

Delbarton School Graduation 2020
Graduation Remarks: Guy Adami P'17,'19
August 2, 2020

Good morning

Abbot Richard, faculty, administration, parents, guardians, and graduates. It is an honor to be here with you today. A few weeks prior to last year's graduation, Father Michael asked my wife Linda and me to dinner. Once seated, I told Father Michael how excited we were that Taylor Price would be the graduation speaker. Taylor is a dear friend and his journey epitomizes everything that Delbarton stands for and instills in you young men. Father Michael shared our enthusiasm with his infectious smile and proceeded to say, "that's why I invited you both to dinner this evening. I would like you to be next year's graduation speaker." I take great pride in my ability to anticipate and to see things coming, but this caught me completely off guard. After regaining my composure, I told him how flattered I was and that it would be my honor to speak at graduation. I also told him that if someone better came along or if he had second thoughts, I would absolutely understand. In the Delbarton community alone, there are literally hundreds of more qualified individuals. But he was resolute and steadfast in his offer. Father Michael, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your confidence, but most importantly, your friendship.

It's interesting how certain calendar days can have such a lasting impact on a person. August 2nd, 1979 was one of the saddest days of my life. My grandmother called our house and I answered the phone. "Little Guy, I just saw on the news that one of the Yankees was killed in a plane crash." Thurman Munson was far and away my favorite player. As a 15-year-old, his passing somehow marked a move from the innocence of my youth to the reality of the world. To this day, every time I see his widow throw out the first pitch of a game, or make an appearance at Old Timer's Day, I get brought back to that day in August. On the flip side of that coin, August 2nd, 1997 was the happiest day of my life. I married the person that understands me and loves me more than any other person in the world, my wife Linda. Today, may be the most humbling day of my life, as I have the opportunity to speak to you wonderful graduates of Delbarton.

It goes without saying that the world has changed considerably since that dinner last May. The ideas I had for my speech six months ago just didn't seem to line up well with everything that has transpired. In 1986, our college graduation speaker was Cardinal Jaime Sin, the 30th Catholic Archbishop of Manila. At that point in my life, the only thing I knew about the Philippines was that in 1942 General Douglass MacArthur promised to return and did so in 1944, and that Mohammad Ali and Joe Frazier had their third and final fight in Quezon City – a battle that is to this day called "The Thrilla in Manila". Cardinal Sin was an extraordinary man, but his speech just missed the mark. His message seemed more geared towards a few dignitaries in the audience, rather than the 1,600 or so graduates withering in the Washington D.C. heat. So, in order to avoid that, I took the liberty of reaching out to a few people, culminating in a call with your class president Rohan. I asked him what he thought would resonate best with the class. He

said that they would all like to hear about my personal journey and the lessons I have learned along the way. So fellas, here it goes.

Lesson one – Don't allow others to dictate the person you want to be or the goals you want to accomplish.

When I was in grade school, I had to take speech as I had difficulty pronouncing words with "L's" and "R's". It was an awful experience which was made exponentially worse by the method in which one was summoned for his or her appointment. The speech teacher would walk into the class and announce for everyone to hear that it was time for our session. It was beyond humiliating. On one particular day, we had a parent, teacher, student conference. I had the pleasure of listening to the speech therapist tell my mother how I was making progress, but probably would never be a public speaker. The meeting ended, and when I got in the car, I burst out into tears. I was probably 10 years old and had no idea what a public speaker even was, but I knew I was just told I would never be one and I was devastated. My mom started the car and proceeded to tell me the following story.

In the fall of 1960, five women walked into an auditorium filled with men for their first day for orientation at Fordham Law School. Once everyone was seated, the professor at the podium looked around, identified each woman, and said "I'm not sure why you are here. You may meet your future husband, but you certainly will not get a law degree." Now as it turns out, this gentleman's predictions were not entirely wrong. Despite his proclamation, my mother, as well as the other four women, did earn their law degrees, and to his credit, my mother did meet her future husband and my father on that very first day. That was the first time I had heard my mother tell that story. She stopped the car, turned around, looked me in the eye and said, "Little Guy, don't ever let someone's words or actions scare you from pursuing your goals and dreams." In April of 2013 I took my mom to her 50th reunion of that Fordham Law School class. My dad had passed away a few years prior and she was reticent to go alone. The event was at Cipriani in lower Manhattan and the other four women from the class were also there. Over the course of the evening, many of the men in attendance came up to me and said what an inspiration my mother and the other woman had been to them and how proud I should be of her.

Lesson one gentleman. Never allow the ignorance, insecurity, and nastiness of others, impede, dissuade, or stop you from pursuing your goals and dreams. And while I'm at it, don't allow yourself to be labeled or pigeonholed. A few years ago, I was at an arts event outside the Fine Arts Center. I was talking to a group of people when out the doors comes a young man in shoulder pads carrying a trumpet case. I excused myself from the conversation, ran up to the young man and asked if I could take his picture. In retrospect, I realize how creepy that must have seemed to him, but I wanted to capture that picture as a perfect illustration of a Delbarton student. You are so much more than just the athlete, or the arts kid, or the science wiz, or the debate star. What makes you all so interesting is your multi-faceted and diverse set of interests. Stay true to that and don't let anyone to put you in a box that fits their narrative while stifling yours.

Lesson two. The greatest risk is not taking one.

I started my career at Drexel Burnham Lambert on 60 Broad Street. It was an incredible place and to this day, some of the most interesting people in the business are Drexel alums. The biggest client we had in our commodities department was Sir James Goldsmith. Sir James was one of the first corporate raiders and an absolute legend for a number of reasons, some of which proper decorum prohibits me from saying. At any rate, Sir James had his own designated phone line to our trading desk. If that number lit up, it was Sir James calling. At the time, there were only two people that were allowed to speak with him. Gary Davis ran the department. A few years earlier, Gary had been on the cover of the New York Times Sunday magazine in an article about lawyers on Wall Street and through that he was introduced to Sir James. The other person was the head trader of the desk, Brad Klein. On one particular day, Brad was off the desk and Gary was out of the office when the phone line lit up. Now a Wall Street trading desk in the late 80's was not for the faint of heart. They were loud, edgy, combative, and tightly packed places where Darwinism ruled. Our trading desk reeked of an unhealthy combination of cigarette smoke, testosterone, and despair masked in bravado. However, when that phone rang, and the immediate realization of Brad not being on the desk to answer the phone set in, the desk went silent. I was in my early 20's and quite junior, but somehow watching everyone become paralyzed with fear registered as an opportunity, so I answered the phone. "Hello Sir James, how are you?" Is this Brad?" "No sir, Brad is off the desk right now, can I help you?" So, he asked me about the gold market and what I thought about things, before saying that he was a bit troubled by something. His daughter Jemima was dating this Pakistani cricket player named Imran Khan and he thought she was making a mistake. Although I couldn't find Pakistan with a GPS machine, I assured him that everything would turn out just fine and we ended our conversation. A few minutes later, Brad came back and asked if he missed anything. The desk was silent as I told him that Sir James called and that I answered the phone. After a series of expletives hurled my way, I explained to Brad that I answered the phone because if I didn't Sir James would have hung up and called one of our competitors.

Lesson three. Trust your instincts.

I am of the opinion that we all are born and blessed with good instincts. The only time we get ourselves in trouble in life is when we do something that we instinctually know is wrong. Whether in sports, academics, relationships, or careers, fighting against your instincts is typically a recipe for disaster.

I have a laundry list of examples, but one sticks with me for a multitude of reasons.

In the spring of 1996, I got a call from the head of the precious metals desk at J. Aron, the commodities and currency group of Goldman Sachs. He asked if I would be interested in coming in for a chat that Friday. In my world, getting a call from Goldman Sachs is like getting a call from the Yankees, so I was all in. That Friday afternoon, I made my way down to 85 Broad Street to meet with two people. One of those individuals was Lloyd Blankfein. We met in a conference room off the trading floor and they proceeded to tell me that their head gold trader needed to go to London and that they would like me to consider joining the firm. I told Lloyd how flattered I was and asked if I could have some time to think things over. He told me, "you can have all the time you want, but I need an answer before you leave the conference room" I instinctually knew that although I didn't yet work at Goldman Sachs, that this was my first test

at Goldman Sachs and it was pass / fail. If I wavered or equivocated, I was done before I even began. I said, "Lloyd, when do I start."

Now I would be remiss if I didn't bring up how life has changed for all of us over the last six months and how I have dealt with and thought about it. In a few weeks, some of you will be taking a class called "Problem of God". Leave it to the Jesuits to come up with class like that. In 1982, I didn't understand the title let alone what the class was all about. As it turns out, it was my favorite and most influential class I took. The events of the first half of this year has many people turning to, questioning, or maybe abandoning their faith. Problem of God, in the fall of my freshman year, taught me that the path of a faith-based life is different for everyone and that events will challenge your beliefs in ways you never thought possible and that is all part of the journey. In 1973, Led Zeppelin released their fifth studio album, "Houses Of The Holy". The third song on the first side was "Over The Hills And Far Away". One of the lines in the song is, "mellow is a man who knows what he's been missing. Many many men can't see the open road". I've thought a lot about the meaning of this line. We all live such frenetic lives, however the events of the past few months have forced us all to slow down and to reflect. The mellow or content man knows exactly what he has been missing. What is longed for is not the fast paced, non-present lifestyle of the pre-pandemic, but rather the basic and essential human interactions that we had all taken for granted. This realization has helped me to find the open road and to that end, I have found contentment.

Thank you for the honor of speaking today. God bless you and your families and best of luck in everything you pursue.