

Dare to Dream
Commencement Address
Crossroads Charter Academy
Dr. David L. Eisler
May 27, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. It is an honor to share this time of achievement with you and to celebrate your success. As graduates you represent the hopes and dreams of Crossroads Charter Academy. Each of your teachers, the school staff, administration, and yes, fellow students, sees in you the fulfillment of their collective efforts.

On such important occasions as this, your friends, teachers and parents look at you and see someone they've tried to help guide, to help grow and flourish, and they wonder if they've done enough. They wonder if there is some last piece of information or advice they might give that would make a difference. Is there something that they've forgotten to say or do that would help?

When I stand on the stage at other commencements and hand graduates their diplomas, I look into their eyes and discover that they have changed. They are no longer students, but friends and colleagues. As the very name of your school proclaims, you are at a crossroads.

Before you head out to chart that new direction in your life, I want to share a few thoughts that may be useful as you begin this next stage of your journey. I challenge you to keep these ideals in mind -

- Dare to Dream
- Make a Difference
- Don't Give Up

Dare to Dream

There was a time when people believed the world was flat, that humans would never fly, and that space travel would remain the stuff of science fiction. These realities changed as people dared to dream, to push back the boundaries of what was thought to be impossible.

I want to encourage you to go beyond the possible, to dream and to do great things. Maybe you have been one of the best students in your classes; perhaps you have not. Who can tell which of you will make the next great breakthrough in science, in technology, in the arts, or in world affairs? Consider these four teacher reports -

One: "...as a seven year-old school boy this young man is hopeless. His brain is addled and it is useless for him to attend school."

Two: "...although he has had only four months of school, he is very good with studies, but is a daydreamer and asks foolish questions."

Three: "...[he] is a unique member of the class. He is ten years old and is only just beginning to read and write. He shows signs of improving, but you must not set your sights too high on him."

Four: "...[he] is a very poor student. He is mentally slow, unsociable, and is always daydreaming. He is spoiling it for the rest of the class. It would be best if he were removed from the school at once."

One: Who was that hopeless 7-year-old boy with the addled brain? - Thomas Edison, inventor of the phonograph, the light bulb, motion pictures, and the holder of 1,093 patents.

Two: Who was doing well with studies after 4 months of school, but daydreamed and asked foolish questions? - Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States, one of our nation's greatest leaders.

Three: Who was 10 years old and only just beginning to show signs of reading and writing? - The President of Princeton University and 28th President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson.

Four: Finally, who should have been removed from class because he was mentally slow, unsociable, and a very poor student? - None other than Albert Einstein, the father of modern physics and winner of the 1921 Nobel Prize.

If each of these individuals went on to such great success, what is possible for you?

Make a Difference

I always find inspiration in the words of Martin Luther King who said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

A life spent making a difference encompasses much more than just personal success. A measure of how you answer Dr. King's persistent and urgent question will be found in the relationships you create and sustain. Achieving a balance among your career, your family, your friends and your community is one of the keys to happiness. The most profound example of helping others is when that help extends beyond the circle of those you already love and cherish.

Dr. King also wrote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," another way of saying that we should adopt the Golden Rule, that we should treat others as we would have them treat us. A well-rounded education helps develop a sense of empathy for others, a desire not only to treat people as equals but to understand on a deeper level that we truly are equal.

It is my great hope that each of you has learned about the possibilities of your heart as well as the abilities of your brain. I hope you have learned the power of being engaged with society, the need to volunteer, and the importance of service. You will make a difference in your community not simply because of your education, but through the humanity you cultivate by helping others who are less fortunate.

Don't give up

Over my career I have worked with many students, but I remember particularly the story of one young man who struggled to find his first position after college. Although his resume stretched several pages in length, it spoke of potential rather than experience. During his job search he met with disappointment and discouragement. Fifty-six carefully written letters of application were rejected by potential employers. Finally this persistence did pay off. His 57th application was for a teaching position at a small state university in Alabama. Seeking to get his foot in the door, he called the dean there, said he would be nearby and wanted to interview for the job. The dean agreed, interviewed the student, and hired him that day.

I know that story well because 32 years ago, almost to this day, I was that student. The dean was a legendary Alabama educator, John M. Long. I had the opportunity to work for him for 15 years. He influenced me and became a part of my life in ways I could never have imagined. Just as your mentors honor your achievements today, he and his wife, Mary Lynn, attended my inauguration as president at Ferris State University. Their presence was one of the highlights of my life.

We learn and remember much more from failure than from success. Before he was elected president, Abraham Lincoln - that day-dreaming and foolish student - was defeated for state legislature, failed in business, defeated for

nomination to Congress, defeated in election for the Senate and defeated for nomination to be Vice President. Which effort of yours will be the one that brings you success? You won't know until you make that effort.

Closing Thoughts

As you face the challenges of this next stage of your life and career, I challenge you to keep these ideals in mind -

- Dare to Dream
- Make a Difference
- Don't Give Up

I like to think of things this way...

**Once in a while, something comes along
That marks a moment we remember as having forever changed our life
... a door opens, we walk through and look back for that same opening
It no longer exists**

Sometimes, you need to open the door yourself. As the Czech poet Miroslav Holub wrote

**Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
A tree, or a wood,
A garden
Or a magic city.**

I salute each of you on your success and encourage you today to open the door on your future.

Congratulations and best wishes to you the Class of 2007!!