

## **2018 Graduation Speech**

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### **Introduction**

Hello Spectrum Academy: faculty, staff, students, and members of our families and communities. My name is Mr. Powner. I am humbled and grateful to have been invited to share one last lesson with you before you graduate today. I feel confident in speaking for all adults here when I say it has been a privilege to watch you grow and mature over the years. Most of you have been one of my science students at least once or twice in that time.

Thinking back over our years with you, we educators feel like proud parents much of the time; exasperated and exhausted parents on other occasions. We have fed you, fixed your cuts and scrapes, encouraged you, reprimanded you, put an arm around your shoulders when you needed it, and have often discussed and planned how to be the most helpful to you in private meetings. You were born to other families and are cared for by many other adults, but in our minds, you are our kids. I am sure there is not one teacher/para partnership here or administrator or staff member that does not feel the same way. We often marvel

as we discuss the progress that each of you makes from year-to-year. We are in awe of your intelligence, abilities, and potential.

Spectrum Academy Class of 2018, you've done something great! You deserve to be recognized and applauded as you graduate from high school. Enjoy your well-earned celebrations.

### **Adulting is for Heroes**

With your permission, I wish today to plant a seed in your minds, hoping it will sprout, take root, and grow within your thoughts after today is forgotten...

After the congratulations... You'll eventually ask yourself, "Now what?"

It's normal to feel lost for a little while... My message is, "Don't be afraid. You'll be fine, eventually." I wish to share with you an attitude that can help get you through your transition, your metamorphosis, into someone who can adult like a pro.

I think that adulting is heroic. It's hard, it's complicated, and those who do it well deserve a medal... or at least our admiration and gratitude. We often think about bravery and skills when thinking of heroes. Adult courage and the ability to do what needs to be done is heroic. But the hero's journey to adulthood needs to be remembered. How does a true hero handle the numerous failures along the

path to success? I propose that the answer to this question is the measure of a hero's character, and it is also the measure of an adult's character.

### **“FAIL” is NOT a Four-Letter Word**

Let me pose another question. If you fail often, does that make you a failure?... In answer, let me tell you a handful of origin stories for a few of our most famous heroic adults.

**Abraham Lincoln was the famous President who led the United States through its Civil War.** As a young man, Abraham went to war a captain and returned a private. Afterwards, he was a total failure as a businessman, and then failed as a lawyer. He turned to politics and was defeated in his first try for the legislature, again defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for congress, defeated in the senatorial election of 1854, defeated in his efforts for the vice-presidency in 1856, and defeated in the senatorial election of 1858. It's lucky he didn't give up. He did some good things after that.

**Thomas Edison was a famous American inventor, who created the long lasting electric light bulb.** As a boy, Thomas's teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He was fired from his first two jobs for being "non-productive." As an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light

bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps."

**Even the best scientists NASA has to offer fail often.** In 1969, NASA scientists accidentally erased the Apollo 11 moon landing video footage. In fact, there are no known original recordings of the event. Later, in 1999, NASA also lost a \$125 million-dollar robotic Mars orbiter because part of the team of "rocket scientists" used metric units of measure while the other half used English units. The orbiter hit the Martian atmosphere much harder than was intended... Lessons learned... Out of the ashes of these mistakes came the spectacular successes of the Mars Rover missions.

**Many other adult heroes overcome strings of failures to find glory.** Henry Ford failed and went broke five times before he founded the Ford Motor Company (which produced the truck I enjoy driving). The young Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because "he lacked imagination and had no good ideas." He went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland. In fact, the proposed park was at first rejected by the city of Anaheim, claiming it would only attract riffraff and troublemakers. J.K. Rowling was rejected by 12 publishers before a small London printer picked up Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.

Were these famous adults seen as failures? At first, I'm sure they were. They were made fun of, endured embarrassment, felt the sting of self-doubt... just like any of us would. But they didn't give up. They understood that adulting like a hero means rising every time you fall, dusting yourself off, learning from mistakes, and growing from the experience. The point I'm trying to make is that all adults, even the famous and heroic ones, make numerous mistakes. We fail often. Failing is a major part of every success story.

Let me ask again, graduating seniors... If you fail often as an adult, does that make you a failure?... No!!!

### **“Fail Better” – Samuel Beckett**

I want to say this next part clearly for any of you that might doubt yourselves. It takes many decades of hard work, sacrifice, and then giving up all hope in order to be a true failure. You young people are so full of potential that you aren't even qualified to be failures... Don't even let the term “failure” be negative in your mind. When you are challenged and feel stuck, I hope you think like the poet Samuel Beckett, who knew that to move forward to success and greatness, we must all learn to “Fail Better.”

You will make mistakes as you attempt to be adults. It'll be okay. All the adults in this room have failed too many times to count... Decide right here, right now to be strong enough to move forward... Don't be afraid to fail... Failure is a natural function of trying... Working your way to success demands seeing failure as a tool... Failure builds character... Don't let fear, disappointments, hardships, or opposition stand in the way of moving forward in life.

Let me end by making a wish, with all my heart...

May all your failures be glorious. May all your successes be the result of hard work and heroic determination. May you look back on your adult lives years from now with satisfaction, knowing you have gathered wisdom from a full spectrum of mistakes and achievements.

Congratulations, young heroes, graduating class of 2018!

## Works Cited

But they did not give up. <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/OnFailingG.html>

Failure is a key of success. <https://www.accurate.in/student-corner/failure-is-a-key-of-success/>