

PBHS Friday assembly speech
30 Year on Reunion 2017

Good morning. Mr Reeler, heads of departments, teachers, fellow old boys and their partners and scholars.

What a privilege and an honour, it is for me to be standing in front of you today, delivering this speech, a speech that will reflect on the way in which this school, and my experience here, has had an influence on my subsequent life and career.

Like many of us I came from a broken home and had a farther and step father who gave little in the way of guidance or mentorship. This school, its teachers and the boys really become family for me in many ways.

On a hot summers afternoon in 1987, I walked out of Boys High, hoping that I had done enough to scrape through and never look back. The fact is, I was no model student, and so probably the worst person to provide much of an uplifting reflection on my school days.

Having said that, I do think that the successes I have achieved in my post school life, I can probably attribute in large parts to the fundamentals that had been instilled in me at this school. And I am very grateful for this. I suspect that the underlying basis of our schools motto: Virtute et Labore; "Through Courage and Labour", must have had an impact on me.

Thirty years on from when I went out into the world, life is far more demanding and complex. Most of us fail to imagine, let alone anticipate, the massive and disruptive changes that have unfolded between then and now.

Most of which have been a result of the fast spaced and ever changing world of technology and globalization, the pace of change is accelerating, our brains are struggling to keep up. You will be gravely mistaken to think that anything that you have learned here, will prepare you for what you will experience in the real world in the not too distant future. The future is happening right now.

How many things do we own, that are common today, that didn't exist 10 years ago let alone 30 years ago? When I left Boys High there was no such thing as a cellphone, 10 years ago a smart phone didn't even exist, and 3 years ago a smart watch was unheard of – most of you are probably thinking to yourself, how old is this guy and how did he cope?

None of the mobile apps we use today existed 10 years ago: Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat, Uber, Facetime, LinkedIn, Whatsapp, Netflix, Pandora, Apple Music and Facetime.

Several major companies didn't exist a decade ago. Airbnb, Fitbit, Spotify, Dropbox, Quora, Tumblr, Kickstarter, Pinterest just to name a few.

Few people were talking about crowdfunding, BITCOINS, social media marketing, search engine optimization, app developers, cloud storage, data mining, mobile gaming, gesture controls, chatbots, data analytics, virtual reality, 3D printers, or drone delivery.

And be careful of getting onto any government watch list or terrorist list, automated facial recognition software can pick out a face in a crowd of 10 000 people within 30 seconds, and that's right now.

At the same time we are seeing the disappearance of many of the things that were in common use 10-20 years ago. Fax machines, wired phones, taxi drivers, newspapers, books, desktop computers, video cameras, camera film, VCRs, DVD players, video rental shops, and possibly in the not too distant future, movie cinema's. When last did you look at a printed map? All have seen their industry peak.

If we leapfrog ahead ten years and take notice of the radically different lives we will be living, we will see a few key technologies that will pave the way for new industries such as;

- NANO medicine
- Artificial Intelligence
- Autonomous arial Taxis
- Driverless Cars
- Augmented reality
- 3D printing

So if the job you are aiming for in the future doesn't even exist yet, what's going to get you there?

Your ability to move and excel with change and to assimilate the next big thing, is what's going to stand you in good stead for the future. The greatest skill you can master is the ability to excel during disruption in an exponentially changing world.

And that's where this amazing institution comes in. It teaches you that guts, hard work and the determination to win is what will help you make it. It will prepare you by giving you the grounding and the confidence that everything is possible and nothing is out of your reach.

I can also tell you that it's the bonds that you build and the pride that you gain whilst at this school that will count.

In business, mentioning that I went to Pretoria BOYS high has opened more doors to me than Leonardo Da Vinci, Shakespeare or Einstein ever did.

Look at the boys on either side of you. I can promise you that just like you, most have no idea what they are going to do when they leave school. In fact, what lies in store for them, and what they will end up doing, has probably not yet been invented. It's a daunting thought, but super exciting.

I left home after school and went straight to the army, what a relief that I could spend another two years and not have to do much studying. After that; complete terror!!! WHAT NOW???

A glance through the classifieds and a few job interviews later and I was earning my 1st pay cheque of R1 800.00, not much money, even in those days.

Though sheer grit, guts and the occasional bullshitting, its 28 years later and I am proud and humbled to be in a position to hopefully give you a little nudge in the right direction.

So how is it that a high school reprobate old boy, gets to be standing up here giving you a Friday assembly speech, the truth is that the boys of my year thought it appropriate, in the past I have managed an IT business that turnover R400 million in revenues with a team of 150 people.

I also started an IT company back in 1995, which I still run today that turns over a modest R175 million and employs 28 people and indirectly supports another 600 by its existence. I ran both of them together for 2 years. I am however no Elon Musk. The point I am trying to make is that everything and anything is possible, if you want it badly enough, nothing will stand in your way. Not even poor grades.

A word of caution, success should not be measured by the size of your bank balance or your asset portfolio. It's most definitely about the people you touch and leave changed and inspired by your example. That means it's has less to do with intelligence and more about passion. You have to love what you do.

It's also about the family you will build one day, this has to be at the core of your life. Use what you learn at the school and in your life to be a mentor in your own family. Keep it together. Look after your partner and children and be the head of the home. There are so many broken homes and children with single parents. In a throw-away society, try and break the pattern.

What you need to make it in the real world lies not in the text books and the search engines of this world. It lies within you. Courage, determination, confidence, perseverance and sheer hard work. These core attributes are what you need to master.

You know, you have an empire within you. The world may try to hypnotized it out of you. Society may try to program average into you. Just know that world-class is meant to be hard. If legendary and becoming a Titan was effortless the whole planet would be icons.

Allow your trials to become your triumphs and your hurts into heroic masterpieces that inspire.

Own your game. Honour your genius. Celebrate your gains.

And be kind. Always.

Now go out there and be the very best version of yourself you can possibly be.

Thank You.

- Neil Rom