

Yesterday, I was cajoled, hoodwinked, and nagged into volunteering by my friend Sara to moderate a [Toastmasters](#) event at a local high school. I didn't really understand what she wanted me to do, but I wanted to do her a favor so I agreed. I was completely unprepared for what happened.

It turned out that the event was part of the [College Success Foundation](#). Use the link to learn more about the foundation. For the purpose of this post, I'll just say that the kids participating in the event were all high-potential students from low-income families. Through a partnership with the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#),

CSF is providing substantial scholarships and mentoring to these students. The students I worked with were all between their junior and senior years at Kent-Meridian High School in Kent, Washington.

Sara and I divided the 23 students into two groups. She moderated one and I did the other. Each of the students delivered a 5-7 minute prepared talk about their educational and career goals. Our jobs were to listen to their speeches and moderate as the other students evaluated the speaker. I had ten students in my group. Here are their career goals: doctor, lawyer, humanitarian aid worker, surgeon, pediatrician, French/Spanish teacher (he also wants to form a French/Spanish club for immigrants), accountant, electrical engineer, medicine, criminal prosecutor, doctor.

All of the students were very bright. Many of them had not been academically successful prior to the program. All of them are very much concerned with their grades now. Many of them come from families who don't understand the importance of education. One of them came from a family that is opposed to her accepting the scholarship and pursuing higher education. All of them are articulate. All of them are interested in doing something to make the world a better place. Thanks to this program, all of them have hope.

At the end of our session, I told the group how much I respect them for what they're doing and how excited I am for each of them. I told them that the most important voice to listen to is their heart and to follow their heart in spite of all the noise around them.

I came into the event thinking I was doing Sara a favor. By the end of the two hours, I was emotionally drained (in a positive way) and I realized that, in fact, Sara had done me a favor by including me in the event. I left the event more hopeful for the future of our country and our world than I've been in a long time.

Thanks to Sara, Randy (the coordinator), Bill and Melinda Gates, the hundreds of other volunteers in CSF, but especially thanks to Tetiana, Edith, Stephanie, Nichole, Eryka, Cristian, Venus, Henry, Marian, Asha, and Amandeep. God speed!