

OAK VIEW CAREER DAY
JUNE 7, 2011

Oak View Elementary Career Day

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Good morning Oak View!

Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of your career day.

Talking with students like you is what keeps me going. Your energy is better than any strong cup of coffee or Gatorade!

How many of you know what you want to be when you grow up? Let me hear who and what you want to be- all together, shout it out!

Wow- some big ambitions in here!

I hope that no matter what you decide to do, part of your journey will include many more years of school. At Montgomery College, we have a way to help you earn a degree or certificate for just about anything you want to do—from becoming a nurse, a teacher, a doctor, a motorcycle mechanic, a PE instructor, a firefighter, a chef—you name it and we can help you get there.

But I know right now middle school is on your mind, not college.

So let me start by telling you a little bit about where my mind when I was your age, and how it led me to where I am now: president of a college.

Leadership

It took me a long time to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. In fact, I didn't figure it out until I was well into college. I'll tell you a little about my path in a bit.

But, what I want to say to you is this: it doesn't matter yet *what* you want to be when you grow up, what matters now is figuring out *who* you are: your strengths, your interests, your likes and dislikes.

What do I mean?

Well, I had no idea that being a college president, or even being part of the academic world, was what I was meant to do. But what did I know when I was around 10 years old? I knew I was a leader.

I distinctly remember being a 10-year-old when my church started these Sunday dinners where each week a different group signed up to provide warm meals for about 100 people. Right away, I sprung to action and volunteered! I gathered all of my friends around a table and told them what I had done and asked for their help. It was about that time when a parent overheard our plan...or lack thereof!

I had sprung to action...without appreciating that making meals for a 100 people meant a whole lot of work. So, with the help of our parents, we hashed out the details: how much chicken we needed to make that many meals, who would do

what, and so on. This taught me so many lessons that I use to this day:

- Being a good leader means surrounding yourself by people you trust and can rely on to help you succeed.
- Being a good leader means being open to the other people's suggestions.
- Being a good leader means taking a risk, going out on a limb.
- Being a good leader means realizing that you need to learn from every experience in order to know how to handle the next challenge that comes your way.

Video

It's one thing for me to tell you about leadership, another to show you!

Let's watch this great video called "Shirtless Dancing Guy!" I think you'll get a kick out of it.

[PLAY VIDEO (sivers.org/ff)]

Being a leader means having the "guts to stand alone and look ridiculous," and to embrace others as equals.

But what if you don't necessarily like being the leader? That's ok! The first follower and every follower after play a key role in strengthening the group. The key is to start to know yourself. To start taking risks. To start working together—whether in the classroom or on the playing field or at home—to learn your own strengths so you can be successful now and down the road.

My Journey

So, knowing I was supposed to be a leader early is one thing. But now what? How did I go from that ten-year-old planning a church dinner to here?

Well, I went through elementary school, middle school, and high school learning a little about a lot! I had an open mind, which I encourage you all to have as well, and soaked in whatever subject I was learning about in school. Every month in seemed I wanted to do something different: become a missionary, become an attorney, become a minister! When I was 17, and trying to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up, I decided I wanted to follow my father's footsteps and serve in the military. That surely would be a great way to be a leader. But, my father asked me to hold off a year, to go to college and see if there was another line of work that I was supposed to do.

He secretly knew I just wasn't responsible enough yet to handle becoming a Marine at the age of 17!

So...I went to college...and I never left!! I went to Iowa State where I received an undergraduate and graduate degree in English. Then I decided I wanted to tack on a few more *years* in school! So, I got a PHD in educational leadership from Loyola University.

So then, it was time to leave the classroom...sort of. Just leave it as a student. I went on become an English professor..and then a dean...then an assistant vice president...vice president..Campus president...and ultimately president. You can see, my career took many twists and turns. It took patience. It took dedication. It took hard work. It even took some tears.

In the midst of my studies, I hit a wall of self-doubt. I considered dropping out. But one of my mentors made me

realize doing that was running away from my future. She encouraged me to follow my dreams.

I encourage you to find a mentor. Whether it's your big sister or brother, your sports coach, your teacher, your best friend's mom. Whoever it is, find someone who you think is pretty cool! Ask them questions about what they do, how they got there. They may not always come to you—to be proactive!

I promise you the next chapters in your life will be filled with fun times...but also will some nerve-wracking ones. In fact, I recently heard a poem that I think sums up that butterfly-in-the-tummy feeling we all get whenever we embark on a challenge.

Here it is:

“Anxiety is always knocking on your door asking to come in. He lives with excitement, for he’s the only one who can keep up with him. His home is mobile so he’ll never get stuck in one place. Anxiety is trying to invent a machine that can pull up his test scores early. When he turned eight, he asked for a lifetime supply of free homework passes.

At school he is friends with calm and works with him to stop worrying. Anxiety’s parents are confusion and impatience. He is an expert at running and is fastest in the state. Anxiety wears purple shoes. If you want to find anxiety, ask excitement, or look for a small house surrounded by jumbled piles of paper and purple running shoes.”

You know my favorite part about this poem? It was written by someone just like you: by an 11-year-old Montgomery County student as part of a school assignment! He took a risk in

writing such a unique poem. And it paid off! His teacher loved it – giving him a top score—and better yet, the act of writing this helped show him who he is and what he could become. I predict a writing profession in his future.

So I want to leave you with a few words of advice:

1. It is never too early to figure out *who* you are—so start exploring! Don't worry if you have no idea *what* you want to be—you have plenty of time for that.
2. Remember being a leader, sometimes means being a follower. Whatever course you take, respect and embrace the advice, experience and knowledge of your peers and mentors.
3. Don't be afraid to take risks. Remember that shirtless dancing guy? Even if you stumble along the way, even if

sometimes no one follows, even if Mr. Anxiety in his purple shoes runs after you, taking risks is the only way to shine.

I have no doubt all of you will shine in your own way...and I cannot wait to hear about what you accomplish along the way!

Thank you so much for having me. I look forward to answering any questions you may have!