

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES GRADUATION AT THE
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By

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Chairman of the University Council, representing the Chancellor
Members of the University Council,
Vice Chancellor,
Pro Vice-Chancellors,
Madam Registrar,
Provosts,
Members of the Advisory Board of the College of Humanities,
Members of Convocation,
Staff and Students,
Alumni,
Invited Guests,
Members of the Press Corps
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
Graduands,

Introduction

I am deeply honoured to address you today. I must thank the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Registrar and the Provost, College of Humanities for the opportunity to speak at this meeting.

The first time I came around this Great Hall, it was for my matriculation. The place felt really daunting and intimidating. Twenty-Three years (23) on, I am back here as the commencement speaker, even so this Hall seems still intimidating.

Congratulations to the Humanities and Social Sciences Class of 2019. You have graduated from the best University in Ghana! And one of the best in Africa!

I know you can't wait to take your selfies and create your snapchat and instagram videos. I should therefore be quick and straightforward in this speech.

For all parents, guardians and family members, a big congratulations to you. On behalf of the graduating class, I say thank you for your sacrifice and support throughout these last four (4) years.

This class could not have graduated today without all of your help! Of course, the teaching and non-teaching staff of this University also deserve grave acknowledgement. Your support for these students has been immense and for that we salute you.

I am a proud graduate of this University. A former student of the Economic Department and Law Faculty. I have many fond memories of the University of Ghana (UG). UG, gave me many things: Academic foundation, leadership skills, exposure and importantly many enduring relationships.

I know commencement speakers have a responsibility – to advise, encourage and provide hope to the graduating class. There is, however, no guarantee that anything that is said would be remembered anyway. I hope I would be lucky and that a few of what I say today would stay with you for a lifetime.

So, you are done with one phase of life – you are done with school – or are you? For some of you, this would be a terminal degree. Others may go on to pursue other or further academic interests. Whatever course you decide to take, the school of life has just now been opened to you. Your experiences and training here at the University of Ghana should hopefully help you navigate this new school you are about to enter.

It is fair to say however that your training and experiences here at the University of Ghana (UG), whilst helpful, could not have prepared you completely for the school of life. There are many more lessons to learn. You must, therefore, be open to learn new things and in some cases, unlearn a few things as you face life and the realities of it.

As you graduate, I shall like to touch on three of these lessons that are, for me, very important for this school of life:

1. Other people matter
2. Do not be defined by your failures
3. Control what you can and leave what you cannot control to luck/chance/miracles

Other People matter

In your quest for success and as you climb the ladder of life, remember always that “other people matter.” Your own happiness and indeed the survival, success and development of your community and country is dependent in part on your realization that other people matter too. This life is not only about you.

Dr. Christopher Peterson, who was a Professor of psychology at the University of Michigan notes that positive psychology research has shown that “*It is in the company of others that we often experience pleasure and certainly how we best savour its aftermath.... Good relationships with other people may be a necessary condition for our own happiness, even in the markedly individualist cultures like the contemporary United States.*”¹ So, keep the relationships you have developed in this University well and develop new ones.

It is undisputed that among you would be leaders of this country, Africa and the world in various capacities. Some will be lecturers, teachers, civil and public servants, international public servants politicians, parents etc.

You would have the two options set before you; You may choose to act entirely in your self-interest, in which case, you may not mind if you are unethical, corrupt and careless about what other people care about.

Alternatively, you may choose to act for the public good, understanding that people matter: be ethical in all your dealings, care about people and what concerns them, including the environment we live in.

Global warming is upon us. The United Nation (UN) reports that from shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk catastrophic flooding, the impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. We need urgent action from this generation because the future of the next generation is at risk.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-good-life/200806/other-people-matter-two-examples>

I invite you to begin today by taking little steps towards halting global warming and saving our planet. Can you all for starters decide to plant at least one tree within a month of your graduation to commemorate your graduation and invite others to do so too?

I commend you to share in the humanist African philosophy, “Ubuntu” which essentially means, I am, because you are.” In essence, “a person is a person through other people.”

Your success would be meaningless if it is at the expense of others. Indeed, all successes are meaningless if it is achieved at the expense of others. So, I urge you, remember always that people matter!

Let not failure define you.

I have had my fair share of failures, even academic failures, for which reason alone I should not be qualified to address this meeting.

In this very University, in my second semester in level 300, I failed one economics course, that really dropped my GPA. I was so determined not to let my failure define me that I gave thanks publicly in Methodist Presbyterian Union (MPU) on the Sunday following the release of the results to the amusement of the members in Church. I thanked God, even in my failure.

Here I am, addressing you after those academic failures. Indeed, my GPA notwithstanding, I had the opportunity to attend for my Masters in Law (LLM), Stanford Law School, perhaps the best and one of the most difficult law schools to be admitted into, with an admission rate of about 10%.

So, not even my academic failures stopped me from pursuing my academic interest in one of the best Universities in the world. After graduating from UG, I took every opportunity seriously and tried to be the best I could.

The point is this: your GPA is important but what you do with your GPA is even more important.

My message is simple, failure is the opportunity to begin again, but this time more intelligently! Failure will never overtake you if your determination to succeed is strong enough.

So, when you have to deal with failure now or in the future do not let failure hold you down.

Control what you can and leave what you cannot control to luck/chance/miracles

In context, I consider miracles as happenings that are beyond the capacity, capabilities or even expectations of man or woman. Some call it luck, others call it chance. According to the 18th centuries Scottish Philosopher, David Hume, Miracles are “violations of the laws of nature.”

I support dreaming! I am a dreamer myself. I agree that planning and hard work are necessary for survival and success. But I have also realized that there are times when hard work planning and preparation alone does not seem to work. Please understand this, in the school of life, it is not everything that you can control. It is not everything that depends on your efforts. Sometime you need a miracle or if like me you are a person of faith, you need God.

I am however convinced that you must learn to create or improve your own miracles or luck. In your hope to experience a miracle or luck, you must be deliberate and conscientious, prepare yourself by perfecting your craft. You must position yourself in such a way that will give you an advantage when you experience luck or a miracle.

Consider the oft used example of the sport of golfing: whether or not a golf ball, hit with a club will land in the hole depends on luck and who hits the ball. If the golf ball is hit by an amateur golfer, the chances of his luck producing the desired result is slimmer, as compared to the ball being hit by a professional golfer, like Tiger Woods. Tiger Woods spends several hours training and preparing and by that is able to improve his luck. So, you must be prepared for your miracle or luck. Luck is only beneficial to the one who is prepared.

When I started my firm, ADU-KUSI PRUC, formerly Law Bureau 11 years ago, I had to hope for a miracle-that I would get my first and other subsequent clients. I had left my otherwise very comfortable life as the head of legal department of a reputable bank and later as the Legal Advisor and Company Secretary for a Multinational Company to set up this firm. At that time, money was not the most important consideration for me. I simply wanted to do what I enjoyed and thought I

was good at- I had read a book earlier in my professional life which said “do what you enjoy doing the money would follow.” Besides, I thought setting up a law firm would give me opportunity to take on and train other lawyers.

I started that law firm with absolutely nothing except my personal writing desk and computer. Somehow, by dint of hard work, focus, a lot of luck and ofcourse the grace of God, our firm has grown to become a significant business law firm in Ghana.

Having worked to the best of my ability, I earned the trust and respect of all my previous employers. Accordingly, all the institutions I worked for in the past continue to use the services of my firm even up till today. I did well not to burn my bridges as I progressed.

Bottom line: work hard, control what you can control and leave what you can't control to miracles or luck. Your preparation and hardwork would but improve your luck.

The world is now open to you- go on explore it! Work hard don't let your failures keep you down, remember that people matter, prepare yourself for miracles. Go make yourself, your family, Ghana and Africa proud!

I must congratulate you once again. I wish you the very best in your future endeavours!

I thank you for your time.