

The Janus School
Convocation Speech
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Thank you, Jill, for the lovely introduction and for inviting me. I'm absolutely flattered and excited to meet a whole new group of Janus students. It was back in January that Jill asked me to do this, and frankly, I'm surprised I remembered to write a speech. I did spend a good bit of time between then and now wondering what qualifies me to be a graduation speaker. My first guess was that attending a school like Carnegie Mellon, one with a lot of notches in its belt, was the deciding factor. I mean, Zachary Quinto from the new Star Trek movie is a CMU grad. Plus, we're the responsible for the emoticon or smiley as some call it. I'm serious, kids, you can Wikipedia that. Parents, on behalf everyone at CMU, we'd like to apologize for that little contribution to popular culture.

In all seriousness, I am flattered. There really was no question for me. This school means a lot to me, and though I didn't spend much time here, those two years made a lot possible for me. I arrived at Janus a mess. I had just been thrown out of school, and I could barely keep myself together. For me, Janus was a place to start over, to grow and change as a person. To make mistakes and to learn from them. I certainly wasn't problem free when I left Janus but I was at a place where I could put my best foot forward, which I think is all you can really ask of a person, and I have a lot of people to thank for that. Friends I made, teachers, tutors and advisors who helped to make me into a person who go confidently into the world.

To put it another way, I think that everywhere you go, you write your own story, your own little contribution to the history of the place. That is to say that, now, each one of us has our own Janus story, and if you were to tell mine you'd talk about the hours spent by people who absolutely refused to give up faith in me, or that person who spent hours teaching me how to write cursive in the eighth grade, after all my elementary school teachers had given up. Or that little plastic briefcase I had to carry around just to stay organized. Those are all fond memories of mine, but the thing that I most want to tell you about my time at Janus, isn't about staying organized, or making friends, or about people who wouldn't give up on me, though all those things are involved. What the Janus school did for me, what all those people and all those hours did, was help me to not give up on myself. There's no greater gift you can give, no better service you can render than to have faith in a person. There's no easier time to be depressed, to give up and give in than when you believe that no one else believes in you. So, graduating seniors especially, and every other student here, do me a favor. When I'm done talking, when the ceremony is all over, please take some time to thank those people who have helped you write your story, however short and however hard it was.

Graduating from high school is a big change, and you all know that. It comes with a lot of new responsibilities, no matter what you do once you leave, and it is in itself an accomplishment. But, I've seen lots of top-notch students come out of high school and they rush so hard into college and a major and a career that they forgot what they wanted from it in the first place. They have skills, but they don't know what they want to do with them, or they find out that things aren't the way they planned for them to be. These students have so much energy and they are the pride of their schools and parents alike, but are still waiting to find what it is that they're truly proud of. It's important that, we, as young people, take our time, and slow down, even if it's just for a little bit. We have so much to do, our lives ahead of us, and diplomas in hand, we need to look out on the rest of the world and find our own place in it. This doesn't happen right away for all people, but you'll figure it out. Now I'm not necessarily telling you to take a year off or something like that, but if that's what you need to do, do it. Everyone has their own

reasons for going to college or pursuing a career and they aren't all internal. The trick is doing something meaningful, so that you can do justice to your own desires and to those of all the people that invested in you as a person. What I'm really saying is take your time. Think about it. If something is really worth doing, then it's worth doing right. Whatever it is. That's the key to being a successful person. Do it right. This is the sort of advice that I hated hearing in high school, but in retrospect, it's great advice. Then again, a lot of the conversations I now have with my mother consist of her saying I told you so. And she did. But, at a school where everyone wants consulting jobs and to develop new computer systems right out of college, I've learned to stop measuring success in paychecks and nice clothes and prestigious degrees. Don't get me wrong, all of those are wonderful things, and I hope you all get to have them directly in proportion to how much you want them, but what I mean is that I hope you succeed in whatever you want to do. I've seen a man sculpt a replica of the Lincoln Memorial in Lego blocks and I'm in classes with a girl who's been an international rollerblading champion twice now. One of my friends, who is literally majoring in rocket science wants to write children's books about physics, and if rocket science should happen to him, so be it. My point is, it matters less what you do than whether you do it with passion, style and conscience. Do those things that make you happy, the things that make you feel right, those things that you feel will make a positive impact on the world. Do them as if they were what you were meant to do. That's success.

Have you noticed that now that you're graduating, everyone has their own two cents to throw in? Everyone has something to say about your life, college, politics, religion, money. That's great, and you should listen to them. Take the good stuff, take the advice from people you trust and take the advice that sounds right in your ears. Let people say, "I told you so." They did. But other times, they didn't, don't won't and can't. Sometimes, no one can tell you so, but you. You have to make your own way in the world and no one can experience your life but you. Sometimes you will have to say, "Thank you, Mom, Thank you, Dad, but I need to do this my own way." You've reached the age where doing it your own way, or at the very least on your own, is going to happen more and more often, and you need to be ready, willing and able. Ready to do it, to meet the challenges that confront and admit when you can't do it alone. Willing to try, try, and try again, until you're sure you've done the best you can. Able to take advice, listen, learn and love.

Now, seniors, I don't know you. I don't know your stories or where you come from, and no one knows yet where you're going and what you will do with your lives. I have, however, taken the time to read the newsletter and read a little bit about each of you, and you all seem to be wonderful creative people, with unique interests and skills, and I hope that you will take those out into the world and make your own impact. And life will be hard sometimes, more so for some than others, but I'm sure you have the skills and dreams to overcome the challenges that life will inevitably throw your way. Work hard, take your time, get ready, don't give up, have faith. That's all the advice that I can really give you and it's all you need to hear from me. I believe, sincerely, that everyone, every single person does their own little part to change the world. So, I thank you for having me and for the place that you will make out of our world, and that's to every student here not just the seniors.

Jessica, Virginia, Michael, Ashlee, Nathan, Andrew, Harrison. Congratulations, Class of 2009. We don't know each other, but we share Janus, and the loving and caring people that make it. We have that much in common. And so, I'm proud of you. And so are your parents, and so are your teachers and so are your friends. Go, and do great things. Change the world. Change someone's life. Finally, good luck. You won't need it.