



Good morning staff and students,

Last week when I was asked to address you today, I knew there were several things I needed to do to meet the challenge of composing and presenting something coherent. My goal was clear – write and present my ideas about learning to a group of more than a thousand people. Simple, right? But it is not easy to speak to a large group of people, especially if unprepared, and I had to make sure that I was very well prepared because I absolutely do not want to embarrass myself!

I knew I needed a plan. I like a good plan because I have figured out that it can give clarity and courage to achieve the best possible results in a myriad of situations. I knew that I would face challenges in completing this task. I knew that I was solely responsible for determining the outcome of the task. So, I planned the time I would need to fit it in with my schoolwork, to fit it in with my hectic social life, to fit it in with my down time, and with my other commitments. I also had to make sure I had it done with time to spare so that any tweaking could be done without panic. I planned what I thought I wanted to say, in my head then on paper. I drafted and redrafted, to the point where I felt this speech was where it needed to be.

By now at least some of you, hopefully, should have recognized the analogy between me completing this task, and how I think you might approach your learning.

As some of you are aware, I began teaching later in life, the year that most of you current Year 12 students were born. Becoming a teacher was something I had wanted to do for a long time, but life and circumstances got in the way. However, I had an objective, and I had a plan to achieve it. Studying through distance learning while raising children had many challenges, one of the hardest of which was teaching myself, from a book, statistical mathematics for psychology. This was nearly three decades after I had left school, and mathematics has never been my strong suit. I shed many tears of frustration, and the air was frequently peppered with my somewhat salty language as I grappled with what were, to me, totally foreign concepts. Studying in that part of my mid-life educational journey was really, really, hard.

I think the important thing I'd like you to consider with this anecdote is that, despite the challenges, success was the eventual outcome. I had a goal. I had a plan. I was responsible for my learning. I achieved the desired outcome through hard work and the satisfaction gained from that was amazing; I was empowered by my accomplishment in ultimately acing that subject and inspiring myself to forge on.

If I did it, you can too.

I have been privileged to teach many boys over the years. These boys grew into young men who went on to become electricians, doctors, plumbers, car salesmen, dentists, mechanics, musicians, paramedics, carpenters, teachers, and more. They all had different academic abilities, different attitudes to learning. One of the most memorable students I have ever taught was a young man who made no secret of the fact that he did not like school. He was

not academically gifted; in fact, he struggled quite a lot and he could hardly wait to leave. When he came to my class at the start of Year 10 he told me in no uncertain terms that he hated English and was going to fail. I asked him if he had worked out how he might navigate his way out of school, and he told me that he had not. So, I suggested he make a plan because every successful getaway requires a good plan, and I reminded him that he still needed to do his best along his escape route because achievement can be empowering. And he did. For every task he was given he set realistic but challenging goals, he planned how to achieve them, he was responsible for his own learning. He recognized that, by applying these basic principles to his learning at school, he might be able to carry them with him throughout life. He did not fail English. He left school later that year to begin his plumbing apprenticeship, taking with him the respect of his teachers and peers, and the satisfaction gained from achieving his many small objectives along the way to his ultimate one, empowered by his own accomplishments to move into the world with confidence. He is now a very successful, and happy, man.

If he did it, you can too.

The other day, one of my colleagues referred to me as being in my twilight years of teaching and, if I am to be afforded that status of age and, hopefully, knowledge, there is one thing that I really want to highlight for you – not once has a student or a former student ever told me that they wished they had made less effort at school; plenty have said they wished they had made more.

So, no matter if you are in Year 7 struggling with the onslaught of high school demands, if you are in Year 9 immersed in the furphy that learning is boring, in Year 12 on the countdown to the final moments of school, or in the other groups in between, it is neither too early nor too late to act on what I advocate here today. Whether it is a homework task, an assignment, or an exit strategy for life beyond the school gates, set your goal, make your plan, and stick to it. Be realistic in challenging yourself. Be responsible for your own learning. There is plenty of support along the way if you choose to use it, but ultimately you are accountable to yourself. In school, you will achieve, in small increments, in different ways, and at different levels to those sitting next to you, and that is fine. We should not necessarily expect public recognition for our achievements like the young men being acknowledged today, but it is nice to have now and then. However, there is a great deal of self-satisfaction to be gained from your successes, whether they be small or large; they can empower you to move on with confidence to your next task, to your next stage of your learning, to your life after school.

And that, I believe, you can do.