

## *Mae C. Jemison, MD*

### **Physician, Engineer, Astronaut; First Black Woman to Travel into Outer Space**

Dear Success Seeker...

*You can't* and *you have to* are two deadly phrases that are stumbling blocks for many students. These words—when spoken by a person with special influence—can be very damaging by turning you away from heartfelt aspirations and toward ordinary pursuits. This is particularly true when you intend to do something people are not used to seeing folks like you accomplish.

Two things are helpful in this situation: knowing who you intend to be and then finding the courage to be that person despite what negative, disbelieving people say.

I heard these phrases. I remember as a child telling my teacher that I wanted to be a scientist. She didn't think I knew what a scientist was, and out came those dangerous little helpful ideas, accompanied by her retort: "Don't you mean you want to be a nurse?"

I refused to succumb to the weight of those words and to those who had prescribed my life's path through their narrow prism. I intended to be a scientist, someone who discovers that the world around them has adventures and constantly grows.

Why was I able to overcome? Because I had the support of people who believed in me—my family. I was strengthened by their resolve. This helped me to soar beyond the naysayers, carve my own path, and pursue the possibilities life offers.

And so I encourage you to figure out who you intend to be...not so much which job you want to have, but what kind of a person you want to be. Travel; meet and work with people. Take on physical challenges; work in natural settings; work with numbers. Do any of these things. Then I urge you to listen to that little voice inside that is rooting for you. Listen to your heart. Find mentors and confidants who will boost you. Surround yourself with a strong network of people whose faith in you is so compelling that it can shatter the force of the “you can’t” and “you have to” people.


Remain curious and inquisitive. Open your hearts and minds to new adventures. Remember the excitement you displayed as a child as you began to peel away the layers of life. Maintain that excitement and that enthusiasm. Successful people have an aura of curiosity and derring-do that sets them apart from others.

Read...read...read. Reading brings knowledge and gives you access to success pathways. Don’t be afraid to explore the world around you. Maintain and exhibit integrity. Resist the temptation to go along just to get along. Know who you intend to be each day. Take steps toward being that person.

Be kind to others. Don’t spend time trying to figure out how to make people pay for the wrongs they did to you. The more time you spend in that quagmire of misery, the more of your life you waste and give to them.

All of us will face adversity. It’s part of life. Regardless of what fate hurls at you, remain true to yourself and your convictions. This will help you overcome the chorus of people who would block your path with their “you can’ts” and “you have tos.”

As I say in my autobiography, *Find Where the Wind Goes: Moments From My Life*, “Life stretches in front of and behind us, made up of



the actions we and others took.”

Always remember who you intend to be.

Sincerely,  
Mae C. Jemison