



# High School Graduation

June 12, 2016

Speech by Harold Newton, High School P.E. Teacher

Georgetown Day School faculty and staff of the High School, Middle School, and Lower School. Parents, family members, honored guests, Board members and, of course, our guests of honor—the distinguished class of 2016. I will be terse, taciturn, short winded, brief, and laconic. I feel greatly honored to be selected by this wonderful class to give the speech for the faculty and staff at graduation. In fact, had I known this would be my reward; I would have retired a couple of years ago.

I have three regrets about giving this speech: I'm really nervous, I have to concentrate during the whole graduation, and my hands are going to be sore from clapping for every senior.

Those of you who have been in my classes or on my teams know that I sometimes take clichés and change them around. I will not be doing that today. The reason that clichés become clichés is because there is always a certain amount of truth in them. For example, basketball coaches and commentators often say, "Defense wins games." At GDS while we usually play better defense than our opponents, we don't always win. I think the cliché should be "if two teams are relatively equal, the team playing better defense will win." But, I guess that is a bit long for a cliché.

During my freshman year at Springfield College, I ended up taking a remedial English class in public speaking. As with many things, it ended up being a great break. I crushed the class and my most memorable speech was about Millard Fillmore and all the great things that he accomplished during his presidency. I thought that the speech was so good that I am speaking about Millard Fillmore today. Just kidding. But two interesting facts are that Millard Fillmore was the only Whig president to not die in office or was kicked out of the party. He was the last president who was not a Republican or Democrat.

While I promised to be concise, the historian in me wants you to know that around the turn of the century long speaker introductions were in fashion. For example, Future President William Howard Taft was introduced by Clement De Puie. William Howard Taft was our largest president who supposedly got stuck in his bath tub. Clement De Puie was a well known speaker of the day. He was introducing Taft in a long winded introduction. After an interminable introduction, Taft stood up and said "my stomach is feeling upset and I am either pregnant or I have gas. If pregnant, I will call the baby after William after myself. It is gas, I will call it Clement. I hope that you will not call me Clement after this speech.

I have had an interesting history with graduation speakers. My high school (Stowe, Vermont High School) once had the most interesting man in the world speak to their seniors. My high school graduation speaker was the Honorable Philip J. Hoff. He was the first Democratic governor of Vermont in 112 years. As far as I can recollect the honorable Senator Lamar

Alexander of Tennessee is the only Republican speaker that we have had, it might be 112 years before we have another one.

Why is a grasshopper better than a cricket because a grasshopper can play cricket but a cricket cannot play grass hopper.

To the members of the remarkable class of 2016, I met a few of you in middle school and most of you at varying times during your four years. It has been a great pleasure to observe you in your years as you have matured and moved on to various interests. The majority of you are ready to move on but remember this is a happy as well as a sad time for your parents. For those of you going away to school, things will be a lot different in your home when you return next spring after your college experience. Parents, just hold off on renting out your children's rooms. My son was very concerned when he went off to college that my daughter was going to knock out the wall to his room and make a giant room.

This is my coming home from college experience and let me say that I would not condone hitchhiking in today's societal climate but I had no car and very little money. To make a long story short, my dad decided after 14 years of farming that he had enough and he took a job with the United States Postal Service. Thus we had to find a new place to live. I had gone off to college. In early November after soccer season was over, I decided to make a quick trip home over a weekend. After hitchhiking to Stowe, I discovered the error of my ways as I could not find my parents house. I'm hoping and am sure that you will have a more enjoyable time coming home for the first time.

Your 4 to 14 of Georgetown Day School are about to come to an end. There are good times to remember and there are not so good times to remember. I could quote Charles Dickens but it's been done before. One thing I will guarantee is that something that seemed very trivial in 9th grade will take on more importance as you look back on your high school career.

People think of me as very positive person but I have not always been that way. I grew up in Vermont and my dad was a die-hard red Sox fan from the age of 5 onwards. Every time that he would watch a game, he would always assume the worst. If the other team got two runners on , rather than envisioning a double play, my dad would always convince the Sox were about to give up 2 or 3 runs. But even my dad never gave up on his Red Sox and he was rewarded, somewhat late in life with three world championships.

So as a result of my observations, I decided that despite challenges that life throws my way I was not going to let negativity permanently affect me. I learned to focus on the positive and the good. In addition to being a Red Sox fan my dad was also a Marine. In the last few years, leaders in the Corps decided that they needed to change basic training to improve the teaching of self-motivation. They discovered through research that the most successful Marines were those with a strong internal locus of control. I learned this term coaching basketball with Bobby. Whenever athletes blame their teammates, the referee, the playing conditions, their inferior equipment or any other external factor, they are being external rather than internal. As coaches we try to get our players to focus on things that are within their control. A player with an internal locus of control focuses on his or her contributions to the teams' successes or failures. People with internal locus of control tend to praise or blame themselves for failure rather than outside influences.

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In contrast, what the Marines found is that having an external locus of control – Believing that your life is primarily influenced by events outside your power- is often correlated with higher levels of stress, lower self-esteem and diminished motivation. Marines who were taught to be more internal became more effective both as company members, and, more importantly as leaders. Turns out Leaders are not born, they are made!

Graduating seniors you can look inside yourself for your motivation your direction and happiness. I've seen this happen many times in coaching and teaching. For example let's return to the fall. We were preparing to play our archrivals from down Wisconsin Avenue in soccer. We watched everyone take penalty kicks and made some observations. We then asked the players the day before the game "who was feeling confident enough to take a penalty kick. With our list made, we approached the game confidently. We did go into penalty kicks and four seniors stepped up to shoot. It's about a 45 yard walk from the center circle to the penalty spot. Ian Ward and Julian Wallentin were our first two kickers and they made that walk with total confidence and focus. As did our last two kickers Daniel Berger and Michael Osaghae but they also had the added pressure of the contest moving towards its climax. Who can forget the absolute elation of all the fans and players when Michael's shot went in the goal.

I think this is an example of how leaders are made. There are many other examples of great leadership in the class of 2016. I was going to mention the name of everyone that was a leader in some regard but I thought that would be the whole speech. Then I was thinking of just mentioning the teams clubs and activities that are led by seniors. I've decided that the best thing to do is to mention that seniors have led in sports, clubs, productions, SSC, diversity, social justice and activities that I have failed to mention. Well done and thank you.

To conclude, if the Marines can strive to change locus of control from external to internal, then I think we can strive to do that as well. Most of you will not join the marines or a military organization, but if a traditional outfit such as the marines can strive to change its soldier's locus of control from external to internal, then I think you can strive to do that also. I am challenging you to recognize that although there are many influences in our lives that we cannot control, we need to make sure to always strive to focus on those we can.

Pick your moments for leadership and go with them.

It's easy to blame others or outside circumstances when things go wrong, but keeping your focus on what you can control and doing your best leads us to much more positive places.

I was hired about 36 years ago next month. The school decided they needed another physical education teacher. My interview with Gladys consisted of Gladys asking me if I minded driving into Washington D.C. I consider it a match made in heaven. I consider this speech a great honor- something I will never forget. I am confident that all of you will go on to achieve great things in your own sphere. A wonderful thing about Georgetown Day school is that our students have such varied interests. I have been lucky enough to coach two future Olympic skiers although I coached them in baseball. I have taught one Pulitzer Prize winner. I take no credit for turning Andrea into a great writer but I will say that she was a top-notch Physical Education student. I have also taught, at least three magazine editors, countless authors and actors, playwrights, actor/ waiter combinations, educators, entrepreneurs, non-profit employees,

non-profit entrepreneurs, college all-stars, architects, a possible WNBA and way too many lawyers. There are many different opportunities out there, Class of 2016, take advantage of every opportunity for you, control what you can control, remain positive and do something that is fun and meaningful. Please come back and visit Georgetown Day school frequently. We are going to miss you.

Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity. Like GDS, you will always be in my heart.

Thank you.