

Huntington High School's 151st Commencement

Superintendent James W. Polansky's Address

The time has come. After 13 years of primary and secondary education, you leave Huntington High School well versed in English, math, science, history, technology, other languages and cultures, the arts, and athletics. As importantly, you've been educated in an environment within which your parents and teachers have prepared you to communicate and express yourselves positively and productively. And I am not necessarily referring to use of a large rock as a message board, however I find it amazing that in this ever-expanding digital world, The Rock works like it does.

You have been encouraged to find yourselves as individuals, to pursue your interests, to understand the meaning of tolerance, and to do what you believe is right and yes, even when no one is looking.

Members of this class have experienced the crests and valleys associated with adolescence. You have laughed and cried together; climbed and descended together; and celebrated and mourned together. Regardless of the path you choose, you will always share your Huntington experiences and the contributions you have made individually and collectively to the fabric that defines this school community.

It is joyful to reminisce of the past. I warn you, however, not to become an individual to whom others refer as having peaked in high school.

People who live in the past are often hesitant to compete in the present and fearful of looking ahead. Living in the past – well, there is just no future in it.

Let's consider the "icebox," for example. Food had been placed on ice since the Chinese created blocks in 1000 B.C. and 12th century Richard the lion-hearted licked frozen sherbets sent by the sultan of Syria. By the early 1800's, the U.S. emerged as a leader in harvesting ice on a commercial scale. During the hottest months, perishables were kept in iceboxes -- cabinets that distributed perfect circulation to prevent food spoilage. Mechanical refrigeration went into production in the 1920's. Those resistant to the improved technology focused on building bigger and better iceboxes. Unfortunately for them, by 1950, 80 percent of the country had gone "modern." Ice harvesting became nostalgia. If you ask a teenager today to define an icebox, the best you might get is an uninformed answer, such as "an on-line place to chill."

Growing up, I recall that whenever a new technology would emerge, people would immediately think it was is the greatest thing since sliced bread and rush out to buy it. The mindset... surely no one will ever invent something better than this!

Can today's graduates envision a phone with a rotary dial or even one with a cord? Although your parents can recall such items, kids today have no idea how rough we had it back then! We'd need to duck into a linen closet within cord length for privacy. Even the first cordless phones would look

foreign today and weighed nearly five pounds. But I know that I just had to have one.

During my formative years, typing an assignment was accomplished on a manual typewriter with keys that moved upward when you pushed down on them, making an imprint of the letter on paper. And those typewriter ribbons! Black on bottom, red on top. When you'd try changing them, they would often end up in a tangled mess. They were soon replaced by electric typewriters, computers, tablets, etc. And as we all know, electronics transform at an exponential rate in today's global marketplace. There were the cameras that used film and negatives, vinyl records, 8-track tapes and audiocassettes, Betamax and VHS video tapes. Although the youth of today may recognize some of them as ancient artifacts, others might appear as unfamiliar as a television that required one to actually get off the couch and turn a dial to change the channel. Only a decade ago, I set aside an entire walk-in closet for those VHS tapes that used to keep my kids entranced. Couldn't live without them. Today they sit and gather dust.

And what has happened to the written language? In today's digital era, expressive language and penmanship have been transformed and/or replaced by touch keys, voice-to-text, and text abbreviations such as OMG, LOL, IMHO, BTW and many others my own kids tell me stand for one thing when I know they mean another. Additionally, I have never been comfortable receiving an e-mail that ends with a winky emoticon.

Graduates, you will likely see the day when your grandkids ask you to tell the story again about iPads, Androids and Kindles – how you actually

had to use your finger to swipe across the screen to make a new page appear. "Tell us that one again, grandpa!" Although life's moments are often fleeting, keep in mind that when one door closes, another opens. Change today is near instantaneous.

Always remember where you came from, but do not accept the status quo. Who knows? There may be a cultural shift somewhere down the road that battles immediate gratification and that helps patience regain virtuous status. Or the rebirth of a trend where kids need to learn to entertain themselves, maybe by drawing, maybe by writing, by playing make-believe ... by doing something other than staring at a flickering box.

Hockey great Wayne Gretzky said it plainly, "I learned early that I miss 100 percent of the shots I don't take." Graduates every day will present a new opportunity. Whatever it is, you need to be ready. Ready to think creatively. Ready to adapt at a moment's notice. Ready to take a chance on yourself, your loved ones and/or your community. And no matter what the situation, never, ever let anything or anyone convince you to compromise your integrity.

Congratulations and good luck!