

Speech by Mr Mark Rosevear, Principal

Kurt Vonnegut remarked that, *'True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.'* Thirty years from now, that might be one of you, so look around you. And be very afraid!

One of the most popular anti-heroes of our time, Homer Simpson, once said, *'kids, you tried your best and failed miserably. The lesson is never try.'* A more appropriate quote, from Sir Winston Churchill, is that *'success is not fatal, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts'*. But failing is difficult and not everyone reacts to it well. Some cannot ever accept that the reason for their failure is their own. There is nothing wrong with failure if you have done everything you possibly can to ensure success. Sometimes you need to look for a new way to succeed, and carrying on doing the same thing when it has not worked before makes little sense. Confucius wrote that, *'A man who commits a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake'*. Sometimes we must reassess what we have done, and go down a different path. Situations that seem hard or complicated require perseverance and determination but as Nelson Mandela said, *'It always seems impossible, until it is done'*.

I was interested in listening to a mother saying to her young son recently, 'you are not allowed out for two weeks because you made a bad decision'. It was a different way of saying that the child had done something wrong, but probably a more relevant way of saying it. Whatever he had done, he had not chosen well. It reminded me of the scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade when Indiana has to choose which of all the cups is the Holy Grail, and the old knight says, *'choose wisely'*. Making difficult decisions takes courage.

You all chose two years ago to finish your schooling here. Was it a good decision? Almost certainly, in all cases. You have completed your schooling in one school. You have studied an internationally recognised, rigorous academic programme. You might have taken part in MUN. You might have played for a successful school rugby, hockey or football side. You might have taken part in a musical watched by almost 10,000 people. All of these experiences will help you as you move through life, and life is a series of decisions. You will get some wrong, so follow Churchill's advice and move on with courage. Sometimes you will realise you have made a wrong decision, and there is no point in continuing down the same path, in which case you will need to rethink your options. But Homer Simpson's advice, of not trying, is not going to get you very far.

It has been said that one person's misfortune, is another person's opportunity. Sometimes luck can play a part in life, although as any gambler will tell you, it is best not to leave a great deal to chance. Most professional gamblers know statistics and probabilities as well as any mathematician. The very misunderstood statesman, and arch pragmatist, Niccolo Machiavelli, understood that luck plays a part in one's success. *'Fortune may be the arbiter of one half of our actions, but she still leaves us the other half...to our free will.'* One of the greatest golfers, Gary Player, once hit an outrageously good and seemingly impossible shot. His opponent said, 'wow, that was lucky'. Player, who practised long before practising in golf was seen as necessary, replied, *'do you know, the more I practice, the luckier I get'*. Napoleon Bonaparte was famous for saying that he did not want good generals, he wanted lucky ones. We all know people who seem to do well in whatever they turn their hand to, but I am confident all of these people worked hard to obtain what they want, and then made the most of the opportunities that came their way.

The last word I want to use tonight is responsible. It means being responsible to your parents, to your teachers, to your school, to yourself, and to your friends. Those of you who think that you can turn your back on this responsibility, are wrong. Take just one example. Your school. This school has been in existence for 110 years.

Thousands of people have been educated here, including many of your parents and family. You are a part of its history, and everything you do reflects on the school, whether those actions are positive or negative. This will continue after you have left. The same goes for your friends or classmates. You have been with them now for years. You will still see them after you leave the school, so keep in touch - and remember that one day, one or more of them might be running the country!

I said at the beginning of the year that for obvious reasons, this being my first year and your last, I would not get to know you very well. I have managed to get to know some of you, and I want to wish every one of you every success for the future. If leaving speeches from Head Boys or Head Girls are anything like they are in other schools, then I am sure Alana and Jose are going to expand on you as individuals or as a group, so I will not intrude in that area. I hope you look back on your time here fondly. I also hope that you have learned how to make good decisions, and learned that being responsible is a requirement, not an option.

I will finish with a famous speech from Theodore Roosevelt, known as 'the man in the arena speech'. I apologise to the ladies and girls present but this was written in less enlightened times, and today the man could easily be 'the woman'.

'The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds;who knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.'

Albert Camus wrote that, '*life is the sum of all your choices*'. So, choose wisely. Keep trying. Be responsible in every sense. Be the man – or woman – in the arena. And be lucky.