

June 6, 2011

On behalf of the School Committee, I'd like to welcome all of the parents, relatives, and friends to graduation. To the seniors, congratulations! You are on the brink of a new adventure.

I will do my best this evening to follow Franklin Delano Roosevelt's instructions for speeches: "Be sincere, be brief, be seated."

I'm going to talk briefly about four "P's" today.

Firstly, PRACTICE. You'll need lots of it at many different things.

Since I believe you are each likely to have multiple careers over the course of your life - and the next big thing is likely something we do not even know about yet - don't get pigeon-holed. Try something new every day.

Robert Heinlein, the science fiction writer, once wrote: "A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects."

There is a time and a place for going deep, and I hope you'll know the pleasure of feeling like an expert in your niche of the world, but don't specialize too soon!

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Secondly, PERSEVERE. Perseverance is what's needed to do an excellent job. It's those reputed 10,000 hours required to achieve mastery in something. It requires hard work, dedication and effort. It gets you through tough times because you learn that you can do difficult things. It produces satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. I hope that you've already learned to stick with something to sufficient completion and resolution.

Thirdly, PERFECTION. We have this myth in our society that everything has to be perfect. Don't be stymied by perfection - or by the fear that you will not be perfect. Rita Mae Brown wrote: "Good judgment comes from experience, and often experience comes from bad judgment." It's the best kind of experience to have. Succeeding at life is all about learning - not so that the next decision will be perfect (although it might be), but so that it will be better and will serve more people well.

And finally, PLAY. Play with your friends, your family, and your co-workers. Pause to enjoy them. Relish them. Cherish them. It's the people who really make it all worthwhile.

We all wish you every success as you journey forward from today. With practice, perseverance, a lack of obsessive-compulsive perfection, and play you will make your dreams come true! Now, I'll follow my own advice.

Marianne B. Cooley, Chair
Needham School Committee