

Opening

Pause. Breathe. Slow Down

It's an honor to be back at Williston.

Mr. Hill, Board of Trustees, Deans, Members of the Faculty, Staff, family and friends, rising underclass...and of course, The Class of 2024. Good morning!

Pause. Look At the front Rows.

Williston Northampton School – Class of '24...Congratulations. Today I want to begin by saying that Commencement Weekend is a celebration you all deserve. A chance to recognize the outstanding achievement of individuals and the class at-large. It is also, an opportunity to show appreciation for the people who were impactful to you, during your time here.

For me, Williston changed my life. In 2007, I arrived as a 16 year old from Long Island – *My accent was thicker then* – And I had hopes of playing college hockey. In my head it was simple...

- get good grades
- play hockey
- and then I would be off on my way.

From the onset, I quickly realized that my time at Williston would not be as transactional as I had envisioned in my simple teenage mind. The teachers, coaches, and staff saw me as more than just a hockey player here for a pit stop.

They challenged me to be the best version of myself as a student, and more importantly, as a person.

Since graduating from Williston, I've been grateful for the foundation this school helped me build. I'm certain that the soon-to-be graduates today share that same feeling of confidence and gratitude. And I am confident that you will appreciate it more and more moving forward.

I was fortunate to arrive Friday morning with my mom – *Hi Mom!* I have to say, the campus and state of this school is amazing. As an alumnus, appreciate all that the Williston Team does to make this one of the best prep schools in New England. It was special for me to see folks who were here during my days when I was student. Again, thank you for everything.

Due to the significance of their last Commencement here at Williston, I would like to take a moment to personally thank Mr. and Mrs. Conroy for their 48 years of combined service to the school. Thanks for always treating me well and keeping in touch over the years. We all wish you the best as you start a new chapter as grandparents!

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Message

Back to you 2024. For the past several weeks I thought to myself, what I could offer with my time speaking today? I looked back at the last two commencement speakers. Former NCAA Division-1 athletes. An Orthopedic Surgeon in the Navy. The other, a Harvard Graduate, and Olympic Track medalist.

Well, no Olympics for me, I don't practice medicine either. I don't have a Wikipedia page.

I played club hockey in college. I graduated college with a GPA that was...alright.

What I can speak to, is that I have I over a decade serving and learning on great teams.

- It started at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD.
- Then on to Naval Flight Training – a.k.a Flight School.
- Then out to the Fleet, flying with Helicopter crews at home and abroad.
- And recently supporting the Executive Branch at The White House.

Everywhere I've been, I've had the privilege to work with exceptional leadership at all levels. From the most senior and seasoned, to the fresh and lightly experienced junior ranks.

So, Class of '24, you're off to start your leadership journey.

- New colleges and universities
- Athletic teams
- Organizations, clubs, community groups, academic focused areas of study.
- Those talented in the arts will join theaters, music groups, and collectives.

No matter what you're doing next, everyone in the class of '24 will be on a new team. Whatever adventure awaits you, do something you believe in. In environments like that, service and leadership are always intertwined.

Leadership is hard. It is dynamic. It is challenging. It's both an art and a science. It's debated. It is scrutinized. There is an entire genre of books about it. Colleges and Universities offer curriculums, they establish leadership in their mission statements or core values. Everyone wants to know...what's in the special sauce.

I won't stand up here and describe myself as an expert. But from my experiences, I think I have enough street cred to speak to it.

So, for the Class of '24, I'll pass on three leadership traits I've learned, and worked to develop over the years.

“My Advice:

Be a Great Teammate.

pause

Be Authentic.

pause

and, Celebrate the Wins.”

One - Be a Great Teammate.

You're not always going to be the one in charge. When you're new, you are likely to be in a supporting role, but you can still make a huge impact. Supporting your team and being there for each other allows everyone to be successful.

Quick story... During one of my final graded flights before I became a mission commander, I made a *minor* navigational error. *And by minor, I mean was a few football fields away from where I was supposed to beThat right, The Ocean is big.*

- With the evaluator next me in the cockpit, I communicated to everyone in the aircraft – a crew of 8 people – I messed up.
- Behind me, in the cabin of the helicopter was the crew. I needed their help to smartly craft a recovery plan. So that’s exactly what I requested from them.
- Everyone was engaged and motivated to work with me.
- It’s important to note, I was the only one being evaluated. The crew could have easily been quiet. Allowed me to fail on my own, and say with a smirk on their face, “*Try again next time Sir.*”
- After a quick, collaborative discussion, I directed a plan of action that was set in motion.
- The flight crew performed their actions perfectly. Allowing me to *properly navigate*, and get back to our mission profile.
- The rest of the flight went well, and I passed my evaluation.
- Without the crew backing me up – After my mistake – That course correction does not happen.

Proud to say that on every flight or assignment I’ve had, I have been extremely grateful to have worked with incredible teammates, who were exceptional at their jobs, and who I could also trust with my life.

Two - Be Authentic.

On the Williston school website, the first words you see...

“BE YOURSELF HERE”

An outstanding motto to take with you when you leave this campus.

Be yourself, be genuine, and respect others for who they are. This is a concrete example how Williston instills values to carry with you.

No need for me to rattle off another story of me messing up, *we can take a break from that*. From a leadership and team perspective, quality teams are a collection of different personalities, and the flavors of leaders come in a variety as well. A common denominator of effective and respected leaders is authenticity.

Three – Celebrate the Wins.

A few traditions you are familiar with...

- Ring the Victory Bell.
- Sing Sammy.
- Jump in the Pond.
- And today on the quad, where graduates will shake the hands of the faculty and staff with a diploma in hand. Hugs for their parents, grandparents, and families.

In Naval Aviation, we love to celebrate the success of others. The traditions range from a newbie receiving their wings to career milestones. Whatever the accomplishment, it's customary for the entire squadron to take a moment out of their day and celebrate the achievement of a single individual.

It's easy to get consumed with grades and work. Challenges and shortcomings may seem to be everywhere. As someone who has worked in high stress environments, where the consequences may weigh heavy... Don't lose perspective.

Highlight the good. Have fun. Recognize accomplishment and effort. Especially that of your friends, peers, and those who look up to you.

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Close

So, to bring this to a close...

-Wherever you find yourself. **Be a Great Teammate.**

-Continue to grow as the exceptional people you are and refine your style. **Be Authentic.**

-Shine light on the good moments. **Celebrate the Wins.**

Class of 2024, please know that because you went to Williston, you have the foundation to be exceptional leaders, and serve your new community with integrity.

It has been an honor to speak here today. Thank You Everyone.