

Good Evening Mr. Marshall, Educators, Parents and most importantly Graduates. I am honored to be here with you today for the awards ceremony for the graduates of 2016.

Before I commence I think they deserve another round of applause.....

I won't take up too much of your time, as I am sure you are interested in getting to the point where you receive your fancy diplomas and shiny trophies.

I am a proud graduate of Oude Molen myself, having graduated in the class of 2001. Some of my best memories coming from my time at Oudies.

Mr. Marshall kindly asked me to talk about 3 topics today.

- 1. Overcoming challenges/difficulties**
- 2. The qualities that employers are looking for in graduates and employees.**
- 3. How men are better men if they encourage, support and partner girls and women too.**

However, on point number 3 I am not too sure I am able to give any good feedback unfortunately (joke).

For the first topic

Overcoming challenges/difficulties

I found that nothing in life is worthwhile unless you take risk. Nothing!

Nelson Mandela said "There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living."

As you are sitting here today, the top achievers of 2016, you would have had to push yourselves to be successful. Some of the papers you might have attempted you would have done exceedingly well, others you might have not achieved your personal objective.

Guess what, keep trying, and this time try even harder.

Thomas Edison conducted 1000 failed experiments, because the 1001 was the light bulb!

Every failed experiment is one step closer to success, you have got to take risks to eventually become successful.

I was always scared of failure, throughout my high school career I never failed any subjects, I played first team rugby, I was an achiever (or so I thought). Whilst doing my National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering I failed my first ever subject, and guess what, it was liberating. I was still alive, my world did not end. I realized where I made my mistakes and I returned the following year even more focused.

In 2012 I was approached with an exciting opportunity to take the position as CEO of an international renewable energy companies business operations in Africa, this at the age of 29 years old. At the time I took this opportunity I had no idea what was to come, all I knew it was a high risk move from a secure corporate role. I made many mistakes, I had some success stories, but I learnt so much, and grew so much as a professional and individual, which has prepared me for the many exciting opportunities which came thereafter.

For your years ahead, you will be presented with personal challenges/difficulties. However, I firmly believe that each challenge or difficulty is an opportunity to learn something new, to grow as an individual and to be taken out of our comfort zones to enjoy new experiences.

For the second topic

The qualities that employers are looking for in graduates and employees.

In recent years the level of competition for employment has increased, while the number of available jobs has decreased, this requires a prospective employee to have some form of X-factor to differentiate themselves.

So what are the qualities employers are looking for?

I think it goes without saying that the qualifier for any company to even want to interview or consider you, is your performance in school/university. So I am confident that the group present here today has that covered already.

Over and above that, when I reflect on my assessment process for new hires, their grades are secondary, I am looking at the individual.

We should always remember that People employ people, not companies. So what does this mean? Employers want to hire people who;

1. Understand their own path

Each person in this room is traveling and experiencing your own unique journey. Are you able to understand and comprehend it? Can you identify the critical moments in your life, that lead you to where you are today, and where you think you want to go to? I can. And it is a powerful feeling to understand this.

4. Know what they want in their own career

- a. Employers look for 'self-directed' new hires, and here's what that means. They want people who know what they want and are willing to work for it.

I met a new grad who told me "I'm interested in starting my own company someday but I expect that to happen some years from now. In the meantime, I want to learn all I can about how a business works."

This is the kind of vision great managers look for.

5. Know your strengths

- a. Employers are looking for people who know what they are good at. This allows the employer to understand where the individual could add value to the organization. Additionally it allows the individual to identify what kind of people they need to partner with to compliment their skill set. The most successful CEO's surrounds themselves with a team that are specialist in areas they are not. This allows them to make informed and effective decisions.

6. Think independently

- a. Strong managers want to hire people who have their own ideas. In every job interview, take the opportunity to share an opinion, rather than a cookie-cutter, standard answer

to your interview question. Managers need smart people around to brainstorm with -- so why shouldn't that smart person be you?

7. Have ambition
 - a. Having ambition means you have the goal of getting smarter and stronger throughout your life. It could mean moving up the corporate ladder, starting your own business or going off the grid to something completely new. Good employers look for people with ambition.
8. Get involved
 - a. Employers look for people who get involved, and not those who just show up. Great managers look for people who put their hands up, this shows willingness to want to learn, to grow and shows the level of ambition of the individual. Use the opportunity during your high school career to get involved in social clubs, do something to add value to your peers. This shows that your interest are not only internally motivated.
9. Work well in teams
 - a. Nearly every manager will tell you that teamwork is a critical attribute for anybody on his or her team. Be ready to answer the question "Tell me about how you function on a team" with a colorful story about a situation that required teamwork, and in which your team came through!

Always remember that organizations are lead by people. Strategies are developed, implemented and executed by people. The most important investment any organization can make is employing the "right" people. You are the most important asset to any organization if you apply yourself.

Lastly the most important and controversial topic

1. How men are better men if they encourage, support and partner girls and women too.

I would like to share my personal view on collaboration between sexes. In my limited experiences in life, I have learnt to appreciate that each person has their own unique value and qualities which they bring to the table. Regardless of race, gender, age, etc. I believe in identifying the value a person can add to my life or organization. In doing so, I always attempt to look beyond the vessel I see standing in front of me, but rather what the individual can offer in terms of skills, wisdom or any other form of enrichment I deem valuable on a personal or professional level. Collaboration to me is something which I find important, extracting value from collective thinking and acting.

In closing I would urge you to always remember that each person has is unique, and has a purpose in which they could add value to you. It is your job to understand what kind of people you need in your life to help you move forward, without being bias.

And lastly I would like to end off with one of my favorite quotes from the pursuit of Happiness "Don't ever let someone tell you that you cannot do something. You got a dream, you got to protect it. When people can't do something themselves, they're going to tell you that you can't do it. You want something, go get it."

Thank you very much for your time and all the best for the years ahead.