

SPEECH DAY ADDRESS 2017

Good Morning. I've been expecting you.

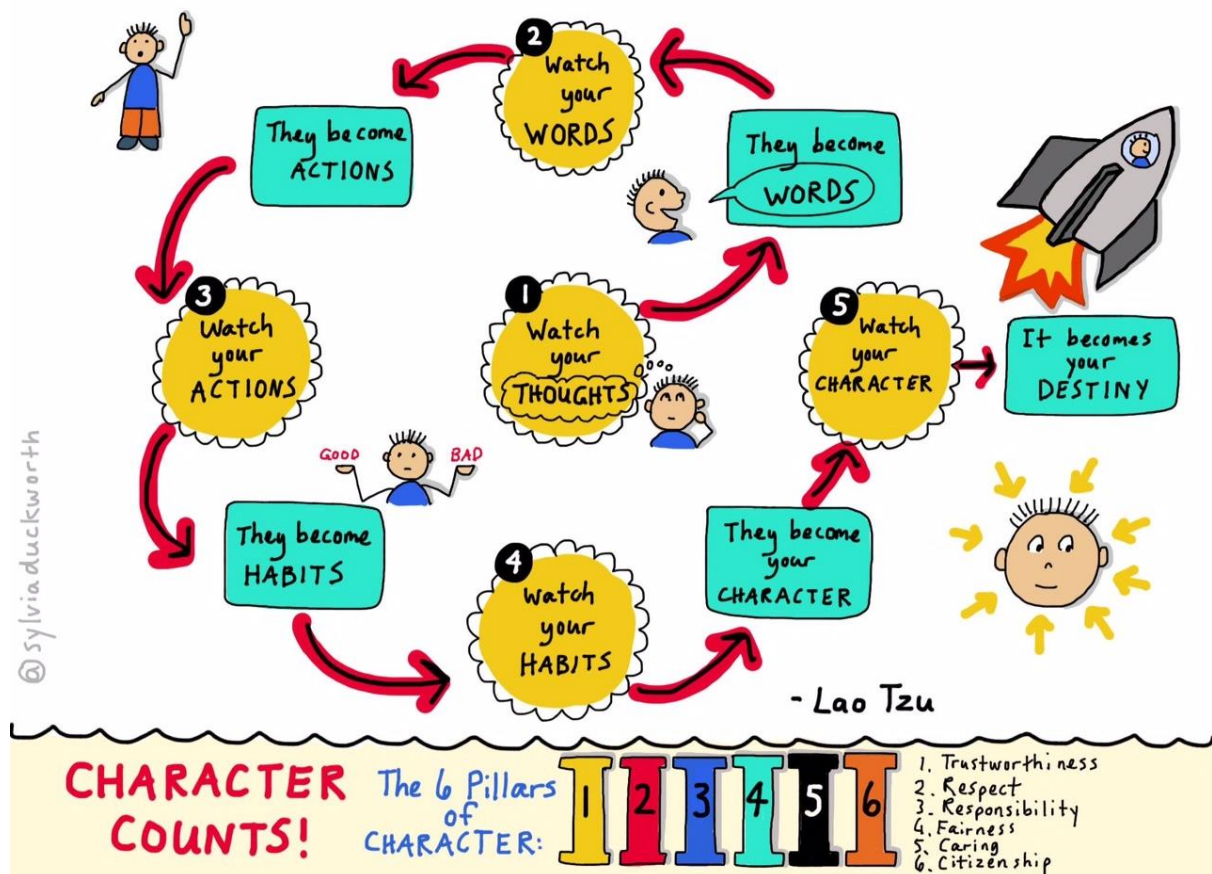
I've always been fascinated – and, I'm afraid, instantly bored – by introductions to speeches and events which list all the dignitaries by name and title.

Firstly, if you are important, you are here. If you are important and you are not here, then for the purposes of this event, you are no longer important, or you are the only one who still thinks you are.

To those who don't have to be here, but are, thank you. Can you tell this is my last Speech Day? Zero Chill.

It's strange, isn't it? When you are in a role, you have to live it. All. The. Time. That's kind of what "Headmastering" is like. How dare you not be strict? A teacher or Old Boy tells you, I remember the days of McFarquhar and Mr Hardaker, and that...what was his name...Mr Govender. Look how I turned out...I was naughty and I got in trouble but I turned out just fine.

But playing a role is what we all do every day. It's also what we expect all the time of Northwood boys. But is that realistic? Can we really expect you to be the perfect person all the time? We speak a lot about character in this school. Here's how it goes.



Your character defines you. So does your time, like the trends we seem to blink and miss.

Matrics, do you remember the dance moves there have been since Grade 8?

Gangnam Style

Harlem Shake

Whip/Nene

Dab

Mask off

Matrics, what will you do when your school mask is off? That song polarises me. It's cool. And for reals, I'm low-key lovin it. Mask on, mask off, represent, gotta represent. But those aren't the lyrics. If you've listened to the unedited version of that song you know that. And you don't want your parents to know that you know that. The lyrics are disgusting and distasteful, but the song is one which many of you enjoy. And what are you going to do with that knowledge – enjoyment versus discomfort – that you can present one thing to please and feel another thing inside? You still with me?

The answer, gentlemen...Knights...is that this is life, and **this is not going to go the way you think.**

Conflicting thoughts confront you constantly. Continually. Confusion? But that's enough about government.

Those difficult thoughts are among the weak points we all have at your age - ages.

You are starting to recognise your own fallibility.

The fear – that, for example, when someone asks you, “What are you passionate about?”, that you are not going to have that “wow” compelling answer. And that might mean you are not interesting, or ambitious, or that you don't have a talent that you are hiding – and that means your life isn't worth living the same way as others. And that girls won't like you. Or that you are Sheldon Cooper.

Passion is not a job, or a sport, or a hobby, it is the full force of your attention and energy that you give to whatever is right in front of you. And if you are so busy looking for this passion, you could miss opportunities that change your life. It finds you.

Passion is not a plan, it's a feeling...and feelings change, yet passion seems to be the guide. Passion should be seen to be what it is - the spark – the thing that ignites when you rub sticks together. Keeps you on fleek. Just helps you to stay woke, fam.

The winners of "American Idol" seem to have lots of passion, but so do the thousands of people who don't make it past the first audition. Passion might be the least useful predictor of success. And in the worst case, passion keeps you from bailing out of a doomed venture at the right time.

You don't create your life first then live it, you create it by living it, not agonising about it.

Your world of work will look nothing like ours. What jobs will you be applying for in 2035? And 2055, when some of you will be thinking about retirement?

Look for problems that need solving. Which one of you will be the first to invent a new colour? Be useful, be generous. People will thank you and even pay you, and that's where passion can be found, where you meet someone else's need. In what you have to contribute. Don't wait. Just start doing. To live a life full of meaning and value, you don't follow your passion – your passion follows you.

It's ok not to know what you'll be doing in five years from now, because the most fulfilling careers are those that still have the power and potential to surprise you. It's ok to know what you want to do, but if you are going to wait for passion to show up and take you there you are going to be waiting a long time. So don't wait. Spend your time and attention solving your favourite problems.

But finding your focus can be difficult. How do you do it? Let's try something.

Firstly, close your eyes. No, do it. Now, ladies and gents, close your eyes.

Breathe. Just breathe. Now reach out. What do you see? Keep your hands where they are and reach out. What do you see?

I'll tell you. You all see different things. You are unique. That makes you different, just like everybody else. Our role at Northwood is to help. Here you will **see light, darkness, a balance.**

You will also see opportunity. It's a funny beast, opportunity. And if a chance you've been waiting for forever comes your way, what will you actually do?

Experience will tell you it's risky.

Pride will tell you it's impossible, because you might fail.

Reason will say it's pointless to try.

Your heart will whisper, maybe so softly that you can't hear, "give it a try."

Research tells you that one of the strengths of a boys' school is that, without those other distractions, like the pressure to impress, you are free to express yourself. I think that is particularly true of this place.

I've seen this raw strength only once before, and in terms of potential, it didn't scare me enough then; it does now. Our peer schools should be scared too.

Why else would we offer, and be really good at, everything from sailing to e-sports to ballroom to rugby to chess to cycling to just being outright good people. Isn't it fun to watch other schools come here, uncertain of themselves, with a need to prove something, a face a strong, confident and proud blue wall, undaunted by the prospect of defeat and steadfastly humble should we prevail?

You know those guys. They get you real lit. They get upset and behave badly, and you just want to throw some shade and say..."I'm sorry that I offended you by calling you stupid...I really though you already knew!" But you can't say that of course. It's an important lesson in self-discipline and control. Something that you make your teachers practice all the time.

There is passion here.

As a Squire you arrive, thrust in to this place where eight matric boys got straight A's last year – 260 matric distinctions overall – 96 % of boys qualified for tertiary study – and you think, **I need someone to show me my place in all this.**

Choosing a high school is a decision over which there is much debate in Durban North, mainly driven by this supposed private school versus state school thing. Add in IEB versus the National Senior Certificate and you have the primary topic of conversation in Java, Mayfair and the La Lucia Kawaii most mornings after 8am. But how dare you assume we are the same as all the others? We are not. We set our own standards, hold ourselves accountable to each other, whilst recognising that we are not all equally capable in every area. We are Northwood and we are Knights.

Our message is, and will remain, simple. Northwood IS Durban North. Taking a boy from the local primary schools out of here for high school does not help him. In fact, I take it that this suburb provides a service to the rest of KZN by sending those educated at our excellent primary schools elsewhere, because they need the help. In recent years however, more and more parents have recognised the intrinsic value of this place. Quality teaching – our primary focus – tick. Strong sport and extramural activities – tick, and a wider variety to boot. Facilities? I laugh in your face! The best there is. Need structure through a boarding school environment? – tick – and with the addition this year of the second Boarding Establishment, even more so.

So how did we get to where we are today? Well...let me remind you...

Our whole universe was in a hot, dense state
Then nearly fourteen billion years ago expansion started, wait
The earth began to cool, the autotrophs began to drool
Neanderthals developed tools
We built a wall (we built the pyramids)
Math, science, history, unraveling the mysteries
That all started with the big bang! Hey!

So you choose Northwood, arrive here, and then what? High school was always an exciting prospect, and you think, **something inside me has always been there, but now it's awake and I need help.**

Very quickly you find that, almost without exception, everyone is pulling in the same direction. To the very small number of you who do not support the goals, morals and ethos of our wonderful school, I have some news for you. **The Resistance is doomed.**

To those of you who have struggles – at school or at home – and who feel that those troubles come first in your life, draw strength from and believe in your fellow Squires and Knights (and that includes and each every staff member here), because together, **we are the spark that will light the fire that will burn the First Order down.**

Stay persistent, keep your head high. Believe in yourself, but cast aside the arrogance that allows you to think that you know all the answers. That is a challenge that we as teachers face too. We cannot be so blind to think that we are superior; that our rights and personal preferences are absolute. Sometimes what you miss is how you are viewed by others, and it takes strength to back down, and place the institution first instead of what you think is best for you. To staff, especially those with whom I have had conflict in the last five years, remember,



Don't you dare think you are superior, and don't you ever spend a single lesson giving less than 100 % for each and every boy. You are a teacher for a reason. **Fulfill your destiny.**

Something I took from yesterday's special assembly – an event for which I will be forever grateful by the way – was the repeated theme that I have tried hard to connect with you over the last five years. We all crave our youth, remembering ourselves when we were you. And I guess that's part of the reason I do what I do. My energy levels are as high as ever, and that is down as much to my own efforts as it is to the support that I have received from you. Leading this school has not always been easy, and part of what I have tried to do is anticipate needs...Think about how I felt when I was you. This hasn't always worked out the way it was planned, but being able to connect to those you are trying to guide can only help.

Sometimes you have to stop and think along the way though. Let distractions happen and refocus you on the objective, the goal, the path and direction. But the path may change, as it has again for me going forward. It may take you to destination unknown, or it may even take you full circle, as it has for many Knights, including the growing number of Old Boys on the staff. It will however always be YOUR path.

You have been led along this path by many people so far. Some are obvious, others less so. The trees in the Northwood forest. The teacher that you instantly connected with; the one who made you work in a way you just didn't appreciate at the time. The admin staff who do things daily around the school that you take for granted. Mr Beukes and his staff that prepare our facilities so that they are the envy of all. In their own way, they all throw their own shade.

The school executive, the Board of Governors, the incredible support from the Old Boys and the Northwood network of sponsors and friends. I thank them all – as will you when, somewhere in silence, you realise just what efforts have gone into giving you the advantages that coming from Northwood brings.

The academic staff, qualified and experienced professionals, do not just teach for the time from bell to bell. They grow their knowledge all the time, ready to guide you, they are the canopy in the forest that protects you before you emerge into the world beyond.

For me, I cannot close this chapter without specific mention of a number of people. To those I omit, please blame me, but do not see it as me throwing shade (pause) on your contribution at all.

To Mrs de Sousa, thank you for bearing the brunt of parental assaults, and for handing over any number of forgotten kit bags and lunches. The challenges you face are only visible to those who spend time with you.

To the ladies in the marketing department, we have travelled a road together. The value you add is seldom seen by those that you work with within the school. You are very, very good at your jobs, and you know I appreciate you. We lead and innovate in this area, thank you for having my back.

Mrs Dalais is a lady to whom I owe a lot. We have formed a special partnership in these years, and every day I see how she strives under difficult circumstances to manage complex paperwork and aggressive prospective parents. Jane, you are a star, and your unsung contribution continues to make a real difference in the smooth administration of a key area in our school. Thank you so much.

Together, the calm and steadying demeanour of Mr Rich, the steadfast determination of Mrs Stanley, the dynamism of Mr le Roux, and the rigid focus and passion of Mr Govender have made us a formidable management team. To those who thought in 2013, that I arrived with an agenda, you were right. But that agenda was mine and mine alone, informed by the needs of the school and driven by a singular aim – to make this the place it should be. Sometimes you have to **let the past die. Kill it, if you have to. That's the only way to become what you were meant to be.** As a school, **when I found you I saw raw untamed power, and beyond that, something truly special.** That feeling remains.

I leave a better person than when I arrived, due solely to my time spent with all of you.

The staff and I have been playing a little game since I stepped up to the microphone. It's called

THE LAST SPEECH DAY JEDI BINGO

And over that time I have included every single spoken line from the trailer for Star Wars 8 – The Last Jedi, in what I have said to you. They have to tick off the quotes as they hear them. There are two left boys and girls. One is because I simply couldn't figure out how to include the **Porg War Cry** of **"Uh Eh Uh Eh"** in my speech.

The other is because it needs to be the final line. Pop culture, movie franchises, heroes on stage, screen and on the field. Find what is valuable for you in what you see, and use it to help yourself and others. Recognise the heroes and their flaws, the villains and what made them so. That is why I keep using these references – because it brings us closer, and helps us understand each other.

Every movie franchise serves its purpose. So does every teacher and every Headmaster. But life happens. I leave in an attempt to make the best of mine, for my family, and will be forever grateful for our time together. This era is over, and for now

I only know one truth: It's time for the Jedi... to end.