can say, “OK, where did the space program come from?” It came from buzz bombs flying out of Germany, being built at Peenemünde; they were raining down on London. We had Apollo-Soyuz, which was, “Can’t we all get along?” during the Cold War. Can’t we all get along? We’re looking at the Earth now from space, and it’s very fragile. The atmosphere of the Earth is like the skin of a grapefruit, thick compared to the Earth. So, can’t we get along? Can’t we go to Mars together? Can’t we be part of this larger humanity?

We Go into Space Because It’s Our Destiny

I have students from all over the world. I’ve got Siberia, I’ve got India, and so on. They come into the program for a year and a half. We look at every aspect of space—mission planning, trajectory, spacecraft design. You think of space being specialized on a lot of stuff. We learn about radiation issues, cosmic radiation, solar energy particles. How do you land something; how do you move it; how do you connect things together; what happens when your muscles and bones demineralize because of low gravity; and all that kind of stuff. That’s what we do.

I ask my students—because they come here from all over the world—why would you give up a year and a half of your life to do this? You must think there’s a future.

I want to pick up on what Tom said. Why do we go to space, when there are so many other priorities? Why do we go to space? One reason is, I think, we do it because we want to, because it inspires dreams and inspires exceptional achievements. It’s something that lifts us, draws us, expands us. We do it to expand advanced technology, science, global culture—things that Tom was talking about. We go there to motivate learning; to get young people thinking about something that maybe they can apply, maybe they’ll learn something about physics and sciences. Maybe, if we’re really lucky, they’ll even learn about global warming.

We go there to transfer lessons, as Tom was saying, about how we do things, so we can keep the planet from becoming an extreme environment. And, we go to space because it’s our destiny to do so. Thank you.