

Graduation Speech

Ryan Mohr | given May 19, 2006

I was told to write something short, sweet, and uplifting. But I'm not a great orator. I'm up here based not upon my wisdom, but upon how I performed in school. However, I must speak about something, and incoherent rambling doesn't really capture the moment. I would rather speak about something poignant.

I have found, or rather seen, that one of the most important qualities you can exhibit is integrity. The quality of any work you do is evaluated with respect to the integrity of your character. Yes, your work may have merit based only upon what problem it solves or how much money it saves the company, but we do not live in a world that evaluates worth solely upon the end effect. And if we do, we should not. We interact with people; we work with them and form relationships. You will be judged not only on what your work accomplishes but on how you accomplished it.

When I say integrity, I'm talking about how you carry yourselves and how you treat others. I'm talking about showing respect to those you don't agree with; about letting others live the lives they wish without pressuring them towards your own viewpoints. I'm talking about letting others have their own opinions, whether it be about politics, religion, or life in general and realizing that it's okay that they don't follow lock-step with your opinions.

In that sense, VCU has been a proving ground for us. The school has provided the opportunities for growth of character, and it has tested us beyond the limits we've placed upon ourselves. All of us have been swamped with work at one time or another, seemingly without a way to finish it all by the deadline. We could have taken the easy way out. We could have cheated or asked for extensions others didn't get. But, I'd rather think that we carried ourselves with integrity and dignity, and found it within ourselves to accomplish our tasks without the crutches we could easily have used. I'd like to think we found qualities within ourselves that would have remained hidden without our attendance at this school. The challenge now is to carry that integrity and those qualities throughout the rest of our lives.

But who am I kidding? Maybe I'm incredibly naïve. I'm not some old man looking back upon a lifetime of experience, cautioning you on how to avoid the pitfalls of life. My viewpoints are definitely neither new nor revolutionary. I'm just a kid who's found what works for me. You should do the same and find what makes you happy. Hopefully, the world will be a better place for it.