

First I want to thank God for allowing me to be here, my parents for being the pack leaders of my support system, Mrs. Eileen for being a fabulous mentor, Mrs. Jaki Scott and the Scott's Pharmacy family for fueling my career choice, and last but not where near least, Mrs. Kesia and the eminent Next Level staff and volunteers.

Unlike a lot of the other graduates, Camp Zion 2009 was when my endeavor, my legacy, my story here began. I had just finished being the "new kid" at Porter Elementary and I was already the "new kid" once again. I only knew a handful of people since I had just moved to this side of town so I was intimidated when I saw everyone talking to each other like it was nothing.

Seven years later, here I am. Speaking amongst faces that are both old and new.

Next Level has done a plethora of things and has also been a few very important things for me. Let's start with the first word, next, which means following, succeeding, or upcoming. For me, the beginning has Nurtured me to Empower others in order for us to become eXtraordinary men and women of Tomorrow

Nurture: I was taught that any set back is a set up for a major comeback so never lose hope when you feel like all hope is lost.

Empower: The younger kids look up to us and, one day, I hope they aspire to be like us. What we, as the teenagers, high schoolers, and graduates have to do is be the person who these kids WANT to look up to.

eXtraordinary: is truly the type of opportunity that we all have been granted. To be apart of a program as great as Next Level for little to nothing is extremely hard to find! So don't take this opportunity lightly.

Tomorrow: is that day that isn't promised. The one we hope to see yet that isn't guaranteed. Live it to the fullest. Take advantage of anything that's given to you that may seem too good to be true because it may be a once in a lifetime type thing.

In between the words Next and Level is a space. It doesn't seem like something major but sometimes the space is what keeps you from getting to the next level. The space indicates the time in which one takes to fully wrap their minds around the path he or she wants to take to fully unlock his or her potential. Breaks are necessary for much wanted, as well as worked for, success. On to the last word, level, which Merriam Webster says is a height, altitude, or elevation. From this word, which has guided me to the point I am at now, I have become a Leader who is an Educated woman of Virtue who is Enlightening others to Learn

Leader: Through the ELITE Leadership Academy, I have acquired so much knowledge and understanding. ELITE means that Next Level is Empowering Leaders: [by] Inspiring, Transforming, and Excelling. Through ELITE, I have become more comfortable with myself and my confidence has gone through the roof. One huge piece that I've taken from this program is, in order to be a great leader, you first have to be a great follower! Following takes will power and also shows one how to not be so self-centered; because at the end of the day, being a leader is about serving others.

Educate: education is so important, especially these days. Sometimes we take reinforced education for granted. Next Level uses the curriculum from Bibb Co. schools and makes lesson plans in order for us to be successful in the classroom AND has free tutoring!

Virtue: As everybody knows, Mrs. Kesia takes NO mess! This is absolutely amazing because, as African Americans, we already have a negative connotation associated with our race. Her strong position molds us into young men and women of dignity, honor, and integrity. It's time for us to give people a reason to look at us and automatically respect us.

Enlighten: Something that never fails is history's repetition. History is repeating itself right now! What we, the future, need to do is be aware and stay alert! It's getting extremely tough to be black in America and the sooner we realize this,

the more equipped we will be so that this cycle can be handled more reasonably. And when I say equipped, I don't mean physically, I'm talking about mentally. People can take anything materialistic that you may value, but they can't take your mind unless you let them.

And the last L.

Learn: I know I sound like the adult but keep learning. It's the only way you'll know how to stay in the know of things. Learn something new everyday and you'll be amazed by what you know and by what you don't know.

I have been Nurtured to Empower others so that we all can become eXtraordinary men and women of Tomorrow. As stated earlier, I stand before you as the Leader who is a very Educated woman of Virtue who is continuing to Enlighten others to Learn.

Next Level sounds pretty good doesn't it? Take the opportunity THAT YOU HAVE to be apart of this program and run with it! There's no other program like Next Level so be grateful that you're one of few.

Once again, thank you to everyone that embraced me with open arms because I have a place molded in my heart just for you all. I am elated to now be a Next Level Alum!