

SANFORD BROWN

COMMENCEMENT – DECEMBER 6, 2013

Today, I am fortunate to be able to speak **for** a very special group of people. I said “for” instead of “to” because I am hoping that I am going to speak what you believe or at least want to believe. If I were graduating today the first thing I would say is “thank you” to my family, my friends, my school, and I’m sure others. If you have a family that has been there with you from the first day you started to a school to this very day – they are now sharing in a day of success. If you unfortunately did not have a natural family to support you or be here with you, your school family is here sharing your success.

You might ask – what do you mean “sharing my success” – I did it all on my own. Impossible – if nothing else you had a teacher that taught you, then they passed you, and a school that certified your achievement; you had a family that encouraged you, and probably a government that loaned you the money. What am I saying – we all have the right to smile when you walk across this stage. We can all share in the joy of this moment because your achievement also means our achievement; your success also means our success.

I am going to say it again and I just can bet there are students here today who may remember the first day and the first rule that I taught in any of my classes. If you were not a part of one of my classes – I’m going to give you the one lesson that you must now learn in life. Do you remember it? It is John Maxwell’s Law of Addition. It is on the first test of all classes that I teach. What is it? I believe it is the first law of success - -

RELATIONSHIPS ARE MORE VALUABLE THAN POSSESSIONS – the person that has everything, but who has no one, actually has nothing that can bring true happiness, unless you believe being locked in a bank vault staring at a million dollars for the rest of your life brings real happiness. Material wealth only brings happiness when you are sharing it with others.

Let’s Talk About the Meaning of Today’s Achievement

Another achievement at last - graduation! We look back at all the goals we have already accomplished. We learned to speak in our first year of life, and walk; we successfully climbed the ladder through elementary school, middle school, high school, and now college. We have arrived, we have achieved, and we have accomplished a lot of things, little goals, that got us to this achievement – BUT we are not talking about the rest of our lives – we are talking about today, the here and now, and this one goal. Today we are not celebrating all the achievements and goals that we have accomplished. We are celebrating the accomplishment of this one goal – AND GUESS WHAT – most of us have already started on the next one!

Achieving one goal at a time is an important concept that many people do not understand. They forgot that neither success nor failure is permanent. Success or failure should never be looked at as the whole of life. Today's achievement is not life's achievement. Today's success will surely contribute to tomorrow's successes, but it will not be the ONE THING IN LIFE that brings you success.

Let me give you a few very important statements by some very successful people:

Charles Evans Hughes wrote, "One of the most important lessons of life is that success must continually be won and is never finally achieved".

John D. Rockefeller said – "The secret of success is to do the common things uncommonly well".

But here is a quote from a man that understood this important principle – neither success or failure is permanent, so here is what he said about being successful:

"I do the very best I know how – the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so". The man who made this statement had the following career:

1831 – he failed in business

1832 – he ran for the state legislature and was defeated

1833 – he opened a new business and it failed again

1834 – he got elected to the legislature, but in 1835 his sweetheart died, and in 1836 he had a nervous breakdown

In 1838 he ran for the speaker of the house and was defeated; he ran for office again in 1840 and was defeated; he ran for congress in 1843 and was defeated; he finally got elected to congress in 1846, but was defeated again in 1848. He ran for the U.S. Senate in 1855 and was defeated. He ran for Vice President in 1856 and was defeated. He ran for the Senate again in 1858 and was defeated. Finally in 1860, Abraham Lincoln became the President of the United States.

When I read the story of Abraham Lincoln I am reminded that I cannot tell you the names of all the presidents of the United States. But it was not the fact that Abraham Lincoln finally became President that we call him successful. Out of 44 presidents of the United States, how many know anything about what Benjamin Harrison did, or Grover Cleveland, or William Howard Taft. How many of us remember William McKinley, Rutherford B Hayes, or James Garfield.

We remember Lincoln was not because he became successful by becoming President, we remember him because he kept his promise – I do the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so, and in doing so, Lincoln changed the course of history so that even in the year

2013 they made another movie about the man who brought an end to slavery in the United States.

Winners versus Losers

Let me give you some differences between winners and losers – those that are successful and those that are failures. But remember success and failure is not permanent. The fact is that both only speak of an experience in life that can become a stepping stone or stumbling stone. A successful man was once asked,

“What is the secret of all you have accomplished?” The man replied, “Good judgment”. He was then asked, “Where did you learn good judgment?” The man answered, “I learned good judgment from experience”. Finally he was asked, “And from where did you gain your experience?” The successful man answered, “From poor judgment”.

- A winner says “Let’s find out”. A loser says, “Nobody knows”.
- A winner makes a mistake and says, “I was wrong”. When a loser makes a mistake he says “it wasn’t my fault”.
- A winner goes through a problem, a loser goes around it.
- A winner makes commitments; a loser makes promises.
- A winner says, “I’m good, but not as good as I ought to be”; a loser says, “I’m not as bad as a lot of other people are”.
- A winner tries to learn from those that are superior to them while a loser always tries to tear down those that are superior to them.
- A winner says, “there ought to be a better way to do it”; a loser says “that’s the way it has always been done”.

Closing Remarks

Today you have achieved success. I expect for the rest of your life you will achieve some successes and you will have some failures. Today’s success will contribute to tomorrow’s successes; it will not contribute to any failures, but more importantly it should be seen for what it is, an achievement that represents what I really believe. How is that?

You see – my degree did not come easy. Perhaps I never failed a class, but my spirit failed at times when I thought about “can I make it”. There were a few times when I would not say that I was successful with the paper that I turned in – I could have done better, and I just got by. I did not do as Abraham Lincoln said because I did not always do the best I can. So I readily admit for those times when I did not do the best I could, I was a failure – but it was temporary. I forced myself to do better because I was determined to achieve my goal. And now I have done it.

It has not been easy. A little old lady once said, “Son you could not climb the mountain if it was smooth.” Today I climbed to the top of this mountain and guess what I see – there’s another

mountain over there for me to climb but there is only I one problem – to get there I have to go downhill, and through a valley before I can climb that next mountain.

Now some people might say going downhill is a sign of failure, but I say it is the only way I can reach the next mountain to climb. As we have already stated – success and failure are not permanent. I believe that statement to be absolutely true except in one case. Failure is not permanent unless you quit trying.

Today's achievement is the one proof that what we have just said is true. Thank you.