

2012 MERRIMACK COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2012

“My Game, My Rules”

Thanks for that kind introduction, President Hopey. By the way, where's the step stool I ordered? I want to make sure they can all see me!

President Hopey, Board of Trustees, fellow Honorary Degree recipients, Merrimack faculty and staff, distinguished guests, parents, family members, friends, and of course, all the graduates of the Class of 2012...

I am truly honored to be with all of you today, especially, here at my alma mater. However, I have to make one embarrassing confession before I begin. I've run over 130,000 miles in my life and I only live about a mile from Merrimack...and I actually **drove** here! What a wonderful example of fitness I am, eh!

To the Class of 2012, I am going to give you your very first major decision to make as you embark upon the real world. Do you want to head out right now and do an easy 3-mile run with me or suffer even greater pain by just sitting here and listening to my 18-minute talk? So, who wants to do the run? Who wants to sit here and listen to me talk?

(Ha, that is how you get students to listen to you, you threaten them with exercise!).

Or better yet, who would rather do neither one of these and let's just get the party started?

Years ago when asked what I did for a living, I use to mumble quite embarrassingly, "I am a race director!" I know, what the heck does a race director do? Put a chalk mark in the road and yell go?? Now I say, by producing all the events I do, I help raise the level of self-esteem and self-confidence of tens of thousands of people in America. People then immediately ask, what are you a doctor or something? I used to say, no...now I can say, YES, I guess I am!!

So, thank so much for this incredible honor...Dr. McGillivray, kind of has a nice ring to it!

One score and 16 years ago (that's 36 years, can you tell I was a math major), almost to this very day, I stood in this exact same spot and delivered the Valedictory Address to the graduating class of 1976. Who was here 36 years ago other than me? Well, I'm honored to be back!

Some would assume a lot has changed about me since that day. Not really. Actually, I don't think I have changed very much at all.

The values I learned here at Merrimack have stayed with me my entire life, as I am sure they will with you. I know one thing is for sure though, I haven't even grown an inch taller since then! In fact, I don't think I ever really grew up at all. Why? Mainly, because I never really wanted to. I may be 36 years older than most of you, but I certainly don't feel it or act it.

Thirty-six years ago -- I recall talking about how the past four years prepared us graduates for what I thought would lie ahead for all of us as we were about to leave the safe confines of Merrimack College.

For me, I knew I had prepared well and I was on my way, I just wasn't really sure where I was going. It is said that a good traveler has no fixed plans because he is not intent on ever arriving. I still don't think I have ever fully arrived but I'm actually relieved about that. I just want to keep going and going.

Remember the Olympic skater a few year's back who got whacked in the knee by another skater while training for the Olympic Trials? What were the two words she cried out in agony? "Why me?" Well, when asked to speak to you today, I said the same thing, "Why me?"

I'm really no one special. I'm not a complex person. Not a politician. I haven't invented anything yet. I don't recall ever having saved anyone's life. I'm not the President of the country or "running" for President. I never even won the Boston Marathon...in fact, I finish last every year. I'm just...well...I'm just, Dave.

So, unlike other commencement speakers these past few weeks, I'm not going to lecture you, I'm not going to talk to you about the economy or about who you can marry or about the job market and I'm not going to tell you all about the world you are about to enter as soon as you walk through those doors...you probably already know a lot more about that than even I do. I am not going to talk about all the negative. I am going to talk about all the positive. I just want to talk to you...about you.

First, I have a few questions to ask you. How many graduates here honestly do not even know what you want to do or where you want to go now that you are graduating? Raise your hands... don't be shy. What a coincidence, neither did I. A good buddy of mine, Forrest Gump, once said, "life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get." The guy was right, because none of us really know what the future will bare. But, that's the beauty about it.

How many of you right now are experiencing a degree of apprehension and nervousness about what lies ahead? That, too, is funny, because so did I. How many are in their comfort zone here at Merrimack and would rather this all not end just yet? Well, that's how I felt, too!

So, just what did I take away from my four years at Merrimack that prepared me for the next 36 years of my life? Well, it was Merrimack who gave me...a chance. And really, that is all I ever wanted in my life, a chance. I didn't want to blow it. I never missed a day of school in four years here and I never once missed a class. I wanted to get the most out of my education as I knew I'd probably never be back...until now.

It was what I learned from my overall experience of just being here that was a defining moment in my life. Defining moments, they happen all the time to us. You just have to recognize and take advantage of them.

When I walked out these doors myself, I began to realize that there really was no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an exam and you are finished with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.

The way I've always looked at it is, I live as if I were to die tomorrow but continue to learn as if I were to live forever. And, I am one of very few people on the planet who thinks sleep is over rated.

As I walked out those doors, I realized how fortunate I was simply to get an education...I trust just like you do! Not everyone gets that "chance". In fact, all of us here today have something in common, we woke up this morning...not everyone else did. We are truly blessed and are the lucky ones.

During the past 36 years, I learned about, well, being me. My goals in life have always been to stay young and to stay fit, not just physically but mentally, emotionally, morally, intellectually, ethically and spiritually.

I learned about credibility and about integrity and about honesty. I learned about paying it forward. I learned that when you give, you actually receive even more in return. I learned about warding off self-pity and to appreciate what I do have. If you ever feel bad about yourself someday, take a walk around the Jimmy Fund clinic in Boston and talk to the sick kids. I guarantee you, you won't feel that bad about yourself anymore.

Ben Franklin started each day by asking himself "what good can I do today?" Before he went to bed each night, he asked "what good did I do today?" All of us, young and old, should actually do the same thing...every day.

And, I learned that life is a marathon, not a sprint...okay, you knew that was coming! You are at the starting line of your marathon but I'm sure you know you have truly earned that spot on the line. Pace yourself, you've got a long way to go and you'll probably encounter a few hills, bends and turns along the way.

So, if I am not going to lecture you, what do I have to share with all of you? What I do have are a few experiences which I think you all will be able to identify with.

When I was a young boy, one of the first questions I was asked was, "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

The very first thing I wanted to be was "an ice cream man". Why? Well, everyone loves the ice cream man because every loves ice cream, right? We all just want to be wanted and needed. Then, I decided I wanted to be "an astronaut." Not sure why...I'm even afraid of heights. Maybe I just wanted to "leave" the area for a while.

Once I got beyond all that fantasizing, I decided I wanted to be "a professional athlete." That's it. Second base, Boston Red Sox. Unfortunately though, I kept getting cut from all the teams I tried out for and I was always the "last pick". I was vertically challenged, so, no one wanted me, so just forget about it Dave. Bad idea.

Just recently, however, I finally realized what I have always wanted to be but just didn't really know it. I saw a billboard in Boston which had just one word on it – ACCOMPLISHER. I realized just then that this is exactly what I want to be...an accomplisher.

Isn't that what we all want to be and to do...set goals, work hard and accomplish something... anything. Pretty simple, huh? I told you I wasn't very complex. Nothing, I mean nothing, can make you feel better than that. Do something meaningful, anything.

I've always felt that the most important person in the world is...ourselves. We all have a responsibility and an obligation to take care of...ourselves. Believe it or not, that is a very unselfish thing to do. By doing that, you relieve others of the responsibility of someday taking care of you and you put yourself in a position to take care of others who are in need. You not only owe it to yourself to watch out for yourselves, but you also owe it to the rest of us.

So, setting realistic goals, having the guts to commit to them, doing the work to earn the right to go after them and succeeding at them makes you an ACCOMPLISHER. There is no greater reward in life than the self satisfaction knowing that you indeed accomplished what you committed to and what you set out to do.

Now, I want to share just a few very brief personal experiences and leave you with a few lessons learned from them:

1. THE FIRST LESSON IS ABOUT EARNING THE RIGHT

I ran my first Boston Marathon as a high school senior. I called my grandfather and told him. He said he'd meet me at Coolidge Corner, 24-miles. I dropped out at 18. Taken to Newton Wellesley Hospital. Called him numbers times and he answered at 9pm. We cut another deal... earn the right. He died two months later. **I trained right here as a freshman on the Merrimack campus. I think a lot of the paths that now exists here are partly due to all the miles I ran here.** I got sick the day before. Still ran but dropped again at Evergreen Cemetery after BC where he was buried. He was there (spiritually). A defining moment. I finished and have every year since.

I continue to set goals, but not reckless ones any more. In the entire process, I have learned that those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it. And, I have learned that the worst injustice you can ever do to yourself is to underestimate your own ability.

2. ACCOMPLISHING SOMETHING DOESN'T MEAN EVERYONE IS HAPPY FOR YOU.

Two years after I graduated from Merrimack, I ran across the United States for the Jimmy Fund. While running by myself through the State of Iowa one day, kids in a pick up truck started coming at me and tried to run me over. They turned around and did this three more times. I wondered why as I was just trying to do something good, help little kids. I

concluded it was because they were perhaps envious and upset that someone was trying to accomplish something positive. I just carried on and kept running, realizing just then that sometimes the toughest part about achieving something and succeeding is realizing that maybe not everyone is going to be happy for you. But, you must remain positive and remain driven. Leave the negative people to the cold frustration of complaint. They inhabit a lonely world best left to themselves.

3. BEING PREPARED

I've always thought my greatest asset was that I was always prepared. Winning is the science of being totally prepared. After the birth of my first child, the nurse came into the room and handed off my newborn son to me, then turned and started walking out the door. I yelled at her, "hey, where you going?" She yelled back, "what do you mean where am I going, he's yours now." I said, "I know he is mine, but what do I do with him? Where's the instructions, where's the owner's manual?" She turned and said, "there is no manual, you are own your own now, sonny boy" and proceeded to walk out the door. Similarly, you are all about to be handed a diploma (and luckily not a newborn) and you, too, are now own your own but I am sure you are much more prepared then I was with my first born.

4. MY GAME, MY RULES

My mantra has always been, "It is My Game, so it is My Rules". I have learned to do what I want, not what others may want me to do. Our time is limited here, so don't waste it living someone else's life. We only get one shot at this as far as I know.

A few years ago, I received a call in my Boston Marathon office from a young girl named, Katie. She asked if she could meet with me. I said sure. She was in a wheelchair and was only 26 inches tall. She asked if she could run the marathon...I asked her to ask me a difficult question. She said her marathon was 26.2 feet. She trained and earned the right. She did it in about four minutes. It was her game, so it was her rules. It was the most memorable moment in sports I have every witnessed. When I was finishing later on at night, she was waiting for me at the finish line.

Like Katie, it's your game so it is your rules. And, don't be afraid to change the rules. Be realistic about your expectations and build for success, not failure. You can do just about anything you want to do in life if you are willing to accept the sacrifices involved. And lastly...

5. I DON'T REALLY WORK

I finished my run 3,400 mile run across America inside Fenway Park in front of 32,000 people. The next day, my boss said I had to come back to work right away. I told him I needed a few days to recover and I'd be back. Two days later, he fired me! Best thing that ever happened to me. So I turned a hobby into a vocation and started my own business. I had a vision and followed it, as I've always felt that the genius is seeing it in the seed.

I decided to take a path not taken by many others and chose to serve in a unique way...and you can, too. It all comes down to doing what you love and trying to make a difference. Running was a big part of my life, so I expanded on that to see how far a human being could really go - all the while helping to raise millions of dollars for those who are less fortunate.

When asked now what I do for work, my typical response is, "I don't work." I love what I do. TGIF stands for Thank God It's Friday...most people live for Friday. I don't. Every day is a good day for me. Find something you love to do and you'll never have to work a day in your life. If you hate your job, don't worry because you probably won't have it for that long!

St. Peter once said, "Do not be afraid-- the biggest obstacle in my life whenever I failed was just being scared of things that never happened". There is no reason not to follow your heart. Just try. Don't settle for less. Find what you love. I am convinced that the greatest single determinant of your success will be passion. Passion has driven me towards all of the best decisions in my life. All that it takes is a little courage and a little guts.

Lastly, and most importantly, I've learned there is no such thing as an individual award or achievement. Success can be considered an illusion as we owe everything to our parents, our teachers, our coaches and all those who put us on the road less traveled. Don't neglect the most important things in your life...your family, your friends and especially those in need.

I believe life is not a journey to the grave, with the intention of arriving safely, in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, wow, what a ride! Given the way my body feels right now, I think I nailed it myself. And, I pray that you all do, too!

So don't wait, do it now. A French nobleman once said, "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good things, therefore, that I can do and any kindness that I can show a fellow being, let me do it NOW. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

For me, I am never looking back and I am never going to slow down. Time waits for no one. I'm going to keep going until I just simply "run" out of time which I think I just did...

And always remember, your game, your rules.
Thank you, best wishes and God bless all of you.