

John Barella

2009 Commencement Speaker Finalist

Fellow graduates and families, staff and alumni – Welcome! I asked a friend of mine for some advice on giving a speech to a large crowd and they told me to imagine everyone naked. I have heard that before and did not think that it would work, so I put on this cool cap and gown instead.

Benjamin Franklin said, “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest”. This is the mantra by which I attempt to live my life. I also teach my son to live by it. I stand here today as a testament to that quote. I would have to say that there are many of you who fit into my category, people who wanted to move up the promotion ladder; people who had put in their time and were getting nowhere. I applied for a promotion a few years ago and was denied. I was told that I should get some college under my belt and come back. This was difficult news to swallow.

I had twenty years of experience in my field. One would often assume that twenty years was enough time to prove oneself. I

decided to take a step back and re-evaluate my direction. Many of you should do this on occasion to insure that you are going the direction that you want to go. Many of us live our day to day lives and do not evaluate our direction. Sometimes we need a push. My push occurred when a representative from Gwynedd Mercy College came to my job looking for applicants for the Center for Lifelong Learning. After discussing my options with the Gwynedd Mercy representative, I sat down and made a list of the pros and cons. My cons were time and money. My pros were plentiful. The most important of which was to be a mentor and example for my son. I wanted to show my son that it could be done.

I decided to get my degree, but I had reservations. I thought that it would be too difficult. That is when I met a group of people at Gwynedd Mercy College that were so focused on their education, that I felt I could not fail. This institution was able to give me a gift. I thought about that word, "gift". I looked the word up and it means to give without compensation. The definition does not really apply here. We have to look deeper. Then I focused on the letters and what each letter could represent and I came up with these ideas:

**G is for God** – The importance my professors placed on the value of personal faith and the connection they made between religion and learning was moving and insightful. I wasn't raised in a religious environment so this emphasis was new to me; however, I found it to be comforting and influential.

**I is for Inspiration** – I truly enjoyed the fact that many of the subjects were taught by Professors that were actively working in the field in which they were teaching. I found this kind of dedication inspirational. It proved to me that Gwynedd Mercy cares that our education comes from knowledgeable people whose lives are actively engaged in their subject matter, as we all hope to use our education in our respective fields.

**F is for Fun** – You would think that striving for a college education would not be FUN; however, our cohort was just that. We had a tumultuous time completing our assignments, but we found the time to tell stories and jokes about each other. I cannot remember a time where classmates were mad at each other. I try to include humor in my life as much as possible because I find it easier to live after you laugh. If you cannot have fun in your life, what is the point?

**T is for Tapestry of America** - It is not often that you meet such a diverse group of people who are striving towards a central purpose. It was incredibly refreshing to find a group like that at Gwynedd. Our group was like a tapestry of America. We had single Parents, Blue and White collar workers, civilians, veterans, and current military. We even had a Merck employee. We were able to divide up into groups and use each others strengths to create what we needed to complete our classes. The best part of the whole process was that it was a direct reflection of the business world. I believe that this type of program is great for working adults. It places hard working adults together and intertwines their lives and responsibilities, making them dependent on each other while providing them the opportunity to succeed.

In closing, I would like to first thank my family, especially my wife who did the job of two parents for the last three years. I would also like to say thank you to everyone who assisted all of these graduates to get where they are. It is vitally important for us, the graduates, to go back and thank all of these people ourselves. People like to know that they have made a difference. A simple act of gratitude may bring you more than you know. Today, may we each take the opportunity to share the gift we have been given with others. Thank You.

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