

Wisdom of the Ancients

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Spring Awards Convocation, May 6, 2014

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President Troha, platform party, faculty, staff, students, and visitors. When students graduate they are normally thrilled and terrified. I'm sure the members of the Class of 2014 are both. In this charged, anxious, happy atmosphere, it's customary for the speech-giver to give advice, although the best advice is often the advice we don't take. It's also the advice we don't remember.

I have some very simple things to tell you. I could load you up with a bunch of quotations from the Stoic philosophers or Shakespeare. But the reason this speech is called "Wisdom of the Ancients" is because it's advice I and people I know have learned through being older than you. Take note of these things. I promise you, if you put them into practice, you will not be sorry.

The first bits are things that you should do.

First. Learn the names of the people you see every day and greet them by name. Thank them when they help you. Here are some people you could thank. Mary Coleman is one of the regular baristas at Jitters; she's the lady who is glad to see you every time. You could thank Mary. You could thank the custodian who cleans up after you. You could thank Sam Brenneman. Sam is a plumber. He's the guy who cleans out the Founders fountain whenever some bright young thing decides to fill it with laundry soap, like this weekend. (You should know that it costs \$100 in labor and materials and 400 gallons of water every time this happens.) I'm grateful for Sam and I'm grateful not to be the one with the bucket. Try to pay attention to the people in your life who you should thank.

Next. Be pleasant. By this I don't mean either be fake-friendly or refrain from being mean. Be pleasant means to be genuine, positive, and attentive. It costs you nothing and can gain you a lot. I have reaped the benefits of this many times. Many years ago I made conversation with a nice woman who worked the checkout at Weis market. I had happened to give a speech that year, and she had heard the speech. Honestly I found it a little embarrassing to talk about a speech in the Weis checkout line. But that lady enrolled at Juniata as a non-traditional student in the education department. She eventually became my oldest son's first grade teacher. She was the one who told me to chill when I started to obsess because my son felt that learning to read was a waste of time. I built a fantastic relationship with my son's teacher

on the foundation of two minutes in the Weis check-out line. You never know when something like that will happen.

Next. Admit when you've screwed up. You can get a lot done if you say, "OK, what I did was a disaster. Let's fix it." Pretending it wasn't a disaster will not improve anything. I admit, it's hard to stand up and say, "It was me!" You will find, however, that your coworkers respect you more for your honesty. Nobody likes a poser. Also, fessing up gets easier over time. "Yup, that was me, I'm an idiot. "

The second bits are things you should not do.

Never pretend you know something that you don't know. We use information in our society as a form of social capital. So we tend to think if we admit that we don't know something, we are somehow showing that our intellectual wallet is empty. Grownups should know better, even grownups that attend academic conferences. I would add to this, don't lord it over people who don't know stuff that you know. Big whoop; information is easy to get. Work on how you use it.

Don't assume that you can be finished with learning new things because you're [blank] number of years old. You're educated; act like it. Learn a new language. Finally figure out how to work a spreadsheet. (True confessions: Excel still baffles me.) Start a new sport. Make polymer clay frogs. It doesn't have to be earth-shatteringly important. I'm learning Ancient Greek right now. After a year of study, I can read sentences like, "The next day the Greeks entered into battle with the barbarians upon the sea." I doubt my Greek reading skills will save the world anytime soon. It doesn't matter.

I must apologize to my husband for stealing this one from him, but he is so right about this that I must use it. (All together now, history students:) Don't be as funny as you can be. Refrain from that zinger in the business meeting that might turn out to be really insulting to the person across the table. I think everyone in this room could probably come up with an example of a situation in which they tried to be cute and failed.

Here's mine. I have an uncle who, in his forties, was known for dating women in their early twenties. He was wealthy and had a very fancy car and a high opinion of himself. I was in college and had an internship at a local historical society where there was an elegant lady, also in her forties, who was in an administrative position. One day a number of us who worked in the historical society were eating lunch in the break room, and she said to me, "Oh, I once went on a date with your uncle." I replied, "That's nice; he doesn't usually date women your age."

I'll admit to you, too, I was too young and too embarrassed to go and apologize to that lady, which I should have. I guess I was lucky he didn't marry her.

When to speak; when to be silent. It may sound a little silly to have a speech about speaking when you should, and not speaking when you shouldn't. However, these are also the kinds of advice that can, and should, be repeated often. Ask the faculty; they'll tell you these lessons are hard to learn.

To finish this brief speech, I want to invite a few colleagues up to the stage with me. They are going to help me share a congratulatory message for the Class of 2014. Let me introduce them first, and we can welcome them up.

Dr. John Bukowski won the faculty service award this past year, and of course he has spent the past half hour or so playing the organ for our ceremony. I decided, though, that didn't mean he should get out of having to be up on stage today. With him are the members of the well-known faculty vocal ensemble, the Over-Educated Men's Chorus, also known as the "Funny Hat Squad." Actually, they are just the four guys I forced to sing with me because they are all too nice to refuse: Dr. Russ Shelley, Elma Stine Heckler Professor of Music; Dr. Jamie White, William I. and Zella B. Book Professor of Physics; Dr. Jay Hosler, Professor of Biology; and Dr. Jim Tuten, Professor of History.

With apologies to Gilbert and Sullivan, we will present "The Professor's Song."

The Professor's Song

(sung to the tune of the "Policeman's Song," from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*)

When students aren't engaged in their employment
Or maturing all their graduation plans
Their capacity for innocent enjoyment
Is just as great as any honest man's.
Our feelings we with difficulty smother
When graduation duties are all done.
Taking one consideration with another,
A professor's lot is quite a happy one.

Chorus:

When graduation duties are all done, are all done,
A professor's lot is quite a happy one.

Oh, we watched you all arrive for your first year
And we watched you all a-storming of the arch.

We know you sometimes drank a little beer
And didn't study when you really ought.
But now to praise all your success we gather
And we feel some sadness and remember fun.
Taking one consideration with another,
A professor's lot is quite a happy one.

(Chorus)

To see the song performed, see <http://vimeo.com/94544686>.