

May 2006 CMPS Graduation Speech: by John Shin

The Totipotent Mind

I'd like to give a big welcome to all the family, friends, faculty, and the CMPS class of 2006! Life's milestones are precious, and today is one such milestone. Look around you, and let's treasure the moment. If you take the time to think about it, it's truly amazing what it took for all of the graduates to get to this point today. Although there are no reliable metrics as of yet for measuring perseverance and hard work, any CMPS student will tell you that counting empty cans of caffeinated beverages on a dorm room windowsill will provide a good estimate. The number of pages with cheek imprints in a discrete mathematics textbook also works surprisingly well. What type of cheeks, I won't specify. Whatever price we were asked to pay over the course of the last four (or more) years, be it long hours of study or overcoming personal challenges, we paid in full for the privilege of being able to wear these caps and gowns today.

As a fellow graduate, I can confidently say that we are entering the most exciting phase of our lives because we now have all the tools we need to become anyone we want to be. To borrow a term from biology, we are, in a word, totipotent. Many of us will move on to corporate America, while others of us, not having learned the lesson this first time around, will enter halls of higher education. However, we all know that graduation isn't everything and that plenty of challenges lie ahead for us. Whatever path we end up taking, we're going to run into situations along the way that will make us wonder if our chosen path was really right for us. Sometimes, we may even question whether we studied right subject in college. G.K. Chesterton, a noted British theologian and journalist once said "there are an infinite number of angles at which one may fall, but only one angle at which one can stand straight." With so much room for failure and

amidst such uncertainty, is there a key that will make the future something we can foretell to a large extent? Is there a key that, if we only knew about it, would guarantee our success? I submit to you that there is such a key.

Have you heard of Professor Robert Rosenthal's famous Oak School experiment? Oak School is a public elementary school with approximately 650 students. At the beginning of one year, all the students were administered a standard test for intelligence. The teachers were told that the test could identify intellectually gifted students who were about to "bloom" and show spurts of intellectual growth. Each teacher was then given a list of names of the students in his or her class who, on the basis of the test scores, would show dramatic intellectual development that year. About 20% of Oak School's students were identified as "potential bloomers." Unbeknownst to the teachers, however, was the fact that these students were selected completely at random. At the year's end, when an I.Q. test was conducted for all the students, 47% of the "special students" had gained 20 or more total I.Q. points, while only 19% of the "ordinary students" gained 20 or more total I.Q. points.

I believe that the Oak School experiment holds the key to success and the key to failure. That key, simply stated, is that we become what we think about. Can you imagine what effect it must have had on the special students' thinking when they felt their teacher's unwavering confidence in their ability to perform?" Ralph Waldo Emerson said "A man is what he thinks about all day long." Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman emperor said "A man's life is what his thoughts make of it." Dr. Norman Vincent Peale put it this way: "If you think in negative terms, you will get negative results. If you think in positive terms, you will get positive results." He then goes on to say "that is the simple fact which is at the basis of an astonishing law of prosperity and success."

The fact that we become what we think about should be very empowering for us because the only thing we have complete control over in life is our thoughts. It then follows that if we place a concrete and worthwhile goal in our minds, we must eventually reach it because that's what we're thinking about and we become what we think about. Conversely, if we think thoughts of fear, anxiety, and worry, our lives will become lives filled with fear, anxiety and worry. And if we think about nothing, we will become nothing.

Our thoughts are like seeds that we plant in the fields of our minds. This means that everyone must live off the fruit of his or her thoughts. Study the life of any person you know who has attained a high level of success in all areas of life, and you will find a life filled with thoughts of hope, love for self, love for others, and thoughts of big dreams. As we graduate, I would like to challenge the Class of 2006 to make a commitment now to plant only good seeds in our minds so that we can reap bountiful harvests in our career and personal lives. And as with all seeds, a whole growing season must pass before the fruit of your thoughts begin to show. However, if you remain steady and continue to saturate your mind with worthwhile thoughts, God will bless you with the rewards that you rightly deserve. This is a law, like any other law of nature.

Fellow graduates of the Class of 2006, in a short while all this noise and celebration will die down, and we will be left alone to reflect on where we've come from and where we're going. Many important decisions will have to be made from here on out that will change the course of our lives. During these crucial times we may be tempted to compromise the values that we've been taught in our homes, or we may start pursuing status over substance. I'd like to share a poem with you that may be of help when we need to reevaluate our goals in life. It's called The Man in the Glass by Dale Wimbrow. Or for the ladies out there, The Woman in the Glass.

When you get what you want in your struggle for self
And the world makes you king for a day,
Just go to a mirror and look at yourself,
And see what that man has to say.

For it isn't your father or mother or wife,
Whose judgment upon you must pass;
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the one staring back from the glass.

He's the fellow to please, never mind all the rest.
For he's with you clear up to the end,
And you've passed the most dangerous, difficult test
If the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years,
And get pats on the back as you pass,
But your final reward will be heartache and tears
If you've cheated the man in the glass.

Whatever we do, whoever we become, let's make sure that, in the end, the man or woman
in the glass is our friend. Congratulations Class of 2006 – we made it!