

It is wonderful to see everyone here tonight. I have seen some of you since you left, and if I saw any of you and did not acknowledge you, and this includes parents as well as students, please forgive me. After over 20 months of only seeing people's eyes, it is not always easy to recognise someone, especially as I am a relative newcomer to this community. And it is a big community, of which the class of 2020 now belongs to the group of around 10,000 former students of The British Schools.

I am going to take the unusual step of thanking some people now, rather than at the end of my speech. The teachers and academic staff helped you get the results and kept you sane, while the administrative and maintenance staff made certain we kept to the necessary protocols and that we were able to keep the school open. In particular, I would like to thank all of the 2020 Senior Management Team of Andrew, Cecilia, Florencia and Vicente, for making sure the 2020 year ended successfully and you were able to complete your studies.

The one thing you will learn as you go through life, is that it is full of surprises. After we sent you the survey about this event, I doubt if you would guess the first person to reply? I am pleased it was one of my tutor group. Santos Figueroa, I am delighted to see, has remained as punctual as ever since leaving school.

Felipe and Paulina, the Head Boy and Head Girl made a speech to the School in March 2020, and I doubt very much they contemplated that their next speech would be in November 2021. Everyone always talks of change and how times are different to before, but in the two years since you started Year 6, the world has changed beyond all recognition. At the beginning of March 2020, you were getting ready for your last year at school. Then, on Friday 13th March schools were first closed. Interestingly, in English, Friday 13th is considered an unlucky combination. For those of you wondering why, there are many different theories, including a number of traumatic Old Testament events or the crucifixion of Jesus, while it was also the day that Philip of France rounded up the Knights Templars and effectively ended their organisation. Your final year was nothing like that, but it was disrupted, disjointed and, dare I say, disappointing. But you did graduate, and you did obtain your IB Diplomas, many of you with excellent results.

Confucius wrote that, 'The hardest thing of all is to find a black cat in a dark room, especially if there is no cat'. That sounds almost Yoda – like, but his point is an excellent one. We can spend hours looking for answers that are just not there. We might want answers, most of us do, but it can drive us to distraction trying to find them, or even if they exist. It is not very often you will hear Tom Petty quoted in the same paragraph as Confucius, but when he sang that, 'most things I worry about, never happen anyway', you might begin to see what advice I am trying to offer.

Nobody has complete control over their own destiny, but the more you can focus on what is important and what is not, what is worth worrying about and what can be ignored, and what you need to prioritise and what to discard, you will find life easier to manage. And how do you learn what is important and what is not? Experience helps, which often means making bad decisions and learning from them. And you will have to make decisions, some where you can listen to advice first, and others where you will need to think for yourself. Never forget the importance of listening. As Ernest Hemingway said, 'when people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen'.

You need to listen, and then you need to think. Henry Ford, who you can always rely on for a blunt quote, said that 'thinking is probably the hardest work there is, which is probably why so few people engage in it'. Have the courage to think for yourself. General George Patton, another colourful character, once said that 'if everyone in the room is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking'. Do not always follow the herd, but often there is a good reason why the majority think the same way. And, there will be a time when you will need the courage to think for yourself. You will learn when something doesn't feel right, and that is when you will need to think differently, after listening to all options. Confused? Good! Because that is life as you get

older. Sometimes we have seen a similar event before, so we know what to do and the decision is easy. Other times, such as the past 20 months, we have to decide what to do and we have no experience to help us. This is when analytical thinking and decision-making is of paramount importance. As Peter Drucker commented, 'making good decisions is a crucial skill at any level'.

I will leave you with a story for you to think about, but might entertain you as well. As you get older, you will attend many leadership courses, or teamwork seminars. I have been to my fair share, some of which I enjoyed, others less so. But as I was writing this speech and thinking about making decisions, I remembered the strangest course. After a while the presenter said, 'I want you to imagine you are a fruit.' Being someone who likes the unusual, that got me interested. Then my interest turned to horror, because the next instruction was, 'turn to the person next to you and explain what leadership qualities the fruit you have chosen possesses'. I will not tell you what I chose, or what I said, as maybe you might want to do this for yourselves one day. Or not. Life is full of surprises.

You are now at university, and I hope you are enjoying it. Don't always go looking for black cats in dark rooms. Concentrate on what you can control, not what you cannot. Think carefully and think for yourselves, do not always follow, but sometimes following can be good. And be careful what fruit you choose.....