

# **Huntington High School's 154<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **School Board President Emily Rogan's Address**

Good evening everyone and congratulations to the graduates and their families. I love commencement—it is truly a time for celebration, reflection and of course, anticipation.

Commencement speeches however, can be like parents, full of clichés and platitudes.

You're probably heard them all by now: Find your passion. Do what you love and it won't feel like work. Work hard and play hard. The world depends upon you to make it better...the list goes on and on.

I sometimes think we adults have forgotten what it's like to be 17 and in a time of such incredible upheaval. I know you're excited about graduating and moving on, whether it's to college, the workforce or the military. But on some level too, you must have some anxiety about the unknown.

With that in mind, I offer you a list of 18 things --since that's roughly your age--I want you to know as you graduate. This list originated a few weeks ago when I wrote my son a list of 19 things I wanted him to know on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. When I was finished, I thought, “hmmm, this would be good for my speech.” And so, I've adapted that list for you.

Most of the ideas are original; some I borrowed from others such as the blog Grown and Flown, which I strongly recommend as reading material for anyone parenting an older teenager.

So here's my list, in no particular order:

**1. Accept imperfection.** Life is messy, disappointing, painful and complicated. Sometimes, in fact a lot of times, things don't work out. And in between there are these great moments of fun, connection, contentment and joy. Get used to it.

**2. Learn how to cook some basic things**--French toast, pasta, scrambled eggs, steak. You will always benefit from knowing how to cook and it's a great to be able to throw something together when people are hungry.

**3. Be kind.** I know you know this already, but it bears repeating. Having compassion and kindness—being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes—will serve you well in ALL relationships, both personal and professional.

**4. Be a better listener than talker.** We're so busy waiting for our turn to talk that we often fail to listen. Listen and validate someone else's opinion, even if yours is different. See what happens when you do.

**5. Be grateful, every day, even when you don't feel grateful.** You are alive, you are healthy and your cup runneth over with blessings. You just have to remind yourself.

- 6. There's nothing attractive about getting wasted. Absolutely nothing.**
- 7. Intelligence is the ability to learn.** Wisdom is making decisions based on what you know and understand. You can and should have both.
- 8. Treat your body respectfully.** Get enough sleep; eat real, nutritious food, exercise regularly. Don't put too much junk into it. Trust me, older you will thank younger you.
- 9. Write handwritten thank you notes.** It's rare and people will remember that you did.
- 10. Do what's right, even when it's hard.**
- 11. Be charitable, always.** This world needs stewardship and care. You can help.
- 12. Don't be afraid of your feelings.** We raised you in a culture that teaches us to fear feelings and push them away. Honor and accept them instead. It's not a sign of weakness but of tremendous strength.
- 13. Hug the people you love.** Tell them you love them. You'll never regret doing it, but you will regret NOT doing it enough.
- 14. Work hard at whatever you do.** The satisfaction from working hard and finishing a difficult task feels good.

**15. Be a person of your word.** You will stand out simply because so few people keep their promises. And if you can't keep it, don't make it.

**16. Nothing good ever happens after 1 am.**

**17. Read books that matter.** Instagram, Twitter and BuzzFeed are not substitutes for good writing. You will be a better, smarter person if you read.

**18. Respect yourself.** You are an amazing person who is on a journey of self-discovery. In order to love anyone else fully, you must first honor yourself. Figure out what that means to you.

On behalf of the Board of Education, we wish you all the best as you begin the next chapter of your lives. Congratulations!