

Christopher Lau's Valedictorian's Address Huntington High School Graduation - 2009

Good evening parents, students, teachers, faculty and administrators. This is a proud day for all, and one that we as students have waited four long years for. But let's be honest here. In reality, what we're all actually excited for is the family barbeque following the ceremony. So I'll try to make this as short and painless as possible.

I'll be honest with you. When I first sat down to write this speech, I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to say. I thought maybe I'd open with a quote. Too cliché. I could talk about the past and how far we've come over the last four years. But I'm sure you've heard that enough already. The future? Too scary, in my opinion. That left me with one option: the present.

Now, before I go any further, there are two people here who I would like to acknowledge: my parents. Sorry to embarrass you Mom and Dad, but could you please stand and wave so that I and everyone else can see you. Thank you.

My parents once gave me an incredibly important piece of advice that I wish to share with all of you. It is a lesson that I live by each and every day: the most important part of life is doing what you love.

Although this may sound a bit corny, and perhaps a bit idealistic, I believe it is a doctrine to live by. Find your passion and your love in life. Travel your own path. Embrace your own journey. And, most importantly, be bold in your quest. The bottom line is this: always do what you love, no matter what it may be; life is simply too short to ever be unhappy.

Now think about that for a second. How many people do we come

across every day who hate their jobs, who can't stand waking up for work every single morning? You don't have to look very hard.

This leads us to now, the present. Upon the completion of this ceremony, we, the Class of 2009, will head out into a world of opportunity, of liberty, of endless possibilities; we will be given the freedom to make our own decisions, to become independent, to grow as individuals. Some will choose to enter the workforce. Others will choose to further their education at college. Still yet, a handful will choose to live in their parents' basement and play countless hours of video games. Although I do not encourage or plan on pursuing the latter, if that is what makes you happy, then by all means, I say go for it.

Now parents, I know what you're thinking. Of course you don't want your kids living in your basement for the rest of their lives. In fact, you probably can't wait to get rid of us. That's the very reason you agree to pay for our college tuition bills, isn't it? All I ask is that before you decide to kick us out or take away the video games, you first consider what will make us happy.

Back to the present. Today, in a world of immense opportunity, of seemingly infinite options and careers, the challenge, to always do what you love, may seem overwhelming. However, I am entirely confident that each and every member of this class is fully capable of meeting, and exceeding, this challenge. So no worries parents, we'll be out of the basement in no time.

Before I go, I would like to thank the individuals who have helped us get this far in our journeys: our families and teachers. Over the last four years, you have pushed us, guided us, and supported us. At times, of course,

you have frustrated us, yet you have never failed to inspire. You have provided encouragement as we memorized Shakespeare and tried to speak a foreign language. You have cheered us on at sporting events and helped us complete anything from class projects to homecoming floats. And even if we came up short of our goal, you were always there to help us back up. Truly, throughout the years, you have been our foundation. And trust me, it has not gone unnoticed.

Lastly, I'd like to say congratulations to the Huntington High School Class of 2009! I wish you all the best of luck!

Dylan Payne's Salutatorian's Address Huntington High School Graduation - 2009

Hello fellow members of Huntington High School's class of 2009. Congratulations on making it this far. Graduation from high school is an important milestone in all of our lives, but before I put some of you to sleep you with advice and gratitude, I'd like to highlight a few memories that have defined our class over the years.

Homecoming. Our double homecoming started this year off with a bang. Although we didn't have the best of luck on the field, the dance and after-party made up for it. After our trek down West Shore Road, we ended up at Rosas, as we often do on late Friday nights. Battle of the Classes was another memorable tradition – our great turnout as seniors paid off with our third consecutive victory.

Surely all of us have been pushed by our parents at one point or another, so I would like to thank all the family members who are here today, who have helped us achieve over the past four years. However, this thank you is also a goodbye. After high school, the people who brought us up from drooling toddlers, into intelligent young men and women, will play a much smaller role in our lives. Not to say that they will be less valued, needed, or loved by any of us. However, now that we are done here, we will be making more of the everyday decisions of our lives, the places we go, the things we do, and the people we meet.

So far, we have been guided in the general right direction. After all, we survived our required education, most importantly, high school. We will all have our diplomas in hand a few minutes after we finish all these uplifting speeches. However, once we go off to college, to travel, to work,

once we leave those who have guided us successfully to this day, we the class of 2009, will have to guide ourselves through the complex world we live in today. We will have to make all the little decisions of life on our own. But the significance of these decisions is anything but small. For it is these little decisions that ultimately dictate what our lives become. These minute choices are what our parents have been trying to prepare us for all this time.

Ten days ago, I was offered the chance to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. I'd always wanted to go skydiving, but I never expected that I'd do it three weeks after my 18th birthday, the minimum age at which they can legally push you out of a plane. I did have to promise my parents that I'd finally start working on this speech, but they gave me the thumbs up. So early the following morning I picked up Sean, Nick, and Joe and we drove out to a tiny airfield in East Moriches. We had to sign our names while being filmed by a long-haired adrenaline junky wearing a tie-dye company T. He assured us that we had nothing to worry about as we assumed the risk of "catastrophic injuries, disfigurement, or death." Fortunately, we were all home and eating lunch by noon. Some might say that four promising young men needlessly risked their lives. However, I believe that life is all about taking calculated risks. After all, driving out East with four 18 year-olds was probably just as big a risk - sorry Ms. Lenhert, I didn't do a two-variable T-test to calculate which was more dangerous.

Without taking small, necessary risks, most people wouldn't be where they are today in terms of their work, relationships, or life accomplishments. I therefore urge you, the class of 2009, to continue to try new things, keep exploring your talents, pick up new hobbies, make new

friends wherever you go, and live exciting lives. However, do not take your new freedoms lightly. Respect the effort that your family here at Huntington has put into you. Don't take unnecessary risks, not just for your own sake, but for the sake of others.

After all, we are all in this world together, and it could use some patching up. I believe our class has a lot of promise among its diverse, unique, and talented members. I am certain that a few of us will change our world for the better, and I will be proud to have known you. Do not take the advantages you have been given lightly. We have been privileged enough to have a strong, supportive school, with excellent teachers and classes in every field. A mind is a terrible thing to waste, and every one of the hundreds of young minds in front of me today has the power to improve the world. You might become the police officer who fights crime, the scientist who develops efficient fuel, or the next senator who fights for progress. Do what you love and feel passionate about. You will garner more respect by doing what you love, than by doing what makes the most money. I'm sure that you will make your loved ones proud in the future, but the most important challenge is to make yourself proud. The only way to accomplish this is by doing something that truly gives you satisfaction.

Sorry, all that advice should last you at least a few lifetimes. But we are here today to celebrate what we have already achieved. Class of 2009, thank you for being an amazing group of people. I will never forget my four years with you, as it was a positive, exciting time in my life. I know you will represent Huntington well in your future endeavors. I wish you all the best of luck.

Principal Carmela Leonardi's Huntington High School Graduation Speech - 2009

It is an honor for me to welcome students, parents, family members and members of the school board here tonight. Before I present my remarks I would like to take this opportunity to thank the two assistant principals, Mr. Noce and Mr. Stein and all department administrators for their work with students and their families. A special thank you goes to the teachers who are committed to the success of every student and continue to take a personal interest in their academic and social development.

It has become my practice, in preparing for this important event, to reflect on the qualities and gifts members of the senior class have displayed in their four years at Huntington High School. I would like to share with you just some of their achievements and I apologize in advance for only mentioning a few. Members of the class of 2009 are service minded. In fact, many have raised their own money to fund mission trips to New Orleans, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. One of our students trains seeing-eye dogs. A number of our seniors achieved the very prestigious honors of Eagle Scout and the Gold Award which, as you know, require the implementation of involved projects that benefit their community. The class of 2009 has many gifted athletes who were recruited to participate on Division 1 athletic teams. One of our talented graphic artists created a mural commissioned by the McQuilling Co. in Garden City. Another of our seniors is such a gifted craftsman that he was able to build his own boat. He might be called upon to build us an ark in the very near future.

In these hard economic times, Huntington High School seniors nervously anticipated their financial aid packages, many waiting to view all

of their college award letters before making their freshman deposits. This shift in cost conscious decision making is reflective of the country's economic crisis to which Huntington's seniors are responding responsibly. They are critically evaluating their educational and career goals, applying to a variety of private and public institutions and completing more scholarship applications than in years past.

And now some hard data about all that they accomplished. Many of our seniors challenged themselves with Advanced Placement courses that have the potential of earning them college level credits. 112 seniors as opposed to last year's 81 took AP exams. 67 compared to last year's 40 took three AP exams or more with six students (double last year's number) taking six AP exams each for a collective total of 331 AP tests as compared to the previous total of 210.

For this senior class, the college center processed 1,439 college applications. As of today the class of 2009 received \$13,428,936 in scholarship money. This amount exceeds last year's by \$4,887,392. 90% of the students sitting here today will be going to college. 2.1% enlisted in the military, 2% will be working to complete a certification program and 4.1% are beginning their work careers. One student will be attending an academic leadership program in Israel.

The college bound students will be attending Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, all SUNY and various out of state public and private colleges and universities including UCLA, University of Virginia, University of NC at Chapel Hill, Rutgers, College of William and Mary, Boston College, Duke, University of Notre Dame, Georgetown, NYU, Tufts and Fordham to name a few.

Some of the interesting majors they have selected include: Film and

Televisions Studies, Theater Design/ Stage Crew, Aviation, Mathematics, Engineering, Education, Astronomy, Biology, Pharmacy, Nursing, Accounting, Photography, Architecture, Fashion Design, Music, Business Management, Journalism, Political Science, Sports Event Management, Pre-medical. These college placements and career choices more than anything else speak to the commitment our young adults are making for their own and our future.

As a closing thought I went back to my now well known “Book of Answers” by Carol Bolt. This little book has not let me down yet. When I opened a page at random, it offered the following recommendation: “Follow through on your obligations.” More than any other group, the class of 2009 has been warned that the future of our country and our planet rests on their skills and talents. We, as parents, would not have chosen to put such a burden on their young shoulders. Judging from the achievements I have just listed, however, we can be encouraged by the knowledge that our sons and daughters will take up the responsibilities they have been handed and find solutions where we did not dream or even dared to hope for. For my part I strongly believe that the future of our society is in very capable hands.

Congratulations to each member of the graduating class and their families, may you continue to experience great success in your future endeavors and remember that “like faith, a great education is empty if it does not affect the way we live our lives.”

School Board President Bill Dwyer's Huntington High School Graduation Speech - 2009

Thank you for the introduction Andrew.

On behalf of the Board of Education I'd like to welcome everyone to this years commencement ceremony. I extend this welcome to members of our central administration, to our high school administrators and faculty, and most importantly, to our graduating students, your family and friends.

Graduates, let me share with you my perspective on the wonderful event that high school graduation is. You see, being that I'm, um, not as young as you, I've been through several of my own commencement ceremonies and since have had time to properly understand where they fit amongst all the other things that go on in life.

You see, life is a journey, but along the way, we stop to celebrate milestones, and high school graduation is a biggie, not only for you, but for your parents as well. You've all worked hard to get to this point and it really is worth celebrating.

It is a good time to look back on all you've accomplished and all the good times you've had along the way, while understanding that your future is full of opportunity waiting for you to grab hold of it and say, "Hey, let's go do something good." So you're celebrating both an ending and a beginning.

The ending, of course, is of your education in our District's schools.

You've been taught reading, writing and arithmetic, history, science and foreign languages. You have had the benefit of dedicated and experienced teachers willing to challenge you to learn, at times, more than some of you would have preferred. While the diplomas you will receive this evening signify that you've completed all of the academic requirements for graduation, understand that they embody much more. Many of you have taken advantage of the wide range of art and music programs we have to offer. And a large number of you have participated and excelled in our athletic programs, learning the value of dedication and teamwork. You've traveled to other communities as ambassadors of Huntington High School whether it was competing on sports teams, in academic competitions, or with the marching band. These have all been experiences that contribute to your overall education. You've developed social skills in interacting with your classmates and teachers, and you've learned to enjoy additional freedoms you've been granted as you've gotten older and the responsibility that comes with them. All of these things have helped to prepare you for whatever comes next in your life.

And that brings me to the beginning....You are ready to start a new chapter in your life, and it is a chapter where you write your own story. You see, up until this point, you have been ours. Your education has been mandatory. Like it or not, you had to get up every morning and go to school. But now the choices become yours. Many of you will go on to further your education at colleges, whether they be two year or four year programs, or trade schools. But these will be schools of your choosing, in courses of study that you are interested in. And if you're not sure yet what it is that really interests you, don't worry, give it time. Go out there with

your eyes and mind wide open and you'll figure it out soon enough. Others may choose to go to work. To you my advice is to find a job that's interesting...but even if it's not interesting at first, give it some time. When you immerse yourself in something, you may be surprised at the things that grab your attention. Several graduates have chosen to enlist in military service. To you I say a sincere, "Thank you. We truly appreciate the commitment you are making.

Some people will stay local, while others will move away or even move abroad, even if it's just temporary. I advise you to take in the sights and attractions of where ever you end up. It's all educational and a lot of fun too.

Before I finish, let me give you a little more perspective, this time not because I'm not as young as you and have already done the graduation thing, but because I've moved around in my life. I grew up in Middlebury, CT, a small town midway between New Haven and Hartford. So small in fact that the road I lived on was named "Dwyer Rd." I couldn't do anything around town without it getting back to my parents. But it was a good place to grow up. Since then I've lived in Providence, Boston, St. Louis, and Los Angeles, and each place was unique. But for me, none compares to Huntington. I tell my family that Huntington is the biggest small town I've ever encountered, with the added benefit of being an incredibly diverse community. Whenever you go into town, you're sure to run into someone you know. And I'll bet that many of you graduates have found that what you do in town, often times gets back to your parents, for better or worse. But as you get older, you'll come to appreciate the

nurturing aspect of a community like ours and don't be surprised that when you settle down to start your own family, if you look for a community just like this, it's not here that you're already living.

Combine this nurturing environment in which you've been raised with the solid educational foundation that you have worked hard to construct and you are well prepared to take your next steps in life. I urge you all...Please take those steps CONFIDENTLY.

So you see your graduation is an ending worth celebrating, but it is also a confident new beginning, and surely, a memorable milestone on your journey through life.

On behalf of the Board of Education, I'd like to congratulate you all, and wish you the best of luck going forward. Make us proud. I have no doubt that you will.

Introduction of Valedictorian Christopher Lau By Huntington Senior Alex Lau

Good evening Superintendent Finello, Dr. Leonardi, members of the board, administration, teachers, students, family and friends. It is an honor to be able to address you this evening, and an even greater honor to introduce the next guest. The next speaker is not your typical geeky valedictorian, who is all work and no play, yet he's certainly not your everyday high school senior either. Yes, he studies constantly and puts endless amounts of time and effort into perfecting everything he does, but he is also always up to play a game of backyard football or basketball, whenever asked. On the academic side, he is the most dedicated, intelligent, hard working student and person I know. But don't let that fool you, especially if you have to play him in a sport. He is a fantasy sports, Flower Hill football and backyard volleyball legend, and not to mention a pickup basketball superstar. Believe me when I say that because I'm the one who is usually stuck guarding him. I can never seem to stop that fade-away jump shot, no matter what I do.

But most importantly he's a great brother, an even better friend; and maybe just a bit cranky in the morning. He's always been there to remind me of that test tomorrow I surely would have forgotten about, or helping me out with everything from a problem I had with homework to some fantasy football advice. He has always served the big brother role in our relationship, even though for most of our lives I have been bigger than him. I can only hope that I have given him as much as he has given me, and I know that when we go to our different schools come this fall, that I will miss him dearly. So without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, it is an

honor to present my twin brother and best friend Chris Lau.

Superintendent John J. Finello's Huntington High School Graduation Speech – 2009

Thank you for your introduction Kristy.

Members of the Board of Education, colleagues in administration, distinguished members of the faculty, class officers, families, friends and most importantly members of the Class of 2009.

This is a day of celebration for each graduate. You are to be congratulated for achieving a high school diploma. You have successfully completed some of the most rigorous requirements for graduation in our nation. I am sure you realize that this was a team effort and that you are here today with the help of family, friends, teachers, counselors, coaches and administrators who stood by you, encouraged you, supported you and believed in you. A high school diploma is a significant beginning to a twenty first century education. But it is only a beginning. Continuous learning both formally and informally is another necessary component of your education. The world we live in is changing rapidly and you must keep up with these changes to be productive and to grow as a responsible member of the work force, a citizen of your country, a member of your family and an ethical human being.

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” These words by Ralph Waldo Emerson still ring true today. Right now each of you, and indeed every other graduate around the nation, is beginning their post high school life with a foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to build success. This achievement is an important entryway but the diploma you carry forward is only part of the equation leading to success and fulfillment. What is it that will set you, as an individual, apart from the rest of your fellow graduates? In the broadest sense the answer would be, “character.”

The combination of your ability, experiences, interactions, interests and desires has collectively created the unique person that you are. To be true to yourself you must realize who that person is. You must know your own character. Build on your strengths, work to resolve and correct your weaknesses. Trusting yourself and knowing your abilities will help you set attainable goals that match your interests and talents.

Our world today presents many different and difficult challenges. Look upon them as opportunities to improve the quality of life for all. Use your talent, energy and knowledge to make the world a better place. Stand up to social injustice, work to put down the dangerous threats that challenge our rights, privileges and civil liberties. The American dream does exist. Whatever you set out to achieve can be accomplished if you remain true to yourself. Be an independent thinker. View your successes as well as your failures as learning experiences. Follow your dreams and set goals to give your life purpose and direction. Find your passions and pour your heart and soul into achieving them. Success comes to those who never quit. Learn all that you can about your chosen field and your goals will be more easily attained. Value your friendships. Above all, respect yourself and be honest with yourself.

All of you are starting a new chapter in your lives. There will be a joy and exhilaration in your journey. Do your best in each and every situation. What you do will make a difference. Believe that what you do today will affect tomorrow. Instead of the world changing you, you can help change the world.

Always remember the blue and white of your alma mater with great fondness and pride. You are off to a great start. May the future bring you much success and happiness.

Congratulations to the Huntington High School Class of 2009!

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