

Graduation Address
International School of Tanganyika
May 30, 2009

Humility, Perspective, Vision

“To whom much is given, much will be required”

Congratulations! Are you happy? So are your parents.

Now the deed is done! You came here this afternoon to graduate, and you have done it. I know you are anxious to begin celebrating.

You will discover that over the next several days that graduating gives everyone you know, family or friend, the right to give you advice. It may have already started. And of course, I am allowed to give you advice as well. It says so in the program.

[Looking to guests] Now to the parents, family and friends: You can listen in, but I am speaking to these seventy graduates sitting in front of me. [Turning to graduates] I am talking directly to you, although we will let everyone listen in if they like.

Rather than give you advice, though, I want to express my hope. My hope is that while obtaining an education at IST you have learned, *you have developed*, several eternal characteristics, character traits that will help you make an eternal impact on the lives of others.

Is that too lofty an aspiration? No. Have you ever seen “Gladiator” with Russell Crowe? He plays the Roman general Maximus under emperor Marcus Aurelius. In the beginning of the movie, as they are about to go into battle, he yells to his officers, “Brothers, what we do in life echoes in eternity!” Our lives are designed to have an eternal impact.

While there are many virtuous traits, I can think of three characteristics **that I hope for you** as you walk away from IST. I want to talk to you about Perspective, Humility and Vision. And let’s frame the three in three different time lines: Past, present and future.

First, **Perspective**. Perspective is important. I am sure you know that today because you had to keep things in perspective with all the pressure that came from three weeks of exams. I know that you encouraged each

other to maintain your perspective. Here is one SMS (that I am reading with permission) that went around the Sunday before exams started:

“Yo everyone sending round these ‘don’t worry, we’re gonna do fine’ texts – kinda making me freak out. It’s jus some tests. Worse thing that could happen is like...not that bad. It’s not like we’re all fighting wild animals tomorrow and have the possibility of dying or something. And yo, even if we don’t do well and each and every one of us fails miserably, being part of IST class of ’09 was still totally worth it. Like in five years I won’t remember this commentary but I will remember some of the crazy stuff we’ve done and the totally awesome people who were in my classes. So yea. We’ll all do well, but in the end it’s not going to matter in comparison to having chilled with all you guys for the last two years. So yea. Just think about happy stuff. (It’s kinda working for me, but I’m still stressing.)

Good work, Barnabas, keeping exams in perspective! All of you made it!

How do you keep your perspective in life? If you look back at your time at IST I think one of the best perspective builders has been your involvement in CAS, Creativity Action and Service. Critical to CAS are the community service projects in which you have all been involved.

I count eleven such projects. Some of you have big hearts and visited the patients at the Cancer Hospital on Ocean Road (as a cancer survivor, that is an effort near and dear to my heart) or with the disabled at Mother Theresa’s. Others of you have hosted students from the Hope Polio School or the Mtoni School in activities on the IST campus. You helped IST underclassmen with the Homework Club and you coached them in football, volleyball, basketball, cricket and golf through Sports Assistance. Through MAD (Make a Difference) others of you helped facilitate the success of those other projects through fund raising.

I expect that you learned how to get things done, you learned some leadership skills, and – most importantly – that you learned some perspective on life. IST may be challenging, but you do enjoy a most privileged position, and I hope that working with other people – many of them less privileged than you -- has taught you that.

Equally as important is the nation in which we live. Tanzania is a lovely country with beautiful people, but still among the poorest economically. Some of you are Tanzanian, while others are expatriates. No matter your

heritage, none of you, I hope, have been unaffected by your time here: The plight of the many, the suffering of some, but also the dignity and cheerfulness of the Tanzanians you met and know. Just last month with the Mbagala depot explosions some Tanzanians in our own IST community lost homes; my hope is that we are not unaffected by that.

Through both your CAS experiences and living in Tanzania, my expectation is that you have developed perspective about your position as graduates of IST.

Secondly, **my hope for you is Humility**. IST is an excellent school. As a result of your education here and your hard work, you are now moving onto excellent colleges and universities across the world. That is a privilege, and one I hope that you will approach with Humility.

In January of this year in New York City, a pilot of a US Airways jet safely landed an Airbus A320 in the Hudson River after it was disabled on takeoff. As a result of his actions and cool thinking, all 155 people on board survived, and the pilot, named Sully Sullenberger, was hailed as a hero. But Sullenberger would not accept the “hero” label for himself. In a phone conversation with President-elect Obama, Sullenberger told Obama, “Me and my crew, we were just doing our job.”

When I was getting ready to graduate from business school my best professor told us that we should be proud of our accomplishment, that we should accept our diploma as we walked across the stage, we should celebrate that day with our families, and that we should then go home, sit at our desks, turn the diploma over and place it in the bottom drawer, because from then on it was not going to matter from which school we graduated. Rather, to use the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., only the “content of our character” would matter.

In a speech given a week before his inauguration as 35th president of the United States, John F. Kennedy stated, ““For of those to whom much is given, much is required. And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state, our success or failure, in whatever office we hold, will be measured by the answers to four questions.” And he goes on to enumerate those questions.

Interesting words, “To whom much is given, much is required.” There Kennedy was actually quoting the words of Jesus, and applying them to

us today. Melinda Gates in a speech at Harvard this year used those same words when describing the work of the Gates Foundation. Because, you see, when you have been given a lot, you also become responsible for a lot. Kennedy recognized it. Melinda Gates recognizes it.

You have been given much. Much, too, will be required of you. As you face that responsibility, I expect that you not be able to help but be **humbled**.

The third characteristic: **Vision**. If looking to the **past** develops **perspective**, and if understanding your significant opportunities yields **humility**, then we are left with now looking toward the future.

A graduation event like this causes you to look back on your high school experience, maybe even back to your elementary school days. (*Wow! Eighteen of you started in kindergarten at IST, and now you are graduating together!*) You can remember all that you have accomplished, and some things that you failed to do. But mostly you look forward.

I am excited for the opportunities you will find as you go off to university. Last summer our family took a tour of universities in the US, and I know I got excited about the opportunities you are going to have. In fact, I told one admissions counselor that I had decided to apply to their school – *she said, you can't – I asked why? – she said, you already have a degree – I asked, how do you know?*

So over the next several years you will put together a package – of university education, perhaps graduate school, your initial work experience and perhaps some volunteering, and then a serious career direction. By that time, you will be well underway in your adult life. But what will guide your direction? What will you do with that package of education and experience? How will you sort it out your direction? Your vision will be brought into focus from all the influences in your lives – parents and family, education, work, friends, a relationship with God. These things can come together to give you a vision to live a life of purpose.

My **hope is that** you will be people of Vision. A vision to do something unique, significant and powerful, and outside of yourself – something of eternal worth. To put to use all that has been given to you (Remember, “To whom much is given, much will be required”).

Shortly after we moved here to Dar the first movie theater opened up, and the first movie that played there was another Russell Crowe picture called “Master and Commander.” (Are you getting the picture that I like Russell Crowe?) He played the commander of a British navy ship during the Napoleonic Wars. And on the ocean with nothing to see but horizon, when the Captain needs to see far away – when he needs Vision -- he pulls out a telescope, a spy glass, and he looks to the horizon.

It is something like this. In fact, I have one for all of you. [Alex and Meg hand out kaleidoscopes.]

I hope that this will remind you to be people of vision, to strive for the things that will be of eternal worth.

Of the many virtues, I hope that you will leave IST with these three: Perspective – Humility – Vision. You have been given much. Much will be required of you. Aspire to do great things, because you have the talent for it. And remember that we, your families, are here to help you do it.

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