

Y6 Graduation

Constantly looking back serves little purpose. Nothing can ever be the same again, and trying to compare the present and the past is like comparing apples to oranges. As Sir Winston Churchill said, *'If we open a quarrel between the past and the present we shall find that we have lost the future'*. It is essential to learn from the past, but to constantly live in it is unhealthy. The only exceptions to this rule are reunions and graduations. This is your last night as students of the British Schools, and as such, it should be a night for memories and celebration. Some of you entered here fourteen years ago, others later, and after tonight, you will all be former students. Many of you will go on to extremely successful careers, and although you might think you can predict now who those people might be, you cannot. I heard of one graduation speech where the guest speaker said, *'To those of you who received honors, awards and distinctions, I say well done. And to the C students, I say you too may one day be President of the United States.'* He was one of those C students, and he did become President. Afterwards, I will see if anyone can guess who he was. I will leave the remembering of your school lives to Sofia and Bautista, who will tell it far more interestingly than me.

You will face challenges in life, but so does everyone. You have the tools to overcome them, but you need to face the difficulties positively. Sir Clive Woodward was once asked how his England rugby team would react to a defeat. *'We don't lose,'* he replied. *'We either win, or we learn'*. Similar comments have been made by others, but it is the ability to address setbacks successfully, and learn from the experience that define who we become. Thomas Edison said, *'I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work'*. The idea that we are afraid to fail, or that everyone succeeds all of the time, is unproductive, unrealistic and unhelpful.

Schools are meant to be places of creativity, but this was not always so. By the time of the industrial revolution, the purpose of schools was to give children basic skills such as reading and writing and to provide workers for the work force. Original thought was not welcome. Now look at today. People value original thinkers, but it is knowing when to follow the current course and when to look for new solutions, that makes for a great thinker. General George Patton said, *'if everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking'*. He did not say that the person who was thinking differently was necessarily correct, but it was the fact that the person was looking at the problem from another angle, which was important.

We also make assumptions about people, which many times are often wrong. Combining making assumptions and thinking differently, let us move to the unusual world of hot dog eating. Competitors have 12 minutes to eat as many as they can, including the bun and in 2001 the world record stood at 25. It came to the turn of Tokeru Kobayashi, who weighed just 60kg. His opponents were, shall we say, a lot bigger, and made the mistake of misjudging him. They assumed that all top hot dog eating champions had to be big people. 12 minutes later, he had demolished over 50 hot dogs, more than double the record. When asked how he managed this, he explained that when training, he had focused not on eating 26 to beat the world record, but on how quick he could eat one. He then did the maths and realised more than 26 was easy. It was a different method, a new approach, original thinking. And his opponents hopefully learned not to judge without doing some good research.

You must also be honest with your own strengths and weaknesses. Even if you are a good judge of other people's character, being a poor judge of your own abilities is going to make life difficult for you. When you are young, it is often difficult to accept you might be wrong, but

believe me, being honest with yourself gets easier as you get older. Joe Strummer of The Clash said that, *'When you blame yourself, you learn from it. If you blame someone else, you don't learn nothing, cause hey, it's not your fault, it's his fault over there'*. By being honest, or self-critical, you become a better person, and more likely to work well with others. A fear of criticism limits development. This is true of people, organisations, teams or groups.

I know you have enjoyed your time here, but nothing in life remains the same forever, no matter how good it is. Confucius wrote that, *'Even the finest sword plunged into salt water will eventually rust.'* So, remember your days here fondly, but now they are in the past, do not live in them. Look to the future with optimism. Challenge yourself, but do not expect to win every time. Everything you do adds to your experience, and that will help you. The more experience you gain, as long as you apply it well, the better. Stan Smith, the American tennis player, said that, *'Experience tells you what to do; confidence allows you to do it'* So be confident. Think differently, but at the same time understand that you do not always need to act on your thoughts, it is often enough simply to think. Do not judge people based on appearance or hearsay, find out for yourself about that person, and do not always blame other people when something goes wrong.

And finally, do not try to eat 50 hot dogs in an hour.