

William Angley

[silently: Today is a good day to EMPATHIZE]

This is it. Today marks the end of an era in all of our lives. Today is the day that we graduate from Loudoun County High School. Tomorrow, we will no longer be seniors; we will be graduates. But we will still be the same people that we are today.

Today is a special day both for us as students and for the school as a building. We are the fiftieth class of students to graduate from this building. Many of our graduates are with us today for this event. At every graduation, the school has hosted several speakers. This year, one is ~~always~~ a distinguished community member, one is a teacher, and the other is the valedictorian.

But there are four messages being presented this year, not three. Three of them come from the speakers; the fourth one comes from your experiences and beliefs. Graduation is a reminder to look back at your experience in high school. Just as the high school has changed, you have changed as well. You are not exactly the same person that you were as a freshman. In all likelihood, you have matured greatly and your experience has changed the way you act in ways that are so subtle you never noticed them.

A school is a living building in two ways.

The physical structure itself is not fixed. The school district maintains the building by cleaning it, by renovating it, and by adding new wings on as the need arises. Our school is nearly twice as large now as it was fifty years ago.

And the culture is not fixed. A high school represents a tradition and way of life that has come down over as many years as the building itself has stood. It is, for all of you, four years of memories and actions. The way you behaved in school has changed it forever, and has changed you forever. Because of your actions, we graduate once more on our front lawn.

When I say "Loudoun County High School," I evoke living memories. Think for a second. What has high school meant for you? The knowledge is not the only thing that makes it special; you can get knowledge in any one of many ways. It is the experience-possibly even one experience-that has made it special. Sports, events, and friends. In the years that you have been here, students from our school won its first ever state sports championship. You have gone to homecoming together, you have gone to prom together, and you graduate together today. This is the essence of high school-the togetherness. We will never forget. And today

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is about you. I have one last message for you, as friends,  
as students, and as people.

There is no formula for success.

Because there is no formula for you.

When delivered, #N was 221.  
There are [#N] seniors looking at me right now. And  
there are [#N] different lives here. And there are that  
many "right" things to do, if not more. You have to choose  
the life that will suit you best. I don't know what that  
is. And no one else does.

You do.

Sooner or later, you have to make your own choices. And  
you have to realize that no one else can make those choices  
for you because no one else knows you as well as you do.  
I'm telling you to be different, and to be proud of it.  
Don't try to be like me. Or like the person next to you.  
Try to be like yourself.

You can pay a psychiatrist to analyze your subconscious  
mind. But in the end, it isn't his subconscious mind. Or  
his conscious mind. It's yours.

You can read as many books as you want on becoming a  
better person. You can hear as many speeches as you want.  
But, when the day is over, you will have only part of the  
key to success. ~~You are the rest of that key.~~ All of us  
can become better people than we already are. All of us  
can have happy, fulfilling lives. But we can never become  
the same "better person" as our neighbor, and still expect  
to have that happiness and fulfillment.

Most of you know what your parents and friends want you  
to be. They may know you well, and they may have your best  
interests in mind. But they're not you. Take control of  
YOUR life. Figure out what YOU want. You don't need to  
make a snap decision. You have time. And you have a life.  
Use it well.

Don't waste your time trying to rationalize to yourself  
what you will do with the rest of your life. If you're in  
it for the money, the government publishes lots of career  
outlook handbooks for you to use. But none of those  
handbooks can tell you if you will enjoy a job or not.  
Only you can. You can't make yourself like something just  
because someone has told you that you "should" do it. Do  
what YOU should do. Be yourself. That's the best person  
in the world that you can be.

I wish all of you the best of luck, success, and  
happiness.