

In 2009, fifty years after I graduated from Miami University (Ohio), a friend asked me, *“If you went back for your reunion, what would you say to today’s grads? It’s so different now. Do you think what we have learned would mean much to today’s crop?”* Maybe not, I thought. I might just sound preachy. But I wrote out what I would have said had anyone asked.

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## Live So the World Cries and You Rejoice

*“When you were born, you cried, and the world rejoiced.  
Live your life so that when you die, the world weeps and you rejoice.”  
– Cherokee Saying*

You are here to celebrate a milestone achieved and the start of a next chapter, and I am here with a few ‘Old Guy observations’ to take with you. In today’s fast-paced/high-tech world, they may seem dated. They are not. But it will be your choice to do with them as you wish.

First, my congratulations! You made it, you earned your diploma, another step on a long journey with new adventures lying ahead. As you move on, take time to remember who contributed to what you have achieved: your parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and those in your church, to name but a few. They set high standards, offered help, required commitment and pushed you to become more than you thought you could be. Take time to name them, find them and thank them.

Now to your future. At times, the outlook will appear uncertain. Just put aside the nagging concerns which dampen the ‘fire in your belly.’ Instead, move forward, play hard and craft a worthwhile life. And as you do, accept that timing and luck will play no favorites. We must go with the hand which we are dealt, which means seizing opportunity even as we deal with the potholes. There is no easy manual for these challenges, which you must navigate without benefit of previous experience. That will be no easy task, but you will manage it.

Yet ‘managing it’ is not the big idea. Nor is ‘doing it’ the big idea. No question, there will be plenty of ‘doing.’ But the secret sauce, what will enable you to put your stake in the ground, is the ‘being.’ Because in the end, the big idea is about who you want to be, and what price you are willing to pay to be that person. The development of you will be born from a relentless quest to discover the best version of you.

Which brings me to the point of all of this, a handful of challenges which that ‘best version of you’ will demand you face and accept:

- **Lose the excuses and justifications.** These are ‘tricks’ we invent to explain away unfulfilled commitments. Be smart: do not bite off more than you can chew, but once you accept a task, ‘own’ it and complete it as agreed. Even better, exceed expectations.

- **Don't dwell on yesterday or expect magic tomorrow.** Yesterday is history. Its value rests in how you apply what you have learned. And tomorrow is just tomorrow. It will be what you make of it when you get there. So, focus on today. Act today. Remember the lessons learned, think ahead, but live in the present and be present.
- **Give up your need to be right.** Whether from a desire for status, for control or for self-esteem, the urge to be right exacts far too high a price. It curbs creativity, crushes relationships, and erodes respect. In a team-oriented future, you must tame the need to be right.
- **Be yourself.** If you try to fool others, in time both your 'cover story' and your credibility will implode. So be authentic. You come into this life with useful tools. Apply them and play to your strengths. It is upon your strengths that you will build success.
- **Answers will find you** if you are patient and stay in the moment. Allow yourself to be quiet, curious and aware. You know what you know; however, it is often what you do not know which will decide the outcome. So, be calm. Embrace the mystery and welcome the new and unknown.
- **Do the right thing and do it for the right reasons.** You have lived long enough to know what is right and what is not right. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it. Do the right thing, and the hard choices will become more clear.
- **Live life with purpose and passion.** Life is not a rehearsal. Comedian Joe E. Lewis said, *"You only live once, but if you work it right, once is enough."* 'Working life right' happens when you are clear about what summons your enthusiasm and calls you to a full commitment. Find your voice and sing your song.
- **Do your best and be the best you can be.** You can do no more than your very best. But you don't have the right to do any less. Others are counting on you. So, if you are in, be all in.
- **Respect the power of human will.** You will be deceived, knocked down, stricken and your best efforts will fall short. There will be times you will exhaust intellect, talent and strength without a fair return. And you may feel that you cannot go on. Get back up, put disappointment behind you, and resolve to keep moving forward. Keep it simple: never give up.
- **Be caring and be kind.** These are genuine 'gifts of the heart,' and both are grossly underrated. Offer them freely, without exception or expectation of payback. And do so because they make the lives of others better. The bonus: they will return to you many-fold.

- **Forgive.** To forgive is to choose 'grace' over retaliation. Until you forgive, you are a hostage, conceding the rhythm and control of your emotions to another. Embrace those who have hurt you. It is how you reclaim your soul.
- **Share the power of love,** not just when loving is convenient or exciting, but when it is hard and messy and exhausting. Love others without getting tired. Be one who brings love when others walk away.
- **Believe in yourself,** in others, and in a wisdom that lies beyond human limits. Life will place hard choices and difficult obstacles across your path. You have no choice, you must handle these; however, you will be at your best when you set your course based upon standards which have stood the test of time.

Five decades ago, roasting under cap-and-gown below a fierce Ohio sun, my only goal was surviving that ceremony. The half-century stretching ahead of me never crossed my mind. Now, suddenly, it has become my last fifty years, a blur with large questions in its wake: *"Where did the years go? Were they all they could have been? And was I all I was meant to be?"*

You too will race through your next five decades, more quickly than you can imagine. And at the end of this passage, you will likely come upon the same large questions. So, make every day matter. Be yourself. Be curious. Do the right thing. Give back more than you take. Never quit. Be kind and caring. Be about love. And believe. Always believe.

That is a tall order, but if you can embrace it, when your time is finished and a grateful world weeps its loss, it will be your turn to rejoice. And you will do so, at peace with the precious days you were granted and the hard work which led you to the very best version of you.

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