

The CHALLENGE of your Life
Major Mark E. Henry, 1 June 2009

Intro -

In preparing my remarks for this evening I did some research and found something interesting...Some of the most important people in our nation's history have been home schooled. They include Artists, Astronauts, Composers, Generals, Educators, Inventors, Presidents, Members of Congress, Scientists, Supreme Court Justices and others. The book *Heroes of the Age*, says one such home schooler was a man who was; "...more responsible than any one else for creating the modern worldthe man who had the largest impact on the shaping of the physical and cultural makeup of present day civilization." His parents began the young man's home-school career after he spent only 12 weeks in a noisy one-room schoolhouse. His teacher, having lost patience with the child's persistent questioning, essentially kicked him out of school. His parents however, recognized the potential in the young man and took on the task of teaching him at home and invested large amounts of time, energy and money into his education. The diligence and persistence of Thomas Edison's parents can arguably be credited with shaping the mind of the man who became one of the most influential men in the millennium.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you have or have had a home school child, please stand.

There are two distinct things happening here tonight. One is a Graduation and the other is a Commencement. A graduation is a celebration of a task accomplished. You are done, you have met the standard, you have finished the race; you are mission complete.

A Commencement, on the other hand, is the START of something, a beginning, a new task, a new set of standards, a new race to run, a new mission to accomplish.

This ceremony is to celebrate your graduation and certainly congratulations are due.

The question now is what will you Commence with? What will you begin?

The answer is...the rest of your lives.

Whatever your plans are the fact remains there is something else, something more, for you to do. Therefore, I submit that you are about to Commence, to begin, the CHALLENGE of your life.

The word CHALLENGE is significant both for its common definition and for our purposes tonight. In the army we love acronyms. So I created an acronym from the word CHALLENGE.

Each letter in the word CHALLENGE stands for a point I would like to make today.

C – CHALLENGE yourself to always give your best; whatever you set your mind and hands to, always give your very best and leave everything you touch better than when you started. Thomas Edison said: “I never pick up an item without thinking of how I might improve it.”

Give your best but don't be afraid to call home for help. The arms of your parents and the arms of God are always open. All you have to do is ask.

H – HONOR yourself and others. You will meet people who will have a fundamentally different worldview than yours. That's OK. You don't have to believe as they do, but you have to respect their right to believe something different.

But never allow another person's worldview to take anything away from yours.

Honor the values you have learned and the foundation your parents have provided by always remembering whose child you are. Don't compromise your values just because you are exposed to a different environment.

Honor yourself by remembering that what God thinks of you and what you think of yourself is much more important than what others may think of you.

A – ACT. Act with appropriate behavior; even when you think no one is watching. Act like God is watching; because He is.

L – LEAD. Be a Leader in whatever you do. Leaders instill hope in the people around them and a belief in themselves and their friends. Chase your dreams and live your life; but do so from the head of the pack, even if your pack consists of only you!

Be a Leader to your peers. Support them. Inspire them. Rely on them. Serve them by being an example of what right looks like.

That means you will have to put yourself out there... out front... where people can see you and will expect much from you.

That can be some pretty scary stuff. But, a lamp is not lit to be hidden but is placed on a stand where it can provide light to all.

You may be thinking ..."What if I fail?"

The answer to that question has two parts...

First; So What! If you fail, determine how and why, then work to improve that weakness and get back in there and try again! You have been doing that since you started to take your very first steps, so it is nothing new. And at one time or another every person we recognize as a success has failed; but they called it a "temporary setback."

Edison said; "Many of life's failures are experienced by people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."

Second, What are you prepared to do?

Leaders shape their own frontiers; they don't shrink from adversity, but thrive on it.

Edison said: "The three things that are most essential to achievement and success are common sense, hard work and commitment."

Be committed to what you choose to do. It is not good enough to be merely involved.

The difference between involved and committed can be illustrated with a ham and egg sandwich. The chicken that provided the egg was involved.

The pig that provided the ham; was committed!

L – Learn something everyday; but first Learn to be patient and accept that you don't know everything right now. With time, effort, commitment and prayerful consideration you will build a fortune of knowledge.

Learn to listen to those who have experience and know better than you.

Learn that learning is a lifelong process. A day spent without learning something new is an opportunity wasted.

E – Expect to work hard. Nothing worth doing or having is easy. It is hard work that will make your achievements great. It is hard work that will set you apart from your peers. Expect the unexpected.

God has called upon some of the most unlikely people to do some of the most amazing things.

Expect adversity and tough times; but know that adversity and tough times bring with them great opportunity.

Edison said; “Opportunity is usually missed by most people because it often shows up looking like work.”

N – No unnecessary risk. Be deliberate in all that you do; thinking before you act or speak. Don’t be in such a hurry that you neglect common sense.

Know who you are interacting with. Not everyone has your best interest in mind. You will meet people who are simply up to no good. So, be diligent and do your research so that you mitigate as much risk as possible.

Know the consequences of your actions; ask yourself; “Will I be proud of this tomorrow?” “Is this something I can live with or something I can just live through?”

G – Gear up & Get Ready. Be ready for tough times; physically, emotionally, financially and spiritually. Life is tough and it takes a tough person to be successful. Life is tougher on those who are unprepared to make the hard choices or who don’t have the discipline to stick to what they know to be right.

Gear up and get ready for tough times; because you will have them.

You will find yourself in situations that may require you to step out of your comfort zone.

Remember, God is much more interested in your character than He is your comfort.

Finally, we have arrived at the letter E and it stands for...

E – Enjoy living your life. Enjoy being a child of God. There are such great things in store for you.

In closing I want to leave you with this...

In my career I have had the blessing of working with some of the greatest people on earth; the American Soldier.

They have come from all walks of life and all manner of circumstance.

I have served with them in some of the world's harshest places and have seen them do some excellent and extraordinary things.

As I look into your faces this evening Graduates, I see that same potential for excellence and the extraordinary.

The future lies with you. With common sense, hard work, commitment and staying grounded in your faith you will do well in the CHALLENGE of your life.

Ladies and gentlemen; thank you. May God bless you, may God bless our Graduates, May God bless America.