

Quincy College Commencement Address

Greetings all and congratulations Graduates! When I graduated from Northeastern University my commencement speaker was Barbara Bush. When I graduated from Harvard Business School, the speaker was Madeleine Albright who was formerly the Secretary of State. Barbara and Madeleine were famous, powerful and accomplished women but I can't remember anything they said.

I am not famous and you likely have never heard of me before but I promise that you will remember my words today. At least some of them.

My gifts to you today are brevity and words of meaning in the form of four (4) pieces of advice that may help you throughout your respective lives.

Piece of advice # one: Listen to the Signs

No matter what religion you are or are not, you will likely receive signs as you move through your life. For example, when I was in High School, I joined the Army Reserves. On one weekend I was offered a choice of duties – one was to go to the motor pool and have fun with Army trucks and the other was to take a CPR and First Aid Class. By a show of hands how many would chose to play with the Army Trucks.

PAUSE – Show of Hands

The normal me would typically have chosen to play with the trucks as did all my friends. But I received a sign. I heard a voice tell me to take the CPR and First Aid class. So that weekend I received First Aid and CPR Certification. That was a Sunday. Two days later, on Tuesday evening, my father had a massive heart attack in front of my mother and me. I performed perfect CPR but it was not enough to save my father. It was his time and he died that night.

Although I was not able to save my father, I was prepared and I performed well. Had I skipped that class to play with the trucks, I don't think I could have lived with myself!

On many other occasions in my life, I have received signs that have guided me. I have always paid attention to them and I encourage you to do the same!

Repeat after me – listen to the signs (audience repeats)

Piece of advice # two: When someone tells you that you can't do something, know that you can, but it will require hard work and perseverance

Perhaps some of you here may have been told that school was not for you and that you couldn't attain an advanced degree. Well, you did it and today you are here at Commencement. Many, many people told me not to go to Army Ranger School because they thought I would fail. Statistically they were correct, for at that time 66% of soldiers who went to Ranger School washed out or quit. But I knew I could do it and I volunteered. In the Army, they say never volunteer but I was now a three time volunteer. Once to join the Army, a second time to jump out of planes, and a third to go to Ranger School. Along the journey I received and listened to several signs. One was a voice telling me I could do it. Another was the voice of the Command Sergeant Major of the 7th Infantry Division who was a very scary man. For those of you who are in or associated with the military, you know that when an individual is assigned to another command or sent to a school, it is common to have a formal departure Ceremony. In my case, the Command Sergeant Major grabbed me by the arm as everybody left the room after the departure ceremony. When we were alone in the room, he said to me "Sir, don't come back to my Division without a Ranger Tab" and then he walked out, leaving me alone in the room. I knew he meant what he said. A ranger tab is a small patch that is worn on the shoulder of Ranger School Graduates.

When I was at rock bottom at Ranger School having been awake and on the move without eating for several days, I didn't know if I could carry on. At that moment, I saw a reflection of myself in a mountain stream and in that reflection I saw a vision of myself with a Ranger Tab on my shoulder. The Ranger Tab is only worn by graduates of the Ranger School and although I knew the tab was not really there, I knew that it soon would be. After the third sign I know I could do it. It was hard but I persevered and I was the honor graduate of the school.

After that, I sent many soldiers off to Ranger School and I pulled each of them aside after the departure ceremony and told them that they were not welcome back to my unit without a ranger tab. They all made it.

So whenever someone tells me I can't do something, I know I can, and I know it will take hard work. So when someone tells you that you are going to fail, suck it up, work your butt off and succeed.

Repeat after me – Suck it up! Work your butt off! Succeed!

Piece of Advice # Three: Be like Mary Chartrand

As some you may know, during the past Academic Year, the College lost three members of the faculty and staff. Mary Chartrand, Sophia Costantino, and Nicole Parks. While I was not acquainted with two of these individuals, I did know Mary Chartrand. How many people here knew Mary Chartrand? How many loved and respected her?

For those who didn't know Mary, she was a professor and counselor at the school. Sadly, Mary passed away this past April.

Be like Mary Chartrand – be professional and passionate at what you do

Be like Mary Chartrand – take care of others around you and those who are in need

Be like Mary Chartrand – be a great friend and an empathetic listener

Be like Mary Chartrand – smile big and be a loving person

Repeat after me – Be like Mary Chartrand

I couldn't let you go without some emergency preparedness advice so here is my fourth and final piece of advice for you. Be prepared for emergencies.

If you are ever unfortunately in the presence of an active shooter remember the phrase: **Run – Hide – Fight**.

If you can run, run and run in a zigzag pattern. If you can't run then hide. Preferably go to a room with a door that you can lock, get low to the ground, silence your cell phone and get ready to attack the shooter if he/she comes into the room. If the shooter is in your presence, then your last option is to fight. When you fight, fight dirty and attack in numbers. Hit the shooter with a blunt object, gouge their eyes. It's difficult to shoot accurately if you cannot see.

So say it with me,– **Run Hide Fight**, get on your feet and say it with me, **Run Hide Fight**

To Summarize:

Listen to the signs
Suck it up, work your butt off, and succeed
Be like Mary Chartrand
Run, Hide, Fight

Quincy College Class of 2015, I'm Dan O'Neill and I salute you and what you have accomplished.

Thank you very much.