

Hey, guys. Very soon, they're going to start calling your names, and one by one, you'll walk across this stage, in front of your family and friends, and graduate high school. **And you have to be wondering**, How did this happen? Where did the last four years go? Wasn't it a lifetime ago that we walked into our first day of kindergarten, sat on the floor, learned how to get along? **You see your parents out there in the crowd? Behind their smiles** they're trying to keep a grip on two very different emotions: pride and panic. Because they're also wondering, how did this happen? Where did the last 18 years go? Wasn't it just yesterday that you were small enough to carry in their hands, and they wondered how they'd ever make it to the day when that small yet loud baby would let them sleep uninterrupted for just one night. And now here you are, all grown.

Except you don't feel all grown. First off, you're not sure what exactly you're supposed to do next. I can't tell you that. Not even going to try. I tried to tell you to do your homework, and we know how that turned out. <fist> So what I'm going to do instead is share with you a few big things I figured out in the twenty years since I graduated high school, and just maybe they might help you find your own truths.

The first of these is that **it's okay not to know** what you want to do with your life. You're not behind because your friends seem to know what they want to be and you don't. **You're actually ahead.** Because in a year or five or twelve, they're probably going to realize that they were wrong, that wasn't it after all, and they *don't* actually know what they want to be, and **they'll have finally caught up** to where you are, now. **I have friends who wanted to be lawyers**, who went to law school, passed the bar, became what they always wanted to be, and then realized they didn't like it. A lot of them switched careers and some even applied to med school. And I have friends who've known all their lives that they wanted to be doctors. Pre-med undergrad, then med school, then residency, finally doctors. And are they happy? Um, one of them is. Most have found that being a doctor is okay, but at the end of the day, it's just a job and not the meaning of their lives. And two of them applied to law school. **See, here's the thing: you can't know** what a job is like, really like, until you do it. You can have some idea, you can imagine, but you can't actually know. I certainly couldn't. I switched majors in college twice, switched careers four times, spent vast chunks of my twenties walking around Boston and LA and Alameda trying to figure out what I should do, **that if I just thought hard enough**, I should be able to figure it out. And I finally realized I couldn't. So I just had to make my best guess and try.

That's **not to say you shouldn't have ideas** of what you might like to be, and to **aspire** to them. Aspiring is exactly what you should do. Every guess you take will guide you closer to what makes you happy. An inspirational speaker back in high school said something that I still remember: **"Far better to shoot for the moon** and miss, than to aim for a pile of manure...and hit." When you take those big **moonshots**, even when they fall short, there are so many exciting places they could take you. So many of our **greatest discoveries were by accident**, while we were looking for something else. The nucleus of the atom, penicillin. Accidents. Viagra? Accident. Columbus stumbled across *America* while he was looking for Asia. While he was looking for Asia. The key is he was doing something. Not sitting at home

playing Xbox or surfing the internet for funny cat pictures. Imagine if he hadn't.

So dream big, and try big. Don't be afraid if what you want to do seems too scary, too unlikely, too hard. And if, say, med school turns out not to be your thing after all, realize that it's **not four years of your life wasted**. It's four years of your life richly lived, taking your best shot at finding purpose. Because when you look back on your life, you're not going to say, Oh, if only I had worked at my job for **44 years instead of 40**, that would have made all the difference. The measure of a life isn't in the opportunity cost of lost income, but in moments of joy, good conversations, mistakes made, wisdom gained, tears, and laughter. It's in every connection that you ever make with another person, and the peace that you make with yourself.

When I was 10, I wanted to be a **scientist** and win the **Nobel Prize**. And now here I am, 38, a high school teacher. And that's not a bad thing. It's not a sad thing. It's a wonderful thing. Dreams will change, just as you change and what's important to you changes. **Before that, when I was 5**, I didn't want to be a scientist. I wanted to be a taxi driver. Get paid to drive a car all day? Sounded awesome. My Asian parents didn't think it was very funny. **Instead of spending the last four years running experiments** in a lab, I got to spend them here with you. And I am so, so grateful for that. Because something else that you don't know yet, that won't even make sense to you until years from now, and the real reason why you see me, Miss Harrington, Coach B at so many of your sports, your concerts, your plays, your banquets, is this: **Happiness, the very best kind** that I know of, is seeing the people that you care about shine.

So when you look out at that crowd and see your friends and your family, you **don't have to thank them** for being here. For today, they owe you. You just need to thank them for being there for you every other day of the past 18 years.

Here's my **last bit** for you. Don't ever doubt that you can **change the world**. When **Obama** ran for president four years ago, his slogan was "Change". But change happens. It's just about the only constant there is. The world would have changed whether he won or lost or never ran at all. What he was really promising was "Good Change". You change the world every single time you interact with another person. It's not a matter of if you're changing their lives, but how. Strive to make every change one for the better. And if you want to change *people*, it doesn't usually do much good to *tell* them how to be. Force them, and people naturally resist. But show them, and you just might make them want to do it on their own. Lead by example. There's a reason why **Gandhi** said *"Be the change you want to see in the world."* **Michael Jackson**, "I'm starting with the man *in the mirror*."

Just think of all the things you'll do in the next 20 years. And for an idea of just how much, look at your parents. Look at all they've done in the last 20. Really. They've changed the world irreversibly, significantly. They had you. And now here you *are*. And now the baton is passed to you. It's your turn. **Class of 2012, go on out there and shine.**