

BACCALAUREATE 2009 David McGinn, Assistant Head of School

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Allow me to be one of the first of many to offer congratulations to the Class of 2009. I am humbled by this invitation to speak, and I thank the seniors for the honor of inviting me to do so.

While contemplating an appropriate message for this speech, I was influenced by something Bob Scheiffer, host of the Sunday morning news show Face the Nation said in a closing commentary.

He was to speak that day at a university commencement, not his first time doing so. He reflected on something someone had told him, "No one ever remembers anything a commencement speaker says". Thus, in the interest of time...thank you.

Just kidding, for those of you who really know me, I have never shied away from a speaking engagement. At the beginning of this year faculty members honored me???? well maybe mocked me by posting a sample agenda for a faculty meeting that would begin with me offering a brief overview...they set aside 72 minutes!

I have tried to learn something from their not so subliminal message to me, as well as Mr. Scheiffer's epiphany.

So I respectfully offer the "Top 5 Lessons" that have stayed with me since I was in your place.

Lesson #1. The last time I spoke at a Baccalaureate, I was a graduating senior at Brattleboro UHS. Baccalaureate at that school was a religious observation, and I shared a passage my mother – my greatest life teacher - shared with me. "Grant me the Serenity to accept those things I cannot change, the Courage to change those things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference". It is the Serenity Prayer written by Rheinhold Niebuhr, which I have in my office. In this passage I have found the foundation for managing the trials in my life.

Serene would not be the first word that comes to mind when I think about my daily life. However, it has been my experience that accepting circumstances I have no control over has allowed me to re-set my thinking even when I don't like the course that lies before me. Courage develops with the experience that comes from confronting challenging times and attempting to effect change in our environment. Succumbing to the status quo is a numbing approach. Fearing failure is disabling. In order to develop courage we must experience failure, and to fully appreciate our successes, we must be willing to fail. Some feel that they can fix everything. The truly great challenge that exists is having the "wisdom to know the difference".

While at BUHS, my Choral Instructor saddled me with Lesson #2.

Now I do have evidence that every now and then someone actually listened to me – so allow me to introduce Holly Buttrey in the choir loft..." To be early is to be on time, to be on time is to be late, and to be late is unacceptable!"

Although I most frequently share this with teams I've coached, I shared this with graduates just a few weeks ago. It might be fair to suggest that for some of you, being late, or "tardy", is a developing, and in a few cases, polished art form. I would like to suggest as you move on in life that you might want to reconsider honing this skill. In a

performance framework, arriving early for any work effort means having time to prepare and be ready to perform at one's best. Arriving on time means rushing to get into a performance frame of mind. Arriving late may lead to peers seeing you as unreliable, or employers no longer requiring your services. When you have an appointment, it is a gesture of respect for those you will engage. Timeliness is one of the most important and lasting impressions we make on people. Holding others hostage due to one's failure to be on time is unacceptable. Seniors, please have your responsibilities in the week ahead highlighted, and remember that many people are working hard to make your graduation a special event. Honor their work by being early and therefore ready when it is time to begin.

Lesson #3 came from one of my college professors, who helped me establish my mindset for entering the workforce. As you make choices about a vocation, it may sometimes feel that employment decisions are one-sided and management driven, and it is certainly true that a high percentage of the job placement process is outside your control. However, at the point of being offered a job you are back in the driver's seat. My professor told me "Once you sign a contract, don't gripe about your work conditions". (I recall her using a different word than gripe that would not be appropriate for tonight's program.) Her point; do your homework! Learn what the job you are pursuing involves. Understand what the expectations for performance will be, and don't put yourself in the situation of learning after the fact that a job isn't what you thought it was going to be. At the end of the day, hard work can be its own reward. Take pride in doing your best. That practice will follow you and be respected as you move through different work environments. You may feel at times that no one notices, or gives you any credit, but you need to know that you have done the best that you can. Although you may not be praised for doing so, when you lay your head down at night, you won't lose sleep questioning whether you could have done a better job. I am grateful for my professor's lesson. If after putting forth my best effort, a job turns out to not be what I expected or want it to be, I may need to decide to look for something new.

Lesson #4 comes from my college coach. "You can never be surrounded by too many good people". When I was younger I believed that I had all the answers. Time and experience have proven what so many told me during those egotistical years, "No one has all the answers". Thetford Academy has enriched my life, as I have the privilege of being surrounded by an outstanding leader in Ms. Rich, whose collaborative leadership style is supported by a Board of Trustees who are true stewards of the school, a faculty and staff who want only the best for our students, and a student body that is unparalleled to any I have worked with in any other setting. Still, from time to time I feel buried in work, often due to believing that I can fix everything. When I take a step back and include the Academy community in the task, not only does the job get done, but it gets done well. As your future travels begin, don't make this same mistake that I make. Be open to accepting assistance from others, especially those you respect, and realize that many hands not only make light work, but often lead to the best product.

Lastly, Lesson #5 is my own, and one that I have shared with some of you over the last few years. There are two phrases that you cannot over use – I love you, and thank you! As this Baccalaureate program begins the week of celebrating your graduation from high school, you can look around you now and see many of the friends and family who are here for you today, and whose love and support have helped you to get this far.

My family means more to me than anything else. I wear the rings of my parents who have passed, and share my life with my wife, my best friend of thirty years, and my two sons who represent my most important work. I am ever conscious of those who join you graduates at this time and the incredible investment they have made in you. Ms. Rich and I have spoken to you on more than one occasion about remaining safe and keeping your eye on the prize as you have one more week of work to do to bring closure to this chapter in your lives. But I implore you to take a careful look around you as you walk these final steps. Thank those who have played a role in helping you to get to this place. More importantly, allow yourself to embrace the family and friends who have served as your foundation and tell them that they are loved and appreciated. For those unaccustomed to sharing their emotions it may require more of an effort.

I know this, as I don't tell those who deserve to hear it, that I love them often enough. I have always worked hard to be polite and thankful to everyone, but those closest to me too often are expected to "know" how much I love them. Please do as I say, and not as I do. As you leave the church this evening start a week of saying "I love you" with a hug for your parents, and thanks to those who share this evening with you. I can't tell you how much hearing my son's voices and receiving a hug from them means to me. It is my firm belief that our greatest resource is family, and with all the external challenges to it, it is your commitment to family that is the cornerstone of your graduation experience.

I love Thetford Academy and this community. I will never be able to repay it for all it has given to my family and me.

I thank you – parents – on behalf of these graduates for the love and support that has brought them here.

And finally, to you the Class of '09, I say thank you for your role in the continuing history of our Academy, and please know that you have been a valued part of my life. So in the words of possibly your most illustrious senior advisor; "Panther on!"