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Cesar Chavez Quotes

Character

"Our language is the reflection of ourselves. A language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers."

Commitment

"...there has to be someone who is willing to do it, who is willing to take whatever risks are required. I don't think it can be done with money alone. The person has to be dedicated to the task. There has to be some other motivation."

"Being of service is not enough. You must become a servant of the people. When you do, you can demand their commitment in return."

"Self dedication is a spiritual experience."

"The name of the game is to talk to people. If you don't talk to people, you can't get started...You knock on twenty doors or so, and twenty guys tell you to go to hell, or that they haven't got time. But maybe at the fortieth or sixtieth house you find the one guy who is all you need. You're not going to organize everything; you're just going to get it started."

"There are vivid memories from my childhood--what we had to go through because of low wages and the



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conditions, basically because there was no union. I suppose if I wanted to be fair I could say that I'm trying to settle a personal score. I could dramatize it by saying that I want to bring social justice to farm workers. But the truth is that I went through a lot of hell, and a lot of people did. If we can even the score a little for the workers then we are doing something. Besides, I don't know any other work I like to do better than this. I really don't."

"There is no substitute for hard work, 23 or 24 hours a day. And there is no substitute for patience and acceptance."

"There's no turning back...We will win. We are winning because ours is a revolution of mind and heart..."

"We draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. We shall endure."

"We must understand that the highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline."

"I remember with strong feelings the families who joined our movement and paid dues long before there was any hope of winning contracts. Sometimes, fathers and mothers would take money out of their meager food budgets just because they believed that farm workers could and must build their own union. I remember thinking then that with spirit like that... we had to win. No force on earth could stop us."

"The picket line is the best place to train organizers. One day on the picket line is where a man makes his commitment. The longer on the picket line, the stronger the commitment. A lot of workers think they make their commitment by walking off the job when nobody sees them. But you get a guy to walk off the field when his boss is watching and, in front of the other guys, throw down his tools and march right to the picket line, that is the guy who makes our strike. The



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picket line is a beautiful thing because it makes a man more human."

"As one looks at the millions of acres in this country that have been taken out of agricultural production and at the millions of additional acres that have never been cultivated; and at the millions of people who have moved off the farm to rot and decay in the ghettos of our big cities; and at all the millions of hungry people at home and abroad; does it not seem that all these people and things were somehow made to come together and serve one another? If we could bring them together, we could stem the mass exodus of rural poor to the big city ghettos and start it going back the other way; teach them how to operate new farm equipment; and put them to work on those now uncultivated acres to raise food for the hungry. If a way could be found to do this, there would be not only room but positive need for still more machinery and still more productivity increase. There would be enough employment, wages, profits, food and fiber."

"If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him...The people who give you their food give you their heart."

"In this world it is possible to achieve great material wealth, to live an opulent life. But a life built upon those things alone leaves a shallow legacy. In the end, we will be judged by other standards."

Community

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."

"When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So, it how we use our lives that determines what kind of



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men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life."

"When you have people together who believe in something very strongly - whether it's religion or politics or unions - things happen."

"You are never strong enough that you don't need help."

Culture

"Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures."

"We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community - and this nation."

Dignity

"A symbol is an important thing. That is why we chose an Aztec eagle. It gives pride...When people see it they know it means dignity."

"Do not romanticize the poor...We are all people, human beings subject to the same temptations and faults as all others. Our poverty damages our dignity."

"From the depth of need and despair, people can work together, can organize themselves to solve their own problems and fill their own needs with dignity and strength."

"What is at stake is human dignity. If a man is not accorded respect he cannot respect himself and if he does not respect himself, he cannot demand it."

"The strike and the boycott, they have cost us much. What they have not paid us in wages, better working conditions, and new contracts, they have paid us in self-respect and human dignity."

Education



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"A word as to the education of the heart. We don't believe that this can be imparted through books; it can only be imparted through the loving touch of the teacher."

"Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity?"

"The end of all education should surely be service to others."

"The end of all knowledge must be the building up of character."

"Years of misguided teaching have resulted in the destruction of the best in our society, in our cultures and in the environment."

Farmworkers

"(Farmworkers) are involved in the planting and the cultivation and the harvesting of the greatest abundance of food known in this society. They bring in so much food to feed you and me and the whole country and enough food to export to other places. The ironic thing and the tragic thing is that after they make this tremendous contribution, they don't have any money or any food left for themselves."

"I have met many, many farm workers and friends who love justice and who are willing to sacrifice for what is right. They have a quality about them that reminds me of the beatitudes. They are living examples that Jesus' promise is true: they have been hungry and thirsty for righteousness and they have been satisfied. They are determined, patient people who believe in life and who give strength to others. They have given me more love and hope and strength than they will ever know."

"It's ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables, and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves."

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"Our very lives are dependent, for sustenance, on the sweat and sacrifice of the campesinos. Children of farm workers should be as proud of their parents' professions as other children are of theirs."

Future Generations

"It is not enough to teach our young people to be successful...so they can realize their ambitions, so they can earn good livings, so they can accumulate the material things that this society bestows. Those are worthwhile goals. But it is not enough to progress as individuals while our friends and neighbors are left behind."

"Perhaps we can bring the day when children will learn from their earliest days that being fully man and fully woman means to give one's life to the liberation of the brother who suffers. It is up to each one of us. It won't happen unless we decide to use our lives to show the way."

"Students must have initiative; they should not be mere imitators. They must learn to think and act for themselves-and be free."

Boycott

The consumer boycott is the only open door in the dark corridor of nothingness down which farm workers have had to walk for many years. It is a gate of hope through which they expect to find the sunlight of a better life for themselves and their families."

Hope

"If you are going to organize and ask for commitment, you cannot go to the most desperately poor. They are not likely to take action. If you stand on a man's head and push it into the dirt, he may not even see the heel

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of your boot. But if his whole face is already above ground, he can see your heel and he can see freedom ahead."

Humanity

"Our conviction is that human life and limb are a very special possession given by God to man and that no one has the right to take that away, in any cause, however just..."

"We are certain God's will is that all men share in the good things this earth produces."

"When a man or woman, young, or old, takes a place on the picket line for even a day or two, he will never be the same again. He has confirmed his own humanity. Through non-violence, he has confirmed the humanity of others."

"When the man who feeds the world by toiling in the fields is himself deprived of the basic rights of feeding, sheltering and caring for his own family, the whole community of man is sick."

"Kindness and compassion toward all living things is a mark of a civilized society. Conversely, cruelty, whether it is directed against human beings or against animals, is not the exclusive province of any one culture or community of people. Racism, economic deprivation, dog fighting and cock fighting, bull fighting and rodeos are cut from the same fabric: violence. Only when we have become nonviolent toward all life will we have learned to live well ourselves."

Justice

"It is possible to become discouraged about the injustice we see everywhere. But God did not promise us that the world would be humane and just. He gives us the gift of life and allows us to choose the way we

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will use our limited time on earth. It is an awesome opportunity."

"People who have lost their hunger for justice are not ultimately powerful. They are like sick people who have lost their appetite for what is truly nourishing. Such sick people should not frighten or discourage us. They should be prayed for along with the sick people who are in the hospital. "The love for justice that is in us is not only the best part of our being but it is also the most true to our nature."

"There is a great fear of our Union - a fear that I do not fully understand, but that I know is present...What is it that causes some men to act so hastily and so cruelly? It cannot be that we are so powerful. Is it so much to ask that the poorest people of the land have a measure of justice?"

"We are confident. We have ourselves. We know how to sacrifice. We know how to work. We know how to combat the forces that oppose us. But even more than that, we are true believers in the whole idea of justice. Justice is so much on our side, that that is going to see us through."

"We shall strike. We shall organize boycotts. We shall demonstrate and have political campaigns. We shall pursue the revolution we have proposed. We are sons and daughters of the farm workers' revolution, a revolution of the poor seeking bread and justice."

La Causa

"Viva la causa!"

"Our opponents in the agricultural industry are very powerful and farm workers are still weak in money and influence. But we have another kind of power that comes from the justice of our cause. So long as we are willing to sacrifice for that cause, so long as we persist in non-violence and work to spread the message of our struggle, then millions of people around the world will

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respond from their heart, will support our efforts...and in the end we will overcome."

"We are involved in a just cause. We know that most likely we are not going to do anything else in the rest of our life except this. We know that if we weren't doing this we wouldn't be doing anything else we would like to do more than this. We know really there is nowhere else to go and although we would like to see victory come soon we are willing to wait."

Labor Union

"In the no-nonsense school of adversity, which we did not choose for ourselves, we are learning how to operate a labor union."

"The road to social justice for the farm worker is the road of unionization. Our cause, our strike against table grapes and our international boycott are all founded upon our deep conviction that the form of collective self-help, which is unionization, holds far more hope for the farm worker than any other single approach, whether public or private. This conviction is what brings spirit, high hope and optimism to everything we do."

"We know what unions have done for other people. We have seen it and we have studied and we have cherished the idea of unionism. We have seen the history and development of unions in this country and we tell the growers that we want nothing more, but that we want our own union and we are going to fight for it as long as it takes."

"...So they are trying to do something about it. They are not doing it by seeking charity. They are not begging at the welfare office. They are not, like many of their employers, lobbying the halls of Congress with their gold plated tin cups asking to be paid for not growing crops. They are trying to do it in the way that millions of other Americans have shown is the right way-organization, unionism, collective bargaining."

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Leadership

"I am an organizer, not a union leader. A good organizer has to work hard and long. There are no shortcuts. You just keep talking to people, working with them, sharing, exchanging and they come along."

"I'm not going to ask for anything unless the workers want it. If they want it, they'll ask for it."

"There are many reasons for why a man does what he does. To be himself he must be able to give it all. If a leader cannot give it all he cannot expect his people to give anything."

"These observations tie in directly with the whole question of organizing. Why do we have leaders? We put some people out in the fields and all of a sudden they hit, they click. Everyone's happy with them and they begin to move mountains. With other people there are problems and heartaches. They just don't go. When we look and see what's happening, almost invariably the differences are along the lines of willingness to sacrifice and work long hours."

Motivation

"Si Se Puede!"

"If you're not frightened that you might fail, you'll never do the job. If you're frightened, you'll work like crazy."

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Nonviolence



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"In non-violence the cause has to be just and clear as well as the means."

"Non-violence, which is the quality of the heart, cannot come by an appeal to the brain."

"The first principle of non-violent action is that of non-cooperation with everything humiliating."

"The non-violent technique does not depend for its success on the goodwill of the oppressor, but rather on the unfailing assistance of God."

"There is no such thing as defeat in non-violence."

"There's no reason not to be non-violent. There's no challenge unless you are living for people."

"You know, if people are not pacifists, it's not their fault. It's because society puts them in that spot. You've got to change it. You don't just change a man - you've got to change his environment as you do it."

"...people think non-violence is really weak and non-militant. These are misconceptions that people have because they don't understand what non-violence means. Non-violence takes more guts, if I can put it bluntly, than violence. Most violent acts are accomplished by getting the opponent off guard, and it doesn't take that much character, I think, if one wants to do it."

"Farm workers everywhere are angry and worried that we cannot win without violence. We have proved it before through persistence, hard work, faith and willingness to sacrifice. We can win and keep our own self-respect and build a great union that will secure the spirit of all people if we do it through a re-dedication and re-commitment to the struggle for justice through non-violence."

"Imagine the National Guard being called against a group of peaceful people. How far can we get; how disgraceful can it become? It's the most disgraceful, the



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most wicked thing I've seen in all my years of organizing farm labor."

"Non violence means people in action. People have to understand that with non-violence goes a hell of a lot of organization."

"Non-violence exacts a very high price from one who practices it. But once you are able to meet that demand then you can do most things."

"Non-violence has suffered its biggest defeat in the hands of people who most want to talk about it."

"Non-violence is a very powerful weapon. Most people don't understand the power of non-violence and tend to be amazed by the whole idea. Those who have been involved in bringing about change and see the difference between violence and non-violence are firmly committed to a lifetime of non-violence, not because it is easy or because it is cowardly, but because it is an effective and very powerful way."

"Non-violence is not inaction. It is not discussion. It is not for the timid or weak...Non-violence is hard work. It is the willingness to sacrifice. It is the patience to win."

"Non-violence is very weak in the theoretical sense; it cannot defend itself. But it is most powerful in the action situation where people are using non-violence because they want desperately to bring about some change. Non-violence in action is a very potent force and it can't be stopped. The people who are struggling have the complete say-so. No man-made law, no human ruler, no army can destroy this. There is no way it can be destroyed... And so, if we have the capacity to endure, if we have the patience, things will change."

"Violence just hurts those who are already hurt...Instead of exposing the brutality of the oppressor, it justifies it."



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"We are convinced that non-violence is more powerful than violence. We are convinced that non-violence supports you if you have a just and moral cause...If you use violence, you have to sell part of yourself for that violence. Then you are no longer a master of your own struggle."

"When workers fall back on violence, they are lost. Oh, they might win some of their demands and might end a strike a little earlier, but they give up their imagination, their creativity, their will to work hard and to suffer for what they believe is right."

Organizing

"...many have the idea that organizing people is very difficult, but it isn't. It becomes difficult only at the point where you begin to see other things that are easier. But if you are willing to give the time and make the sacrifice, it's not that difficult to organize."

"I think one of the great, great problems...is confusing people to the point where they become immobile. In fact, the more things people can find out for themselves, the more vigor the organization is going to have."

"If they had \$2.00 for food, they had to give \$1.00 to the union. Otherwise, they would never get out of the trap of poverty. They would never have a union because they couldn't afford to sacrifice a little bit more on top of their misery."

"Money is not going to organize the disadvantaged, the powerless, or the poor. We need other weapons. That's why the War on Poverty is such a miserable failure. You put out a big pot of money and all you do is fight over it. Then you run out of money and you run out of troops."

"Organizing is an educational process. The best educational process in the union is the picket line and the boycott. You learn about life."

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"The life of the union depends upon more people getting to share the limelight, because with the limelight also comes responsibility and with the responsibility comes a little sharing of the load." "There isn't enough money to organize poor people. There never is enough money to organize anyone. If you put it on the basis of money, you're not going to succeed."

"We are organizers at heart. Most of us in the movement take great pride in being able to put things together."

"We're going to pray a lot and picket a lot."

Power

"It's amazing how people can get so excited about a rocket to the moon and not give a damn about smog, oil leaks, the devastation of the environment with pesticides, hunger, disease. When the poor share some of the power that the affluent now monopolize, we will give a damn."

"Society is made up of groups, and as long as the smaller groups do not have the same rights and the same protection as others - I don't care whether you call it capitalism or communism -it is not going to work. Somehow, the guys in power have to be reached by counterpower, or through a change in their hearts and minds, or change will not come."

"We always believed that the growers weren't that powerful, and I could never subscribe to the theory that the growers were invincible. I realized that the growers appeared to be so powerful simply because the workers had no power. If they could gain some power, the growers wouldn't seem so invincible."

Public Action

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I've always maintained that it isn't the form that's going to make the difference. It isn't the rule or the procedure or the ideology, but it's human beings that will make it."

"In the final analysis it doesn't really matter what the political system is...We don't need perfect political systems; we need perfect participation."

"It is not good enough to know why we are oppressed and by whom. We must join the struggle for what is right and just. Jesus does not promise that it will be an easy way to live life and His own life certainly points in a hard direction; but it does promise that we will be "satisfied" (not stuffed; but satisfied). He promises that by giving life we will find life - full, meaningful life as God meant it."

"Jesus' life and words are a challenge at the same time that they are Good News. They are a challenge to those of us who are poor and oppressed. By His life He is calling us to give ourselves to others, to sacrifice for those who suffer, to share our lives with our brothers and sisters who are also oppressed. He is calling us to "hunger and thirst after justice" in the same way that we hunger and thirst after food and water: that is, by putting our yearning into practice."

"Talk is cheap...It is the way we organize and use our lives everyday that tells what we believe in."

"Until the chance for political participation is there, we who are poor will continue to attack the soft part of the American system - its economic structure. We will build power through boycotts, strikes, new union - whatever techniques we can develop. These attacks on the status quo will come, not because we hate, but because we know America can construct a humane society for all its citizens - and that if it does not, there will chaos."

"Those who are willing to sacrifice and be of service have very little difficulty with people. They know what

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they are all about. People can't help but want to be near them. They help them; they work with them. That's what love is all about. It starts with your heart and radiates out."

Respect

We want to be recognized, yes, but not with a glowing epitaph on our tombstone..."

"Respect for faith of others stands on the same footing as culture."

Sacrifice

"It is clearly evident that our path travels through a valley of tears well known to all farm workers, because in all valleys the way of the farm worker has been one of sacrifice for generations. Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make other men rich. This Pilgrimage is a witness to the suffering we have seen for generations."

"It takes a lot of punishment to be able to do anything to change the social order."

"The poor, you know, have a way of solving problems...they have a tremendous capacity for suffering. And so when you build a vehicle to get something done, as we've done here in the strike and the boycott, then they continue to suffer - and maybe a little bit more - but the suffering becomes less important because they see a chance of progress; sometimes progress itself. They've been suffering all their lives. It's a question of suffering with some kind of hope now. That's better than suffering with no hope at all."

"The thing that we have going for us is that people are willing to sacrifice themselves."

"We are suffering. We have suffered. And we are not afraid to suffer in order to win our cause."



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"We can choose to use our lives for others to bring about a better and more just world for our children. People who make that choice will know hardship and sacrifice. But if you give yourself totally to the non-violence struggle for peace and justice you also find that people give you their hearts and you will never go hungry and never be alone. And in giving of yourself you will discover a whole new life full of meaning and love."

"We'll organize workers in this movement as long as we're willing to sacrifice. The moment we stop sacrificing, we stop organizing."

"When any person suffers for someone in greater need, that person is a human."

"I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice."

"We have suffered unnumbered ills and crimes in the name of the Law of the Land. Our men, women and children have suffered not only the basic brutality of stoop labor, and the most obvious injustices of the system; they have also suffered the desperation of knowing that the system caters to the greed of callous men and not to our needs. Now we will suffer for the purpose of ending the poverty, the misery, and the injustice, with the hope that our children will not be exploited as we have been. They have imposed hungers on us, and now we hunger for justice."

The Movement

"A movement with some lasting organization is a lot less dramatic than a movement with a lot of demonstrations and a lot of marching and so forth. The more dramatic organization does catch attention quicker. Over the long haul, however, it's a lot more difficult to keep together because you're not building solid...A lasting organization is one in which people will

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continue to build, develop and move when you are not there."

"Across the San Joaquin valley, across California, across the entire nation, wherever there are injustices against men and women and children who work in the fields - there you will see our flags - with the black eagle with the white and red background, flying. Our movement is spreading like flames across a dry plain."

"There is enough love and good will in our movement to give energy to our struggle and still have plenty left over to break down and change the climate of hate and fear around us."

"This is the beginning of a social movement in fact and not in pronouncements. We seek our basic, God - given rights as human beings...We shall do it without violence because it is our destiny. To the growers and to all who oppose us, we say the words of Benito Juarez:

`Respect for another's right is the meaning of peace.'"

"We are tired of words, of betrayals, of indifference...they years are gone when the farm worker said nothing and did nothing to help himself...Now we have new faith. Through our strong will, our movement is changing these conditions...We shall be heard."

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"We do not need to kill or destroy to win. We are a movement that builds and not destroys."

The Struggle

"...the workers aren't going to stop struggling. They're going to struggle to have a union and they have the right to have it. The police repression and the grower indifference to the workers' demands for recognition

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cannot go unheard so we're going to keep on struggling until we get that recognition."

"Because we have suffered, and we are not afraid to suffer in order to survive, we are ready to give up everything - even our lives - in our struggle for justice."

"However important the struggle is and however much misery and poverty and degradation exist, we know that it cannot be more important than one human life."

"Our struggle is not easy. Those who oppose our cause are rich and powerful and they have many allies in high places. We are poor. Our allies are few. But we have something the rich do not own. We have our bodies and spirits and the justice of our cause as our weapons."

"Our union represents a breaking away...represents sharing a power, represent questioning, represents a new force...however long it takes, we are geared for a struggle."

"When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us, so it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving life do we find life, that the truest act courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others, God help us to be men."