

# 10 Lessons From Benjamin Franklin That Might Help Advocates of Gifted Learners

One could easily consider Benjamin Franklin a gifted individual. Over his lifetime, his curiosity, creativity, and possibly his intensity, fueled a wide range of interests. He was an author, publisher, scientist, musician, diplomat, inventor and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. His inventions ranged from the lightning rod and bifocals to the Franklin stove and the carriage odometer. Franklin understood civic responsibility and helped launch both the first public library and Philadelphia's fire fighters.

Benjamin Franklin was a man of action. He was a man who knew how to get things done. Hopefully, he can be an inspiration to us. Listed below are 10 action-inducing quotes from Ben that can be applied to gifted advocacy:

**1) “Well done is better than well said.” *Less Talk, More Action***

We all want better services for gifted learners. We know that gifted learners throughout our state need and deserve to be learning something each day at school, but what are each of us actually doing to make that happen for gifted children? As Ben would say, “Take action”. Make a phone call to someone who has the power to change things. Join an organization that is working to make changes for gifted learners. Don't talk about it, do it.

**2) “Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today.” *Don't Procrastinate***

We all do it. We think about joining the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) or the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). We talk about calling the school superintendent and letting him or her know that gifted learners need to be taught by teachers who have training in knowing and understanding gifted children. We think about writing to our legislators about funding for gifted education. We plan on making a donation to IAGC, the only state organization that continues to fight for the rights of gifted learners in our state. What are you putting off 'till tomorrow that could make a difference in a gifted child's life today?

**3) “To succeed, jump as quickly at opportunities as you do at conclusions.” *Look for and Act Quickly on Opportunities***

Opportunities abound to improve the current state of gifted education. The trick is being quick enough and willing enough to seize opportunities when they arise. Instead of jumping to the conclusion that things can't change or can't be done, consider the possibilities of what will happen if we all do one thing that makes a change. We each have an opportunity to contact one legislator. We each have an opportunity to make one donation to IAGC to support their advocacy efforts. We each have the opportunity to send one teacher to one of the IAGC professional development opportunities offered this summer. We each have opportunities...

**4) “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” Plan and Prepare**

You need a plan of action! Do a bit of homework. Have your facts in hand. If you really want to make a change, know what you want and make sure it is realistic. Bringing about any change requires preparation. If you are truly interested in changing things for gifted learners, you need to take the time to analyze what you want to occur, and why you want it. You need to determine if there is research that supports what **you** want. With a plan of action and research that supports your goals, you have a greater probability of success. IAGC has articles that will help you prepare.

[http://www.pge205.org/Articles/IAGC\\_ArchiveArticles.htm](http://www.pge205.org/Articles/IAGC_ArchiveArticles.htm)

**5) “Diligence is the mother of good luck.” Hard Work Gets the Job Done**

It’s not about luck! Ask anyone successful in business or sports. They will tell you that hard work and sacrifice have everything to do with their success. Successful people learn to work hard and know how to deal with failure. They tackle problems head on, and when things get tough, they pick themselves up and work harder. For advocates of gifted learners it means hearing, “No we can’t do that.” Then asking, “Why not?”

It means hearing, “There is no money for gifted programming.” and asking, “Why not?”

It means hearing, “We’ve had to make tough decisions, and the gifted program budget had to be eliminated.” Then asking, “Why?”

It means asking questions, waiting for answers, and asking more questions until the answers make sense for gifted learners who have the right to learn at school each day.

**6) “Energy and persistence conquer all things.” Don’t Give Up**

Advocating for gifted learners is a marathon, not a dash. As a result there will be times when your energy levels diminish, and you wonder why you are bothering. This is when **you** remind yourself and everyone else who will listen that what you are doing is for the gifted children who are often sitting in classrooms waiting for their chance to learn. This is when you remind yourself that some of these gifted children may stop waiting and give up on school if we don’t change things. This is when you remind yourself that one of these gifted children could be the next great statesman, the next great scientist, the next great author, or the next drop out. Then you take a deep breath and go at it again because you understand that giving up isn’t an option.

**7) “He that won't be counseled can't be helped.” Don’t go it Alone**

There are two organizations that can provide terrific information regarding advocacy: NAGC and IAGC. Each organization has Advocacy pages with specific information that will better equip you for talking with those who can make things better for gifted learners. Beyond that, you want partners in your quest for better services for gifted learners. If you are a teacher, you want other teachers and parents working with you. If you are a parent, you want other parents, teachers, and local businesses supporting your cause. NAGC calls it maximizing you impact. Collaboration counts when it comes to talking to decision makers. You may be seen as a nuisance on your own, but with eight or nine in your group, you often become a person of influence.

**8) “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” **Get Them Involved****

If you want legislators, school board members, school superintendents ... to really understand the life of a gifted child, they need to meet and know gifted children. They need to see them, hear them, watch them and interact with them. You, the adult can tell stories about gifted children, but no one can do a better job of explaining what it is like to be a gifted child in a classroom that works or one that doesn't than a gifted child. Get the people who can make a change **involved!** Invite them into your child's classroom or bring your child with you to speak with those who can make the changes. In either case, don't forget rule four.

**9) “Those disputing, contradicting, and confuting people are generally unfortunate in their affairs. They get victory, sometimes, but they never get good will, which would be of more use to them.” **Get Along With Others****

You will get more accomplished by making and keeping friends along the way. If you learn to be positive and look for ways to make things better for more students, you will gather supporters along the way. For the advocates of gifted learners this means looking for ways to make things better for gifted learners rather than just **your** gifted child or **your** gifted classroom. It means considering the needs of all learners while advocating for what is best for gifted learners. It means using phrases like: all children need, rather than my child needs.

**10 “When you're finished changing, you're finished.” **Don't Fight Change.**** Change is inevitable. The stronger we fight against it, the more negative we look, and the more time and energy we waste. We want to look and act like positive proactive change agents. Instead of having change thrust upon us, we want to be the planners of change. That puts us in charge and helps us look like positive contributors rather than negative agitators. In terms of gifted advocacy this means when you hear that there is a plan to eliminate the self-contained gifted classrooms, get on the committee and talk about finding a better way to meet the needs of gifted learners. When you hear that your school board is planning to eliminate the gifted program, ask to speak at the school board meeting and suggest examining alternative ways to support gifted learners at a lower cost rather than eliminating all services.