Graduation Speech

Mike Wells

May 2019

*‘Fight the Good Fight’*

***Mike,…this is a large group. This is a special occasion as you know, so there will be a lot of noise and conversation. Stand there for a moment or two until the audience begins to focus on you. Once it quiets down, then begin. Speak slowly because with the size of the group the audio won’t reach them instantaneously.***

Hello Everyone---WELCOME,….WELCOME.

It is a pleasure, once again, for me to be in front of you for this very special day. I know so many of you, parents, relatives, friends, associates, and of course the kids too. For those who I have not had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Mike Wells, and I am the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_here, at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_High School.

I understand all too well that these types of talks can go on way too long. I have planned my message today to be brief, but to the point. To the graduates here today, I know you’re receiving a lot of advice, and that there is quite a bit on your minds this week. If you’ll just take a few minutes to file away some of the ideas I am going to share, then when things get settled, I hope some of my thoughts can assist you in setting the foundation for your future.

2.

As a related note, we also want everyone to have a great time for the rest of this day. *But remember kids, your parents, grandparents, and I sat through these exact same types of speeches back in the day, and we had some of the same thoughts* ***for later today******and tonight*** *that you might have too. We know what goes on.* ***(laughter****),….so please make good decisions.*

I want to tell you today about ‘Fighting the Good Fight’. Over the past years and decades, our alumni, our graduates, have returned here to share their experiences, and to give credit to our school for many of their successes. They have repeated time and time again, it was how we taught them, as well as insisting, that they must be prepared to earn what they receive. They understood, as we hope you do too, that when they walked out that door, nobody was going to hand them anything without them first earning it. That they knew when they graduated from our school, no one was going to put a steel umbrella over their head and hold it there. They understood that their **only** entitlement, was the **privilege** to learn and achieve on their own merits. No trophies for just showing up. They knew, the minute they left here, they had to prepare a strategy to not only grow, but to survive. So, let today be your induction into adulthood, your briefing, your strategizing, before you head out into the competition, into an arena, that will certainly be challenging.

To survive and succeed in any aspect of what begins today, you must build a foundation of education and skills, (both **professional** and **social**).

**Professionally**, whether you go on to be a teacher, a philosopher, a counselor, a pilot, a tradesman or woman, a member of the military, or any of the thousands of career possibilities, you must be trained. I cannot emphasize enough for you to finish what you start in any category of

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education and skill building. Nothing is more credible than knowing to yourself and others, that you have the credentials to do a certain profession. Not only will completion of training and education open doors for you, but there is no better personal feeling than knowing you have the certification and confidence to complete a job the right way. Then if you are fortunate enough, there is an old saying: **“Find something you love to** **do each day, and get paid to do it”.** That is the ultimate career. So, fight the good fight to ensure that your educational skills and training are completed, as well as in a field or trade that you enjoy. Being proficient, as well as enjoying your work, will make you the consummate professional.

As for your **Social** growth and responsibility, I want to emphasize to you the subject of humanity and civility. These are the building blocks of character. As you work towards and succeed in your goals, none of that will have any substantive meaning if they are accomplished by trampling on others. Winning is fine, being better is fine too. But, what I am *telling you* straight up, is not to reach achievement at someone else’s expense, misfortune, or personal loss. Fighting the good fight isn’t stepping on someone else’s fingers or tripping your opponent. It is accomplished by you being legitimately *trained and prepared* to win fairly. Regardless of what others try to do to you, maintain your standards, don’t stoop to their low levels, set the bar high and keep it there. Treat people with dignity and fairness until they prove otherwise. Help those who legitimately need help. Share what you have with those who have had misfortunes. Show compassion and empathy to those who have been harmed or taken advantage of by others. Set your moral compass to ethical destinations. Take care of your family, protect your family, and when necessary stop the threat. Make your word your bond. Grow a reputation, a legacy, that when **you** shake some one’s hand, you will carry out what you have agreed to. And never, ever, forget down the road when making choices and decisions: **“It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation, but only a moment to ruin it.”**

4.

As you know by now, you will be challenged in life. Challenged by personal incidents, professional situations, and by individual people and institutions. So, buy a whisk-broom, because you will certainly end up on your rear-end from time to time. When adversity sets you back, slap the trail dust off, pause, take a breath, and quietly implement what you have already planned for this situation. Be prepared to react, be ready to initiate plan B. Never ride into a dead-end canyon without provisions for both you and your horse. That makes you a survivor and will be a loud and clear signal to your advisories, that you’re not going to be turned around, you’re not going to be discouraged, you’re not going to be diverted. What you are going to do is, **SUCCEED**.

As you progress through all the years to come, make the time to pause at certain points in your journey. Examine the *facts* of your experiences up to that point, along with your ***interpretations*** of those life’s lessons, also up to that point. Combining and implementing those two rich reservoirs will assure a continued purposeful professional life, as well as a fulfilling personal life for yourself, your family, and your loved ones.

The world will continue to grow and change. As we send you off today, I am very confident that **you** will be a significant part of making it **a better place** for **all of us.**

**Please be careful out there everyone,….Goodbye,…and thank you**.