



High School Graduation

June 10, 2018

Speech by Kamal Ali '80, Parent of the Class of 2018

GDS graduating class of 2018! Does that have a great ring to it, or what? Russell, Kevin, parents, grandparents, siblings, faculty, administration, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends, welcome.

My name is Kamal Ali and I am the father of Jaleel and Suraya Ali. I started at GDS around 1973 in the 6th grade, graduating in 1980. Back then, GDS was a little different;

- The Lower School black box was called the Big Room. It was our multi-use space, used for everything, from the gymnasium where we played our home basketball games, to our jr high graduation.
- Teachers sometimes brought their dogs to school.
- Our high school on Macarthur Blvd had graduating classes of about 45 kids.
- We played our home games at Jellef's Boys Club because we did not have a regulation-sized court.
- We had a sanctioned smoking room used by students and teachers together.

Yes, indeed, things have changed a little.

Class, let's take a moment to just give thanks. Exhale, breathe in the moment and give thanks for all the gifts you receive today.

- Thanks for life, sound bodies and minds, for life is a gift.
- Thanks for the gift of people, each other, your families and friends who helped you get here today.
- Thanks for GDS, because GDS was truly a gift to you. You've grown up here into the people you are today.
- Thanks for you, you are a gift to this world. Make a difference in it.
- Thanks for the world itself, a gift to us all, enjoy it!

I'd like to tell you a story. It's a story of 4 young people who met in high school. They bonded together through activities, formed meaningful friendships through countless conversations, debates, and adventures. They visited each other at universities spanning from New Jersey to California to Vermont. They traveled overseas together, and supported each other through grad schools to esteemed professional careers from medicine to education, entrepreneurship to high finance. They shared their weddings, served as godparents to each others children, enjoying their friendships decade after decade after decade. Their wives bonded and became best friends almost rivaling the friendship of their spouses. They served their high school alma-mater in many capacities, from development committee to alumni board to managing the endowment committee. Three of them sent 2 kids each to the same school they attended and all 3 served

on the board of trustees. They all maintain friendships of the same 40 plus year duration, with another 8 or so gentlemen equally successful by many different measures all serving their respective communities in a variety of forms.

Yes, you guessed right, this is my GDS friend group, and the real reason why I love this school so much. What warms my heart even more is that 38 years after our GDS graduation, despite many changes to the school and the society in which we live, my graduate today, Suraya, has a friend group so strong, that I predict will be intact 40 years from now. Suraya, I went to Gladys' 100th birthday party, you have to go to Russell's.

Sitting here before us all is the future! The next great playwright, the next bestselling author, the next congresswoman for the people, the next great educator, the next award winning scientist sits right here before us! Class of 2018, you have greatness within you and great futures ahead of you.

As I prepared my comments for today, I looked up the word "commencement." Definition:

1. "ceremony at which degrees or diplomas are conferred to graduating students"
2. "beginning, start, outset, opening, initiation, launch"

Yes, in a few minutes you will be conferred diplomas. However, you also are now just beginning. Just launching your real journey.

As adults, leaving the safety of your parents' homes, traveling near and far, this is a new beginning; the one you've all been waiting for!

I can feel the excitement in the room, the anticipation on your faces, the pride of your parents and loved ones.

A quick note about your parents: In your illustrious GDS career, here are few facts about your parents. They

- Logged more miles driving to school, sports practices, play rehearsals, and friends' houses than it takes to go Mars and back again.
- Spent more money on your tuitions, camps, travel, electronics, and extra curricular activities than the gross national product of some small countries.
- Took enough meds from headaches and stress from worrying about you, your development, grades, health, and your futures to bump the pharmaceutical industry up 450 percent on the stock market!

Please take just a sec, to give your parents a hand!

Before you leave, I'd like to share with you as you embark on your journey a few life lessons to consider, on behalf of these parents I represent.

- Have faith-live free. Believe positively in a higher being, in life, in yourself, in humanity, in love, and in your purpose. All great endeavors start with faith.
- Dream big-set and write down your goals. Don't be afraid to go for it, to take a risk. There is no safe seat on the airplane. Goals must be both realistic, and attainable, but break them down into baby steps and you will achieve them, one at a time.
- Learn your craft, make it your passion. Study it, practice it, master it. Become an expert at any one thing and you will find success.
- Work hard. Put forth real effort through discipline, consistency, and good habits. Remember, maximum effort yields maximum results. Outwork your competition, and remember what they call luck is preparation meeting opportunity!
- Have fun. This is most important for me! Enjoy yourself at work, at home, at play. You're only gonna go thru this life once, you might as well enjoy it. Keep a light spirit and heart, smile often, and laugh much.
- Be kind-serve others. In serving others you serve yourself and your world. Good manners, a smile, and treating others as you like to be treated may seem elementary, but make a world of difference. Give back, by truly caring for and serving those around you. The more you give, is the more you get. It is you who will truly benefit from serving others.
- Take care of yourself. Take time for you recharge your battery and reflect. Keep yourself balanced, healthy, and whole. A good book, a hard workout, a hot bath, a good nights sleep.... Only you can take care of you.
- Be a friend-have a friend. True friends can usually be counted on one hand. But even one single true friend can make life so much more fun and meaningful. I'm so happy GDS has helped many of you foster great friendships. Value them and keep them strong.
- Be a world citizen. Travel, explore America and other countries and cultures. Only through traveling and experiencing other cultures will open your eyes to a real world view. The world is getting smaller and smaller and you are only an airplane ride away.
- Die well. Think of your funeral and listen to that great story of your life. Plan and execute your life accordingly, bucket list and all. Let your grandchildren marvel at the life you've lived when they lay you to rest.

Though I share with you these concepts, I realize that this is a new world, a new age, and a new generation, and you must make your own path! New technology, new innovation, new science makes your futures vastly different from all previous generations. Go boldly, class of 2018, into it, with all that your GDS experience has taught you, with all the confidence we have in you, with all the confidence you have in yourselves, and make us proud!

I'll leave you with a quote from one of my favorite authors, Dr. Seuss:

You have brains in your head

You have feet in your shoes

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You can steer yourself any direction you choose

You're on your own

And you know what you know

You are the one who'll decide where to go!

Thank you, and help me with a 1-2-3 "Go, Hoppers!" before i exit.

One... two... three... **Go, Hoppers!!!!**