

Cadden-Williams Prize Reading

Option 3 | Denzel Washington – Fall Forward

You've invested a lot in your education, and people have invested in you. And let me tell you the world needs your talents, and does it ever? The world needs a lot and we need it from you. We really do. We need it from you, the young people. You've got to get out there, and you've got to give it everything you got.

So the question is: what are you going to do with what you have? Some of you have patience. Some have kindness. Some have love. Some of you have the gift of long-suffering. Whatever it is... whatever your gift is, what are you going to do with what you have? Fail big.

That's right. Fail big. Today is the beginning of the rest of your life and it can be very frightening. It's a new world out there, and it's a mean world out there, and you only live once. So do what you feel passionate about. Take chances. Don't be afraid to fail.

Don't be afraid to fail big, to dream big, but remember dreams without goals are just dreams and they ultimately fuel disappointment. So have dreams, but have goals. Life goals, yearly goals, monthly goals, daily goals. I try to give myself a goal everyday. You have to work at it. Everyday you have to plan – every day.

You've heard the saying that we don't plan to fail, we fail to plan. Hard work works. Working really hard is what successful people do. And in this text, tweet, twerk world that you've grown up in, remember just because you're doing a lot more doesn't mean you're getting a lot more done. Remember that, just because you're doing a lot more doesn't mean you're getting a lot more done.

I'm sure in your experiences in school and applying to college and picking your major and deciding what you want to do with life that people have told you to make sure you have something to fall back on.

“Make sure you have something to fall back on, honey!” But I've never understood that concept. If I'm going to fall, I don't want to fall back on anything except my faith. I want to fall forward, I figure at least this way I will see what I'm going to hit. This is what I mean: Reggie Jackson struck out 2,600 times in his career, the most in the history of baseball, but you don't hear about the strike outs. People remember the homeruns. Fall forward.

Thomas Edison conducted one thousand failed experiments, because the one thousand and first was the lightbulb. Fall forward.

Every failed experiment is one step closer to success. You've got to take risks, and I'm sure you've probably heard that before, but I want to talk to you about why that's important. First, you will fail at some point in your life. Accept it, you will lose. You will embarrass yourself. You will suck at something. There's no doubt about it. Embrace it, because it's inevitable.

The point is, every graduate here today has the training and the talent to succeed...But do you have the guts to fail? If you don't fail... you're not even trying. “To get something you never had, you have to do something you never did.” Don't just take risks, but to be open to life, to accept new views and to be open to new opinions. While it may be frightening, it will also be rewarding. Because the chances you take... the people you meet... the people you love...the faith that you have—that's what's going to define your life.

So this is your mission - never be discouraged, never hold back and give everything you've got—fall forward. Say thank you for grace, thank you for mercy, thank you for understanding, thank you for wisdom, thank you for parents, thank you for love, thank you for kindness, thank you for humility, thank you for peace, thank you for prosperity. Say thank you in advance for what's already yours.

Anything you want, you can have. So claim it. Work hard to get it. When you get it, reach back and pull someone else up. Don't just aspire to make a living, aspire to make a difference.