

Palau Community College Commencement Address

by

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May 2014

President Tellei, Members of the Board of Trustees, faculty and staff, distinguished guests, proud parents and friends and most especially, the graduating class of 2014. Congratulations! Congratulations and thank you. Thank you for the honor that you have given me to be your commencement speaker today.

Today, I feel like I am coming home. I spent the first six years after graduate school, here at the college, where I was an instructor for one year and then moved to CRE where I was a researcher for five years. The things that I learned here in those six years have continued to guide and help me in my work, and in the things that I am doing, up to today. I will always be grateful for my six years here at PCC. In the future, you will also look back and be grateful for your time here and the things you learned at PCC.

Ever since I received your invitation to be your commencement speaker, I have been struggling on what to say to you on this special day. So to help me prepare, as a researcher, I did some research. I had to do research because I could not depend on my experience for guidance. I do not remember what my commencement speaker said during my graduation from college. I only remember that it was really hot and I had a hard time hearing what he was saying. I could not depend on others because everyone I asked, none seem to remember what was said during their graduation and only few could even remember who their commencement speaker was.

My research indicated that a commencement address should provide life advice, words of wisdom, lessons learned and ideas on how to be successful, what does it take to be happy and what are the really important things in life. Wow, that is big task and pressure for me. I want to know those things. All of us want to know those things.

To make it more manageable, and because I am not a Zen Master who knows all the secrets of life, I have decided to talk to you about four things. Three of the things I have found to be very important and have helped me in my life and career. The fourth thing is my special request to you. And I hope that it is not too hot for you today and you will not have a hard time hearing me.

Number 1, find something that you love to do, something that interests you, something that you are passionate about. If you do something that you love, it will show in your work and you will do much better than if you did things you did not love to do. And when things go wrong, at least you will be doing something that you love. And that can get you through the tough and hard times.

When I was thinking about getting my PhD, a good friend and a brilliant scientist, asked me. "Why do you want to do it?" I simply answered, why not. I am doing the work, I am good at it, so why not go for my PhD. Then he said, you do not have to provide an answer to me, but you need to know in your heart why you want to do it and you need to be interested in it and you have to love doing it. "People who succeed in getting their PhD", he continued, "are not the smartest, but they are the most interested in the subject and love what they are doing." When we are sitting in mangroves and mosquitoes are biting and we are worried about crocodile, it helps that you love what you are doing. When everyone in the lab has gone home and you are the only one remaining because you have to run your experiment until the early morning hours, it helps that you love what you are doing. When it is cold and raining and rough and you are out at sea collecting data, it helps that you love what you are doing.

I hope that you will find something that you love doing and do it. It will make you happier and it will show in the work you do.

Number two, in order to be good in something, you have to put effort into it. In the book by Malcom Gladwell, *The Outlier*, it tells a story of Bill Joy. You might not know Bill Joy, but you use his creations. He was one of the people who rewrote UNIX, a software that runs millions of computer around the world even today. He also wrote many of the software that allow us to access the internet. He founded Sun Microsystems and wrote Java, one of the most popular programming language in use. He has been referred to as one of the most influential person in the modern history of computing.

Bill Joy used to spend the whole night during college just programming. He spent more time programming than attending classes. He was spending eight to ten hours per day programming. He spent an estimated 10,000 hours programming. That is 8 hours a day for 1,250 days, which is over 3 years, or 3 years, 5 months and 5 days to be exact. When Bill Joy was given the opportunity to re-write UNIX, he was up to the task. Yes, he was brilliant and yes, he loved to learn but before he became an expert, he had to learn to be an expert. Those 10,000 hours of programming prepared him and allowed him to achieve those great technological advances later in life.

There was study done looking at students at an elite art school. The students were divided into three groups. The stars or the best were in group 1, the second group were just good and the third group was a group that would never play professionally.

Everyone in the three groups started playing violin at about the same time and everyone used the same amount of time to practice, about 2-3 hours per week. By age 8, those students in group 1, the best group, began to practice more than everyone else; six hours a week by age nine, 8 hours by age twelve, 16 hours by age fourteen, and they kept increasing the amount of time they spent practicing. So by the age of twenty, they were practicing over 30 hours per week. The elite performers had each totaled 10,000 hours of practice. The just good ones

practiced a total 8,000 hours, while the ones who would never play professionally, only practice 4,000 hours.

What was very interesting, no one got really good without putting the time to practice. And not only that, they did not find anyone who worked really hard and did not make it to the top ranks. If the musicians have a certain ability to get into the top music school, the only thing that separates the very good from the just good is how hard they work at it. Talent and skills can only bring you to the door, hard work will bring you to the top. The people at the very top do not just work hard or harder, they work much, much, much harder.

So if you want to be very good at what you are doing, you need to put in the time and effort into it. It does not matter how smart you are, how knowledgeable you are, how skilled you are, how talented you are, you cannot be the best, if you do not put in the efforts.

Number 3, I would like to talk to you about appreciation and giving back. We are all here today because someone helped us along the way, someone cared enough to provide a helping hand when we needed one, and someone sacrificed so you could graduate today. It might have been your mom or dad, a brother or a sister, an uncle or an auntie, a husband or a wife, a friend, a neighbor, a teacher or all of them or some of them. They are the reason you are here today, graduating from this great institution, the only institution of higher learning, in this great country of Palau.

I have been very lucky to be able to do things that I love for my career. This was not planned. On the contrary, most of it happened because of pure chance, luck and help that were provided along the way.

My first luck was being born to a lady who really believed in higher education, that she would sacrifice much in her life to allow her kids to go to college. The women of Palau have many obligations, especially the oldest ones, but my mom decided to prioritize her kids' education above everything else. I know that was not an easy thing to do, because of the pressures and the expectations on her as the oldest female in the family. Without her efforts and sacrifice, I would not be here today.

Then when it was time to go outside of Palau for school, I was lucky that I had an uncle who provided me a place to stay. I left Palau at age 14 so I was still underage. I was fortunate that I had an uncle who was able to take care of me while I was going to school outside of Palau. Many of you may know him, his name is Ephraim Ngirachitei, and he works here at PCC. I was also lucky that I had sisters and aunties and relatives that helped and supported me while I was attending school.

After graduating with my bachelor degree, I returned to Palau and met some really great people in conservation. One of them is Carol Emaurois, who used to work here at PCC. She introduced me to Professor Richmond, who eventually offered me a scholarship to study for my masters. There were many others, who provided guidance, opened doors and introduced me

to others. I could go on and on because in every step of the way, there were people who helped me and without their help, I would not be standing here today.

Even in this early stage of your life, if you think back, you will see the same things. You are here today because someone helped you get here. I ask you to always remember how lucky you are, for the help you received along the way and try to do the same for others whenever you can. Martin Luther King said that greatness is measured by service, that to be great, you need to serve. He says that everyone can serve because to serve, you only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. I wish greatness for all of you.

I will end my talk today with a special request. We are lucky to be able to call Palau home, one of the most beautiful place on this earth. We have an amazing ocean, that has been supporting our ancestors since the beginning, and even today, it continues support us, not only by the resources that it provides, but also visitors that it attracts to our island, contributing to our economy.

But our ocean is sick, it is threatened and it needs our help. It is being threatened not only by the things we are doing but things that are happening outside of Palau. And the only way to address these threats is our actions. We need to take bold actions to help protect our ocean. It will not be easy, there are strong outside forces that we need to deal with. We might have to make sacrifices, but we have to act boldly to meet the enormous challenges facing our oceans. Our ancestors were able to manage our resources successful with the *bul*, it is in our culture, it is in our tradition, it is in our blood, and it is in our DNA. We can rise to meet the challenge.

I ask that no matter what you do in life and whatever your career may be, always make an effort to be informed about environmental issues. That is my request to you. To be interested, to be informed, to support and to contribute to bold actions, to help protect our oceans.

I want to leave you with a poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson on what it means to be successful:

To laugh often and much  
to win the respect of intelligent people and affection of children;  
to earn the appreciation of honest critics  
and endure the betrayal of false friends;  
to appreciate beauty,  
to find the best in others;  
to leave the world a bit better,  
whether by a healthy child  
a garden patch or redeemed social condition;  
to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.  
This is to have succeeded.

To the graduating class of 2014, I wish you much success in life.

Thank you