

To be perfectly honest with you, I'm not 100% sure if being good at maths, remembering things and writing essays means you should be able to give good advice to people, but I'm going to give it my best try. On that note, I want to open on a quote from one of the smartest people to ever live, Albert Einstein:

"The more I learn, the more I realise how much I don't know"

I never really let myself believe I could be standing up on this stage delivering this speech and even now, it doesn't feel quite right to see my name next to that number. There seems to be a disconnect between the person I envisioned I'd be if I achieved this goal and the person I am today. It's partly because I always looked at people who got high ATARs as somewhat mythical figures with godly powers, as high school teaches you to do. But they probably were just like me in the sense that they struggled making the connection between who they are and the praise and mythical aura they were appointed. I believe this conflict arises for a few reasons.

Firstly, because there is always a distinction between our expectations and reality that leaves us constantly wanting more, never quite satisfied. The challenge is to avoid basing our identity on some ideal future version of ourselves in order to validate our hard work, living in the moment instead. Because that ideal doesn't exist and will never exist and there will always be things we can improve on. Secondly, because honour and recognition are not and should not be primary reasons for pursuing excellence. The pursuit of excellence should be self-motivated and excellence should be to some extent, self sustained.

And so to all this year's Year 12's and anyone else aspiring for academic excellence: Yes, these are important years of your life that can really set you on the right path so: work closely with your teachers making sure you're confident you understand the content on a sophisticated and in-depth level and work hard to be constantly improving your skills, but most of all:

Don't do it for the recognition. Don't do it for the virtually meaningless number you will receive at the end. Don't do it so your parents will be proud of you, although I'll admit that is a great added bonus. Do it because you truly desire, within yourself to spend these formative years of your life pushing yourself to be stronger and more resilient everyday. Because once you get your results, they virtually evaporate into thin air and are lost forever and all that's left, and what you will take into the rest of your life is the person you became through all the tribulation. It's not going to be easy. But that's what makes it worthwhile.

Success is an ambiguous word, but if I was successful last year, it's not because of this accolade, rather it's because I've become more resilient and more knowledgeable in areas I am interested in, and have grown as a person through embracing and enjoying the year. I think most people who have delivered this speech will tell you success is all about hard work. And of course it is important, but I think they're missing something. My motivation to work hard and do well came from an excitement to learn more, and a deep fascination with and connection to what I was studying.

After all, you are free to pursue virtually whatever you choose, so why waste valuable hard work on something you're not passionate about? In light of this, I think passion is the most essential prerequisite for success, and perhaps finding that passion and pursuing it is success in and of itself.

There may be people in my cohort who didn't get invited here today who may start to convince themselves they were never meant for anything special, but the reality is I'm lucky to have found passion in an area that people think highly of and that's the only reason I'm standing up on this stage.

It may be a shock to hear that, but like I said, the reality is you don't have to be superhuman or all-knowing to get a 99 ATAR. You just have to be a bit socially awkward. But, seriously, I do genuinely feel like I have so much to learn and improve on,

and I would say one of the keys to my quote/unquote success last year was never quite feeling like I was living up to that false ideal of the godly 99 ATAR status. Always feeling like I didn't know as much as I needed to. Always looking for ways that I could improve my skills and knowledge.

And I think the same is true for life itself. In life, we are all, to some extent, students. And to be the perfect student of life, you have to embrace what you don't know and greet it with wonder, fascination and the openness to learn more. I've tried not to spend this whole speech preaching some academic ideology as if I have all the answers to what it means to achieve excellence, because the reality is, I don't have the answers, I don't think any of us really do.

But If you greet life with the humility and openness of accepting that we all know so little, I believe you will give yourself the power to see your own path. I think this is an important notion because it's ultimately one of the main reasons we go to school: discovering who you are and where you want to be. Just please don't forget that you only get one chance. If you choose to spend these years half-committing to studying subjects you're not interested in, doing only what's expected of you by your teachers, friends and family, and never venturing out to explore things that excite you or take risks, then you've probably deluded yourself into forgetting how precious life is.

The life you are living is yours and yours alone. Everyone here is an incredibly unique and miraculous culmination of billions of years of remarkable events and inexplicable phenomena. Not a single person shares the way you view and perceive the world around you. It is this uniqueness that gives you the power to achieve excellence, in your own individual way.

So don't shy away from this, don't try to fix it, don't adjust yourself so you can fit in. Embrace everything that makes you uniquely you, and set yourself on a path where you will flourish in expressing this uniqueness. Every struggle you have to overcome to follow this path will be worth it for the strength and courage you will gain, and the lessons you will learn.

In closing, I want to sincerely thank everyone who has been a part of my year 12 journey. Without the help and support of numerous people, I would not be where I am today. First and foremost my Dad, for whom I have gratitude that cannot be expressed in words, who has taught me the power of resilience in the face of life's greatest challenges. To the rest of my family for believing in me more than I believed in myself. My 12 teachers: The Doc, Ms Lees, Ms Pope and my year 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  teachers Robbo and Mr Winfield and all my other teachers who have helped me along the way. To the year 12 cohort of 2024: for the memories that will last a lifetime and for pushing me to be my best.

Wisdom and intelligence are not manifested in some score you receive on a test, but in gratitude for all the fruits of the here and now. Remember to enjoy the process, embrace the struggle and keep striving for your own individual excellence.

Thankyou and ecka dora