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Ben [], Graduation Address

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A Commencement Speech at High School
Jule Lake - Tri-State High School
Guy Cook

Some people spend their lives trying to be something for which they are by nature unfit. If a man is mechanically inclined, why should he struggle to be an artist or a singer? There is a place in the world for all three. True, if a person has an interest in art and music, he should further it. But often his pursuit is better consigned to the position of an avocation. Why should a person without a good voice persist in being a singer? Let him rather study music as a sideline and find pleasure in enjoying music as an auditor. Likewise the person with an eye for fine art, but without the talent to create it, can be much happier, once he has formed his judgment, in evaluating the works he sees in art galleries. The same applies to would-be authors. There are too many books flooding the market today which were better unwritten. Their authors have expended their talents on the first book, and thereafter they simply repeat the first tale. Let them be content to read. In other words, let each do the work for which he is best suited.

The mechanical aptitude I mentioned earlier may yield something truly beneficial to the world; whereas, if that person persists in preparing for a position he cannot hold, there will simply be another frustrated man in the world.

On the other hand, once a person has found his talent or capacity, he must strive ceaselessly to utilize it to the fullest possible extent. Develop your little talent into a big one. Too many of us are too easily satisfied with ourselves and our accomplishments. Only one in several thousand ever makes the most of what he has. The rest of us lament over our inabilities or, worse yet, blame our environment. The lives of great men

who overcame seemingly insuperable obstacles should be held constantly before us as examples of what men can make of themselves if they have the courage and persistence.

The man who surrenders to the first discouragement will not succeed. The gold miner who gives up when he strikes the first hard stratum of rock will never know wealth; the builder and the farmer who do not persist will have no building nor produce to show.

Difficulties make men great. Unpleasant working conditions, disheartening physical handicaps, fatigue, hunger, and other difficulties sharpen the mind just as specialized exercise toughens the body. Develop a desire, want something badly enough, determine strongly enough to get it, let nothing prevent you from following the course you have decided-upon, providing it is not ignoble, and your efforts are sure to be crowned with success in the end.

Determination is what we need: determination to strive, to study, to work long hours, and to forego pleasures in order to put our motto "Excelsior" into play. When we complain about trivial things, think of the men who spent weeks on life rafts after the torpedoing of their ships--think of the men who froze in the winter in this great war. It's our duty to be determined or "stubborn" if you want to call it that, to do everything we can to make some real contribution to the world. We all need strength of character ~~firmness~~ strength of mind. These can be developed only by forcing ourselves to do things we would rather not do and by carrying out our resolutions.

We must be "tough", too. History has proved that the only way to make men tough is to subject them to conditions which require work and sacrifice.

Pampering makes men soft. After graduation many of you may be tempted to ease up on your mental exercise. Never do that! Continue to discipline yourselves--be constantly on the alert so as to get the greatest possible benefit from every experience. However, lest you want "to build Rome in a day" let me caution you, as well, not to be afraid of going slow--be afraid only of standing still.

The majority of the people are lazy. Unless driven by some great ambition, they drag along, doing just enough to get by. They are the procrastinators, promising themselves to do something eventually to improve themselves mentally, physically, financially, and to maintain themselves at a high peak, morally. But years pass and they accomplish nothing. Procrastination and lack of faith have always been the cause of the world's greatest failures. For example, one of the greatest maritime failures, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, was result of lack of faith. The Spanish Armada was the greatest fleet the Renaissance world had ever seen. Yet this magnificent fleet, the mightiest in the world, was met by a little fleet under Ad. Howard and decisively defeated. Why? Not because the Spanish were not so brave as the English, not because their guns were inferior, but because the commander of the Spanish Armada had no faith in himself.

It won't be our duty to sail a large Armada but, instead, to sail our own ship of life, and in so doing we must have faith and confidence in ourselves.