

My Lords, Ladies, Gentlemen, Headmaster, Teachers, Parents & Students

Huge congratulations to everyone who has won an award today – we all know the effort that has gone into achieving your prize, so feel proud.

The Class of ‘88 was not a vintage LRGS year!

And the odds of me, being the one standing up here before you would have been long!

I like 95% of you here today, wasn't a prize winner - that was Payne, Seetheramadoo or Nick George, one of my friends who is here today!

I wasn't the Victor Ludorum - that was Ash Cross, a great sportsman sadly taken too soon and my mate Martyn Howie who is also here today.

It is testament to school that, 36 years later my two room buddies are still my mates! School friendships last a lifetime and no matter what you have achieved in the rest of your life, you are always reminded of the stupid things you did age 15!

Being here today brings back lots of memories, many of which we regularly recount at the pub, the family dinner table or at an OL Dinner.

We reminisce about the great teachers we had, and we had many, with their various idiosyncrasies; Salmon, Stirk, Gibson, Lea, Kelly, the various sporting successes we had, or the punishments that were dished out by Prefect's and Teacher's alike – who knew what Tardiness meant, but it always led to Doug's study for the wack!

School is one of life's reference points - it places where you are from, how old you are, what is or was your talent, and it opens a whole myriad of further conversations.

So why am I standing before you today? I don't think it's because headmaster wants a free DAZN subscription for the Fury vs Usyk fight.

I believe he feels there are some learnings from my journey that can provide some guidance's for yours.

So here goes.

My first advice is to be brave and always introduce yourself to the people in the room!

It may seem a strange one to start with, but I notice people's reticence to greet others; be it at the start of a meeting, at a social or when starting a new job.

So why do it I do it?

Well, that is down to my Mum. From age 14, she had to attend dinner dances with my grandfather, because my grandmother was too ill to attend.

What she did was to play an ingenious game:

- How many people could she get to know that night?
- What would she learn about those people?
- And what would they say to her father about her over the next few days?
- It was all about taking the positive out of a situation that others could find terrifying or a bore!!

Through this game she met many interesting people, heard their stories, learnings for life and this guided her ambition.

And this has helped me through my life. I like to get to know people and develop friendships across the globe. I believe that EQ is as important as IQ.

Sport has always been my passion – it was the lesson I couldn't wait for and how I wanted to spend my spare time.

And it has taught me so many life skills.

I especially love team sports. Winning together is so much better than individual success.

LRGS provided me with so many opportunities and I was blessed to have some amazing teachers who spotted that passion and invested their time to develop my skills, often at the expense of their own family time.

It would be remiss of me not to remember some of those special people who changed mine and so many students lives; Sean Higgins, Richard Furlong Brown, Ian Whitehouse, Ian Ledward (and Leddy's Spartan Army) and Doug Cameron - an amazing man, who spotted something in me and invested his time to help me reach cricketing levels I couldn't have imagined. Thank you to them and so many others - legends one and all.

In time you will recognise how lucky you are to have the network of schools you compete and thrive against; many of the best private and state schools. Those competitors who you shake hands with at the end of any competition may well become your friends later in life. I have mates now from people I played against at Sedbergh, Bradford or Manchester Grammar to name a few.

So, sport gave me confidence, taught me discipline, determination, stoked my passion and taught me that a team of great individuals will not beat a great team.

And I was very fortunate that it helped me get my first job, in rather unusual circumstances!

Post University, I was in London to see my brother, and we were out with his friends in the pub. They were short for a match the following morning and asked could I play?

I turned up, had a good game, and after the match the captain asked could I play next week?

I said I needed to sort out a job and he replied that if I committed to play until the end of the season, he would give me a job for 2 months! I agreed and on Monday morning I was working at EMI Records.

A week into that role, I was desperate to find out what was happening in the Test Match as a friend from Lancashire cricket was playing.

This was pre-internet, so I ran around the office trying to find a TV with the cricket on. I finally found one, knocked on the door and popped in. Tony, whose office it was, and I started chatting and when he heard I played cricket, asked would I play that weekend!

And that decision changed my life in a number of ways:

Firstly, on the way to the match, Tony mentioned there was a full-time role going at EMI and would I be interested? So, EMI now became my permanent position!

This new cricketing family introduced me to some amazing characters from across the Publishing, TV, Movie & Theatrical worlds to name a few.

And the Chairman of the team was Harold Pinter - the famous play-write.

Over the years I would drive Harold to matches and I learnt so much listening to him. What stood out was here was a man that every actor wanted to meet, be cast and respected by. But cricket was his passion and that's what he wanted to talk about.

One of my most magical cricketing moments was introducing Harold to Doug Cameron and watching them sitting on a bench, chatting about their mutual admiration of Sir Len Hutton at John Paul Gettys ground!

In fact, that day best emphasised that you never know who you will meet if you introduce yourself!

As we sat having lunch, an elderly couple who were on their own asked could they join us, and we said we would be delighted.

I began chatting to the elderly gentleman and he asked what did I do?

I said I worked at EMI Records. He replied, how strange, my son works there as well.

I asked what did he do, and he replied that actually he was a musician in a band that was signed to EMI.

He then proceeded to tell me the story of how his son Michael, had been at University in the early 60's and rang him to say that his band had been offered a recording contract and what should he do?

His advice was don't be stupid, stay at Uni. He wasn't positive that this music thing would lead to anything. But his son didn't take his advice and signed the contract!

As I listened, I had to ask - sorry is your son Mick Jagger! He replied he was, and then explained that the reason we were all there was that Mick had introduced John Paul Getty to cricket and they had become great friends!

Most people I know haven't had a career plan – you play what is in front of you and then pretend with hindsight there was some master plan.

What has driven me is following my Passion.

For example, when I was leaving EMI, I had a choice of going to a leading games Publisher or take a lot less money and join Sky Sports. For me it wasn't a choice - Sky was a product I loved. I followed my passion, and it was the best decision I ever made.

Sky was my University of Business, and I met some amazingly smart, talented and passionate people, whose common goal was to revolutionise Sport on TV. Through them I learnt all about the business of sport which opened up the rest of my career.

While there I learned that the smallest things could make the biggest impact! For example, they revolutionised the live coverage by adding the Live score and clock permanently on screen! A tiny change which seemed so obvious, but it hadn't been done before.

I have been fortunate to have learnt from so many amazing people during my career. A common trait is that they all wanted to help me do my job better! You see most people want to help, guide and advise you - you just need to ask!

One of the best pieces of advice I was given was - you are born with 2 ears and one mouth - so listen and speak on those ratios!

I always got stuck into whatever roles and responsibilities were thrown at me, and this gave me the business understanding to help my career development, giving me the confidence to set up my own business in 2005.

I have often been asked why I started my own businesses?

Firstly, I was fortunate to have grown up in an entrepreneurial family, so I learnt first-hand the ups and downs of running your own business.

I realised that big companies are not for everyone. I am idealistic, thinking people always look to do the right thing! That is sadly not true.

My decision-making rationale is based on 'would you do it if it was your money' and when we analysed the business opportunity, my partners and I decided to go for it.

So, what lessons have I learned along the way?

Be flexible - we spent 6 months building a business plan and quickly saw it was wrong, so we pivoted and doubled down where we saw growth.

The people you expect to help you the most may let you down.

But others will surprise you with the level of help and guidance they provide.

Provide solutions not problems – don't come with a load of problems to your boss without having thought of how you would solve them first.

The most impressive people I have met always simplify complex situations. This breeds confidence that they know what they are talking about and will make good decisions.

Be Authentic - listen to all opinions but formulate yours and be confident to express it, don't regurgitate someone else's.

When working internationally, make sure you smile, look people in the eye as it helps to break the ice. Speak slowly and be respectful for cultural etiquette but don't be afraid of throwing yourself into an uncomfortable situation. By trying it helps win trust.

Building trust is one of my best attributes. And the friendships I have built have taken me to some amazing place and situations.

A good example was the day after the 2019 Rugby World Cup Final, I was in Tokyo with work friends and one of them said they hadn't done Karaoke!

A friend of ours had been to this karaoke bar the previous night and sent us a picture of him with, what we assumed was the Karaoke bar owner.

As we arrived the doorman refused us entry, but we persisted. We showed our friends picture with the owner in it and off he ran and a minute later the bar owner arrived and thankfully let us in.

We quickly realised that we are actually in a private party for Ed Sheehan and his family, and the Bar owner was actually the biggest selling Japanese recording artist. As we talked to Ed and his family, I realised Ed was close friends with my mate Tony who had got me my first job. What a small world it is.

If I had one major criticism of school, it was the lack of careers advice on what roles are really out there in the big wide world!

I was advised, if I wasn't going to be a professional cricketer then I should look at the Police, Army or Teaching. I fully respected these jobs, but I was sure there were so many other roles out there that I wanted to seek out!

It is why I am such an advocate for the role that the OL's can play for students to learn about all these careers out there. So students please use this great resource!

I have been fortunate and recognise many sliding door moments that could have taken me down a totally different career. So, this is my final advice.

Fear and Opportunity are the driving force in my career. My Fear is that everyone else must see these same opportunities I see before me. Therefore, I have to move fast as otherwise someone else will take them! This has taken me on my life's adventure and made it pretty exciting every day.

Sincere thanks for listening to me. I hope I have provided you with some useful advice. My door (or email) is always open if I can help you in some way to reach your goals.

And now, please have the afternoon off with all my wishes! Except those playing sport of course!