

My 2018 Commencement Address

It's that time of year again. High school and college students are graduating from their various institutions of public or higher learning, and that means they get to sit through another commencement speaker. Some are great (Michael Keaton's will be hard to top), some are okay, and most are...well, predictable. All inspiring and "reach for your dreams". Who wants to hear that?

In what is turning into at least a semi-annual tradition, I present the commencement speech I would want to give to graduating seniors.

To the Class of 2018, I have two words for you.

Now, what are you thinking those two words are? If you're a WWE fan, you might think those two words are "Suck it!" That would be appropriate if I were former President Bill Clinton, but no. If you're a comic book fan, you might think those words are "I'm Batman." Considering Michael Keaton beat me to it, it's not that. If you're polite, you might think those words are "Thank you." Not quite. Is it "I'm sorry"? No, that doesn't come until after my speech.

Give up yet? Well, I won't keep you in suspense any longer. The two words I have for you are...

Lighten up.

I know there are some of you out there who are thinking of two more words to say to me, but this is a family commencement speech. And, I want you to hear me out.

When I was your age, which was...far too long ago, I took myself way too seriously. I mean, I liked to have fun, but I thought I was the smartest thing since sliced bread. (Which, if you really think about it, isn't that smart.) That ended after my

very first class my freshman year of college. I walked in thinking I was brighter than everyone else and walked out knowing I wasn't.

I offer you the same advice I learned the hard way: lighten up.

Listen, I know you have a lot on your plates. Global climate change which may or may not be considered weather, potential school shootings, online bullying, and any number of other threats that never could have been conceived when I was in your shoes. You may think you have to grow up faster just to keep up with the issues that pop up on a regular basis. I used to think that way, too. But here's a little secret: this crap has been going on for decades. You're just the latest group to find out about it.

You have a few options on the table, though. Some of you will choose to try to fix the world's problems. Others will try to deny the problems exist. Still others will decide the world's problems don't have to be yours. After almost 50 years on this planet, I can assure you those of you in that last group are going to be a lot happier. Maybe not as happy as the people who deny the problems exist, but hey, you're close enough for government work.

That just leaves the fixers out to address. I'm one of you. I love digging into issues and trying to figure out how to resolve them, so I get why you want to change the world. The problem is most of the change you'll see is of the pocket variety, and most of your best efforts to fix the world will end in failure.

Brought the room down a bit, didn't I?

This is why it's important to lighten up. If you shoot for the moon and get frustrated you keep missing, you will get discouraged, depressed, or, worst of all, the urge to run for Congress. This is why it's important to lighten up: it helps

us calibrate our expectations to our abilities while making sure we're not too hard on ourselves in the process.

And that goes for the lot of you! Have we forgotten how to have fun and laugh? I have seen so many situations where we have assumed the worst from people merely for telling a joke that we didn't like. Except for you, Michelle Wolfe. You're just not that funny. We have reached a point where jokes are the source of more outrage than people and actions that deserve outrage.

Lighten up already! Not every joke is an example of the Patriarchy oppressing people or whites oppressing minorities or whatever the outrage du jour is on any given day. To paraphrase Sigmund Freud, sometimes a joke is just a joke. And it's only when we lighten up that we can recognize the jokes from the actual issues that need to be addressed.

And before the length of this speech becomes an issue, I'd better wrap it up. There's a big world waiting for you out there, and it's best experienced with a sense of humor and a smile on your face, if for nothing else than to confuse the people who don't have either.

Congratulations! Now, go out there and lighten up!