

COMMENCEMENT
May 24, 2013

2013 Commencement

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Good morning and welcome to one of the most significant days of your lives. It is not often when we wake up in the morning and know for sure that that day is going to be etched in our memories forever. This is one of those days...the culmination of dedication, devotion, and dreams. I encourage you all to take a moment, close your eyes, and take a snapshot in your mind of this experience. This day is about you...and your families...and your friends...and your professors and mentors and anyone who helped you achieve the title: College graduate. I encourage you to hold close to those support systems as they will be instrumental to helping shape your future journey, including your inner compass.

As an English professor at heart, I am intrigued by that word—compass. I find it no coincidence that in addition to being an instrument to help you chart your course, it can serve as a verb

meaning to achieve, attain, accomplish. Having a strong inner compass—values, knowledge, passions you have internalized over the years—will help you chart your own course to achieving, attaining, accomplishing your dreams.

For me, my compass in life often are words of wisdom—lessons that keep me focused, grounded, and motivated. That is why when I sat at my desk to think about what kernels of wisdom I could share with you, the paperweight on my desk kept speaking to me. You see, that paperweight contains five simple rules for happiness and it helps shape my inner compass on a daily basis. So I want to share with you those five rules, and why I think they are especially appropriate for this group of graduates.

One and two go hand in hand for me:

One – Free your heart from hatred.

Two- Free your mind from worries

There is no hiding that the last decade has been full of turmoil...from September 11, 2001, to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the Great Recession, to Hurricane Katrina and Rita and Sandy to the Boston bombings, you all have witnessed a tremendous amount of tragedy. It would be understandable to internalize some of these events and become cynical. But a heart weighed down by hatred and a mind with worry...aren't free to beat to their own drum...to discover the beauty on the underside of every hard situation. As the inspired Mister Rodgers said:

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’

Look for the helpers...be the helpers...free your heart from hatred and your mind from worry so you can fill them with love and peace.

The third rule: Live Simply.

Today, there is so much clutter, literal and figuratively, in all of our lives. 24-hour-news can't even catch up with the constant, up-to-the-second updates in palm of our hands. With the click of a button, you can buy a new outfit, a new car, even a new house. In this Information Age, we are becoming so overly saturated with knowledge, it is hard to separate the noise from the substance. As your lives become increasingly complicated, I encourage you to strive to keep perspective, to remember what is important, and to live simply so you fill your life with the things that matter.

The fourth and fifth rule also go together:

Four- give more.

Five- expect less.

I hope that during your time at our College, you learned more than just what is in textbooks—although that’s important! I hope you learned about what it means to be an active citizen and contributing member of our society. The diploma you receive today bestows upon you more than just access to a changed life, but also the obligation to change lives for others around you. It can be as simple as saying hi to an individual who seems down, or donating a few bucks to a scholarship, or becoming a mentor for a neighbor...there are a number of other small way that can make a big difference to someone else.

Give more.

But at the same time, expect less. Live your life based on your own actions, your own goals, your own expectations, rather than dependent on what you expect to receive from others. Be the active participant in your own life—depend on others, but do not

rest your own happiness on what they do for you. Rather, it is about what you do for others. I assure you if you start to look at the world through that lens, you will be pleasantly surprised by all the unexpected kindness and support you receive.

So there it is—the five rules engraved on a stone on my desk that help form my inner compass:

Free your heart from hatred.

Free your mind from worry.

Live simply.

Give more.

Expect less.

Whatever rules guide your own happiness, I encourage you to take stock of them, write them down, return to them in the days and months and years ahead. Your life will take twists and turns,

some planned, some not. What will remain is the inner compass guiding your every step.

Today is a time to celebrate. Tomorrow when you wake up will be the day start actualizing your dreams for your future tomorrows. I hope that you hold fast to the lessons, the people, the values you have experienced the last few years here...and that wherever your inner compass takes you, it will always lead you back in some way to your home here at Montgomery College.

Now, I ask you to turn your attention to the video screens around the room, to take one last look back at this academic year and some of the lives empowered at Montgomery College.

Congratulations!