

The Original Invitation from 'This I Believe'

This invites you to make a very great contribution: nothing less than a statement of your personal beliefs, of the values which rule your thought and action. Your essay should be about three minutes in length when read loud, written in a style as you yourself speak, and total no more than 500 words.

We know this is a tough job. What we want is so intimate that no one can write it for you. You must write it yourself, in the language most natural to you. We ask you to write in your own words and then record in your own voice. You may even find that it takes a request like this for you to reveal some of your own beliefs to yourself. If you set them down they may become of untold meaning to others.

We would like you to tell not only what you believe, but how you reached your beliefs, and if they have grown, what made them grow. This necessarily must be highly personal. That is what we anticipate and want.

It may help you in formulating your credo if we tell you also what we do not want. We do not want a sermon, religious or lay; we do not want editorializing or sectarianism or 'finger-pointing.' We do not even want your views on the American way of life, or democracy or free enterprise. These are important but for another occasion. We want to know what you live by. And we want it in terms of 'I,' not the editorial 'We.'

Although this program is designed to express beliefs, it is not a religious program and is not concerned with any religious form whatever. Most of our guests express belief in a Supreme Being, and set forth the importance to them of that belief. However, that is your decision, since it is your belief which we solicit.

But we do ask you to confine yourself to affirmatives: This means refraining from saying what you do not believe. Your beliefs may well have grown in clarity to you by a process of elimination and rejection, but for our part, we must avoid negative statements lest we become a medium for the criticism of beliefs, which is the very opposite of our purpose.

We are sure the statement we ask from you can have wide and lasting influence. Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent. Your belief, simply and sincerely spoken, is sure to stimulate and help those who hear it. We are confident it will enrich them. May we have your contribution?

Adapted from the invitation sent to essayists featured in the original 'This I Believe' series. Excerpted from 'This I Believe 2,' copyright © 1954 by Help, Inc.

this I believe

Contributor: Howard White
Location: Lake Oswego, OR
Country: United States of America
Series: Contemporary



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The Power of Hello

As Heard on NPR's Tell Me More, August 14, 2008.

I work at a company where there are about a gazillion employees. I can't say that I know them all by name, but I know my fair share of them. I think that almost all of them know me. I'd say that's the reason I've been able to go wherever it is I've made it to in this world. It's all based on one simple principle: I believe every single person deserves to be acknowledged, however small or simple the greeting.

When I was about 10 years old, I was walking down the street with my mother. She stopped to speak to Mr. Lee. I was busy trying to bulls-eye the "O" in the stop sign with a rock. I knew I could see Mr. Lee any old time around the neighborhood, so I didn't pay any attention to him. After we passed Mr. Lee my mother stopped me and said something that has stuck with me from that day until now. She said, "You let that be the last time you ever walk by somebody and not open up your mouth to speak, because even a dog can wag its tail when it passes you on the street." That phrase sounds simple but it's been a guidepost for me and the foundation of who I am.

When you write an essay like this you look in the mirror and see who you are and what makes up your character. I realized mine was cemented that day when I was 10 years old. Even then, I started to see that when I spoke to someone, they spoke back. And that felt good.

It's not just something I believe in; it's become a way of life. I believe that every person deserves to feel someone acknowledge their presence, no matter how humble they may be or even how important.

At work, I always used to say hello to the founder of the company and ask him how our business was doing. But I was also speaking to the people in the cafe and the people that cleaned the buildings, and asked how their children were doing. I remembered after a few years of passing by the founder, I had the courage to ask him for a meeting. We had a great talk. At a certain point I asked him how far he thought I could go in his company. He said, "If you want to, you can get all the way to this seat."

I've become vice president but that hasn't changed the way I approach people. I still follow my mother's advice. I speak to everyone I see, no matter where I am. I've learned that speaking to people creates a pathway into their world, and it lets them come into mine, too.

The day you speak to someone that has their head held down and when they lift it up and smile, you realize how powerful it is just to open your mouth and say, "Hello."

Former University of Maryland point guard Howard White is vice president of Jordan Brand at Nike. He founded Believe to Achieve, Nike's motivational program for youth, and wrote a book by the same name. White lives with his family in Lake Oswego, Ore.

Independently produced for NPR by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with John Gregory and Viki Merrick. Photo courtesy of Nike.

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[Return to list](#)

this I believe

Contributor: Tony Hawk
Location: San Diego, CA
Country: United States of America
Series: Contemporary



Listen to this essay



Do What You Love

As heard on NPR's All Things Considered, July 24, 2006.

I believe that people should take pride in what they do, even if it is scorned or misunderstood by the public at large.

I have been a professional skateboarder for 24 years. For much of that time, the activity that paid my rent and gave me my greatest joy was tagged with many labels, most of which were ugly. It was a kids' fad, a waste of time, a dangerous pursuit, a crime.

When I was about 17, three years after I turned pro, my high school "careers" teacher scolded me in front of the entire class about jumping ahead in my workbook. He told me that I would never make it in the workplace if I didn't follow directions explicitly. He said I'd never make a living as a skateboarder, so it seemed to him that my future was bleak.

Even during those dark years, I never stopped riding my skateboard and never stopped progressing as a skater. There have been many, many times when I've been frustrated because I can't land a maneuver. I've come to realize that the only way to master something is to keep it at—despite the bloody knees, despite the twisted ankles, despite the mocking crowds.

Skateboarding has gained mainstream recognition in recent years, but it still has negative stereotypes. The pro skaters I know are responsible members of society. Many of them are fathers, homeowners, world travelers and successful entrepreneurs. Their hairdos and tattoos are simply part of our culture, even when they raise eyebrows during PTA meetings.

So here I am, 38 years old, a husband and father of three, with a lengthy list of responsibilities and obligations. And although I have many job titles—CEO, Executive Producer, Senior Consultant, Foundation Chairman, Bad Actor—the one I am most proud of is "Professional Skateboarder." It's the one I write on surveys and customs forms, even though I often end up in a secondary security checkpoint.

My youngest son's pre-school class was recently asked what their dads do for work. The responses were things like, "My dad sells money" and "My dad figures stuff out." My son said, "I've never seen my dad do work."

It's true. Skateboarding doesn't seem like real work, but I'm proud of what I do. My parents never once questioned the practicality

behind my passion, even when I had to scrape together gas money and regarded dinner at Taco Bell as a big night out.

I hope to pass on the same lesson to my children someday. Find the thing you love. My oldest son is an avid skater and he's really gifted for a 13-year-old, but there's a lot of pressure on him. He used to skate for endorsements, but now he brushes all that stuff aside. He just skates for fun and that's good enough for me.

You might not make it to the top, but if you are doing what you love, there is much more happiness there than being rich or famous.

Tony Hawk got his first skateboard when he was nine years old. Five years later, he turned pro. Hawk's autobiography and video games have been best-sellers, while his foundation has funded skate-park construction in low-income communities across America.

Independently produced for NPR by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with Emily Botein, John Gregory and Viki Merrick.

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