SENIOR SPEECH

FOR

SHARON LEFF

Hello everyone!!! I want to thank Principal \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, (**name the other teachers and coordinators that put together the program and invited you**) Ms. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and of course Ms.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to participate in today’s program. (**If you want to get a little snarky you can say**) Of course with today being a very critical and important day in the curriculum of Livingston High School, that of school-wide testing, of **course** there were several places I could have been (**Name some fun activities you would rather be doing**). I could have gone skiing for the day…. oh. I just remembered I don’t ski. I could have written even **MORE** essays for prospective college entrance applications. **THAT** would have been fun…. I could have stayed home and brushed up on my humor… I bet you’re thinking **THAT** would have come in **REALLY** handy right about now…. (**Wait for the laugh**), but nooooooooooo ….. I’m here with all of you. When I was first ~~forced to do this~~ … I mean **invited** to speak today, I was told to “make it like a TED talk.” I thought to myself, “Do they think I **REALLY** look and act like Marky Mark (**Or if it’s better to say Mark Wahlberg, say that**)????” These people have known me for around four years or even more. **HAVE THEY EVER SEEN ME WALK AROUND THE HALLS HERE AT SCHOOL WITH A TEDDY BEAR?** …**THAT TALKS?** (**Wait for the laugh**). And then when I calmed down a little I realized that they meant to do a TED talk. Although some grown-ups may think (but not speak) that “we seniors don’t know Jack,” I think we all should know about TED, the non-profit organization dedicated to spreading and sharing ideas. Personally I would rather share a really good pizza …. just kidding… (**Wait for the laugh**). TED originally stood for Technology, Entertaining, and Design, but thanks to us…. the high school seniors of today, soon to be the game changers of tomorrow, with this talk I just might go on the road and expand TED’s horizons to include the riveting, informative and sometimes chaotic world of …. ready??? **WORD PROCESSING**. (**Wait for the laugh**).

Just kidding about that. I’m here today to share a little of what my experience has been like through my involvement in FBLA. I’d like to tell you that it was my idea about four years ago to really look around and find some ways to expand my horizons. After all with my Bar Mitzvah responsibilities behind me, I was ripe for a new challenge…. **NOT**!!!! I explored participating in FBLA for that traditional, time honored, age-old reason…. my parents forced me… nah. They **THREATENED** me. (**Wait for the laugh**). Before anyone calls child services and busts my parents, let me be clear. It was more of a really, **REALLY** firm persuasion. But you know what? I’m glad I did it!!! I started my participation back then and over the years I’ve never done the same event twice. There is always something new, and **sometimes** exciting … just kidding… to be done, and once I began to compete on the national level, I met students from all over the country. I learned the importance of stepping outside of my comfort zone and daring to expand my scope of knowledge and connections. Believe it or not, this community is terrific and the school is very supportive, but there’s a whole country… and I hear even a bigger world, beyond Livingston, New Jersey!! (**Wait for the laugh**). As I learned to take advantage of what this high school has to offer for each one of us, and as I explored the network of knowledge, projects and connections through FBLA, I began to discover more about myself and what interests me. I learned that high school’s purpose is preparation and foundation building and that the REAL learning and connecting begin after we leave here. It’s a big and competitive world out there. We have to be prepared.

In past semesters I (**name some of the functions and events you participated in over the years**) I learned \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The next year I got to go to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, which was great. Last year I participated in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that taught me \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Each year upon returning to the challenges presented by FBLA, I saw that I grew more as a student, participant and potential professional (**If you want to make a joke you can say-“Sorry- did I just spit on anyone in the first row? My bad.” And** **Wait for the laugh**).

As you know, for my senior project at FBLA I chose to compete in the “Wonderful World of Word Processing.” I know, I thought it was pretty weird too, but you know what? It got me here!! It was an arena in which I felt that I could distinguish myself and have success…. I mean, after all, have any of you seen my basketball skills? (**Wait for the laugh**). I suppose you might say-and I discovered this about myself- that in some ways I’m a **contrarian**. A contrarian is a person who sees the masses running … all in the same direction to “grab the prize,” but I chose the opposite route. It’s not something that is popular among many but that’s the point. Having the strength and the vision to find your own route to success sets you apart from the crowd. I don’t know that this technique works all of the time, but I wanted to achieve a goal, I found my path, and I worked to get the prize. By the way, and more about this later, but remember, we’ve always been taught that winning isn’t everything even though some people with limited scope think it’s the **ONLY** thing. It’s true what “they” say when we hear, “It’s not if you win or lose. It’s how you play the game.” That’s what really counts. And if we pay attention and do our best, we learn that even losing is a win. I know, I can say that because I won, but really, everyone can be a winner when times are good and conditions support our purpose. It’s when the **real** challenges threaten us that we will get to learn and show what we’re made of. I believe we’ll be more prepared to succeed in life if we learn **EVERY** lesson including losing, but more about that later.

You might be wondering what the process was like as it relates to the word processing challenge. Do you **REALLY** want to know? Simple. A lot of typing!! **DUH!!** (**Wait for the laugh**). It also took practice and memorization and working to understand the importance of knowing systems and formats in order to correspond effectively in business.

The experience of entering this event is so much more than the actual event itself. Although it is really important to have your word processing knowledge and skills down pat, it’s also important to know **WHY** we do what we do. Honestly, the way we present ourselves on paper or on an electronic document is the most import way in which we communicate. It’s true that we only get one chance to make a first impression and for most- if not all of us, our résumé, letter of introduction, or cover letter is the first impression many professionals will see when they hear our names. Do you know that in many companies if a prospective employer finds a typo in a résumé, that candidate is automatically disqualified from any possibility of getting the job? It’s skills and rules like that which force all of us to pay attention, be aware of what is going on around us, and work hard for what we intend to achieve in life. It’s details like that, along with networking and understanding how companies work, that will help form the connections, land the interview, and get the job. The gateway is the résumé but each one of us has a lifetime of documents that will be needed to define us as professionals and adults.

What are some of the secrets I learned through my activities at FBLA? I learned it’s okay to go after what we want as long as we work for it. I learned we don’t always get what we want, but losing is an even more valuable lesson. It shows us if our goals are authentic and it reveals if we really worked as hard as necessary to succeed. We learn where and how to make corrections so that we avoid the same mistake twice or even three times. It also shows that sometimes there are people around us that are smarter and have more skills, and it’s **REALLY** important to have those people in our lives. They set the bar for us to push ourselves even more. I am also learning that it’s not only interesting but it’s really important to have input from other people, to see how people might have different points of view than mine-but all are worthwhile, and it’s really valuable to make personal and professional connections for morale and practical support in school and in the business world.

So yes, I chose to compete in the mind numbing, gut wrenching, muscle ripping area of…word processing (**Wait for the laugh**). Yes. I stared down the risk of carpal tunnel. I laughed at simple typographic error. And although I began this journey as a “Wiseguy” who mocked the establishment when it came to using proper indentation and margins, in the end I learned. **Period**. (**Wait for the laugh)**

We all have the potential to be winners and leaders. It just depends on you and what you really want in life, and what you’re willing to do and sacrifice in order to get it. Our parents tell us all the time about what we have to do but we’re now getting old enough to work towards finding our own paths. Yes my parents pushed me, but have I seen some of the light? Yes, but don’t tell them!

It’s important to figure out what we intend to do to make a living and make a life in our future. I was lucky to find people who encouraged me, like our teachers and the people at FBLA. I really feel like many of the students there are equals and we have a lot in common. I also learned that if I have friends who don’t want to work as hard as me, that’s okay as long as they respect what I choose to do with my time. There are others that might work too hard, sacrificing all and losing the joy of the search for what counts. That’s their business. We all have to know by now that people who are really our friends will encourage us to pursue our dreams and goals.

I’m looking forward to using what I learned to find the next steps for me in college and maybe grad school and in the professional world. I know that the techniques I learned at FBLA will help to prepare me for bigger challenges and I look forward to them. And remember that I am also aware that loss can also be turned into a win. I may not like it, but I’ll be stronger, more aware and more prepared thanks to the experience. Hey, with **THAT** attitude, maybe I should get back into sports!! … Just kidding!!

From something as seemingly uneventful as word processing, I’m now applying to schools like Cornell for hotel management. Let’s see what each one of YOU discover about yourselves and the future and who knows, maybe we can arrange a corporate discount! Thank you all.