

Welcome
by
Jerry Wu

Honored guests, beloved family and friends, esteemed faculty, and of course, most awesome members of the York School Class of 2019. Congratulations! You made it!

I am not going to put you all to sleep with yet another story about a terrified Chinese kid far, far from home (pause), even though there was a time that, well, I was another terrified Chinese kid far, far from home. But now, as I stand here just a short time later, I am looking out at a sea of faces of people who not only welcomed me, but embraced me, helped me, taught me, encouraged me, and cheered for me each and every day as I pursued the lofty goals I set for myself. You all did that for me, and we all did that for one another. As easy as it might be to sit here today and bask in what you've accomplished individually for yourself, it would also be easy to lose sight of the significant role you have each played in the success of those around you. This could possibly be the most important lesson you take from your years here: As President John F Kennedy said more than a half-century ago, "A rising tide lifts all boats."

I have learned that commencement speeches tend to have their own unique formulas. First, the speaker will of course congratulate all the graduates, then offering you some sage advice like listen to your inner self, be passionate, take risks, fail big, your future is bright. I especially like the speeches that were given by Steve Jobs and JK Rowling on the topic of the importance of failure. From this you learn that failure is awesome... if you are Steve Jobs or JK Rowling. So my advice is don't fail unless you are Steve Jobs or JK Rowling. But seriously, I am not saying you shouldn't fail. Just don't be afraid of failing.

We are about to step into this new world that is going to be most frightening. But regardless of what happens, I implore you, whatever it is you choose to do, be passionate about it, dream big, fail big, and take risks. (Mr. Raymond forgot to tell me to be original.) However, dreams without goals are just wishful thinking, doomed to turn into disappointment. So have dreams with consistent goals, and don't let anybody bring you down. You have to believe you will succeed. I recall that after the basketball season last

year, I really wanted to become stronger and get bigger. So I decided to go to the gym twice a week to gain strength ... and eat lots of donuts to bulk up. Then came the lacrosse season, and I asked the coaches for permission to miss Tuesday and Thursday practices so I could continue my sessions of weightlifting. They said yes, but one day, driving away from the senior parking lot, I spotted Coach Colby, a man known for his somewhat acerbic wit. He gave me a look that told me skipping practice to work out at the gym might not after all have quite the degree of eager support I was hoping for. It's possible it was just my guilty conscience, but I don't think so. I rolled down my window and reminded him that today was Tuesday, the day I would be going to the gym. But as I slowly drove off, Coach Colby yelled out my name, and I stopped to poke my head out, curiously. "It's not working!" he called out flatly. I laughed it off, but I could not stop thinking about it on my way to the workout. Is it really not working? But as soon as I got into the gym, I stopped questioning it and turned his words into motivation. Now, whenever I lift, I think of Coach Colby, striving even harder for success. Just when I think I can't possibly push a bench press another inch, magic happens when I imagine Coach Colby standing on my chest. He is a very scary man.

For some time now, like seniors everywhere we have been counting down the days until we "finish." So why, I've always wondered, is this called "Commencement?" But it's true – this is just the beginning. We can pause for the moment and take a deep breath as we indulge ourselves with congratulations and self-reflection. But then we really get to work, and in the very near future, we will awaken to the reality that our newfound "freedom" of no longer having teachers and parents and host parents...and Coach Colby... to tell us where to be and what to do every step of the way not only does not make life easier as we had assumed but in many ways more difficult, and more of a test. Can we meet this challenge? I am confident we can, and as much as we have all understandably looked forward to this day, there is every reason to look ahead with even more hope and enthusiasm to the future we carve out for ourselves in the months and years ahead. One of the many things I truly look forward to will be all the ways we continue to support one another, despite the miles between us, relying on and benefiting from the growing bonds of trust forged during our years together at this place we have been so fortunate to spend such incredible years, York School. It is with a heart full of love, respect, and immeasurable gratitude that I wish each one of you nothing but the best that life has to offer.

Thank you.