

Commencement Speech to Kenai Peninsula College Graduates

5/2/00 D. Peterson

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Chancellor Gorsech, Board of Regents member Rogers, Director Steffy, respected faculty, students, and guests:

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to share this special event with you. I'm a teacher so you'll have to excuse this first couple of minutes - I just had to take advantage of this teachable moment, this opportunity for instruction with a captive, friendly audience. In case you were suffering withdrawals from not having to go to class today, I just couldn't resist teaching you three new vocabulary terms. I want to make sure you have the most accurate and up to the minute speech patterns as you graduate this evening. The first term that has become almost a part of daily language throughout the peninsula is "dark fiber". If you're wondering what that is, it has to do with the technology infrastructure and the "pipe" where information will travel between sites. The best of the best is dark fiber and we've got it. Just say the term and watch techies drool. The second new term that has squeaked into our vocabulary has its roots in California. If you really like something or if your audience is "getting it", it resonates. If something resonates, it means it is good. Last but not least, there is a new term for lifelong learning. The term I heard was K-99 standing for kindergarten through 99 years of age but I thought a better term should be PK-99 standing for pre-kindergarten through 99 years of age. So, if the term PK-99 catches on, I'll know that it all stems back to tonight. Let's try some guided practice - what are the three terms, say them after me - dark fiber - resonates - PK99. Alright, enough of the participatory part - now on with the main event.

I know those of you graduating have a couple of things in common - you are from the peninsula which is a very special place, and in many ways we are "family" for each other. I know some of you are fortunate enough to either have family here or family who has traveled to be with you but what I sense when I walk into a classroom at KPC is the total sense of family - we are here for each other. That uniqueness is great.

As a family we share many things. Tonight we share our success. I believe there are four "a's" that contribute to individual and group success; they are - attitude, action, achievement, and adventure.

First, attitude. There's a story of a quadriplegic character who, rather than making excuses or feeling sorry for what he didn't have, started each day with the attitude of "I'm so lucky." Try that for a while and see how things change. For me, When I know there's going to be a particularly bad board meeting, I say, "I'm so lucky I get to go to this meeting - there's a chance to educate someone." It's one of those things that when you change your mind, your world shifts. Try it. Like anything else, attitude gets better with practice. What we expect from the world is usually what we get. Abraham Lincoln said that most people are about as happy as they make their minds up to be and he's right. You are all responsible for how your life turns out - you can't predict what is going to happen to you but you can control your response. What about negative people? Have you ever met a person who is "personal skills challenged"? You do your best to avoid them - why - because attitudes are infectious. The message is have a good attitude and surround yourself with others with the same.

The second "a" is action. Your mind is your richest resource. This door you are walking through tonight (you're not peeking through the window anymore, you're not speeding down the highway), you're walking through a door that you don't know what is on the other side. The dance of life that has led you to this moment may be a straight path or it may be a zig zag. No matter, you are here, reaffirming your goal of action toward increased education. For those of you who have taken the time and exercised the discipline to climb in the driver's seat of your lives, you've just reached one stop. Maybe you can't see what's next, but you know that if you keep doing some things well each day, before you know it you'll be sailing into that next goal. Your clear, strong purpose shows.

The third "a" is achievement. Always remember that billions of human beings would give everything to enjoy the freedom and personal liberties we are enjoying tonight --- the right to choose our work, our goals and our path in life. No one can take this achievement away from you. It goes well beyond the piece of paper, however, that's going to look great on the wall. It says something about you. No matter what you had to do today, what hassles of finals are left over, what the rest of your life looks like right now because of your attention to this particular goal, savor this moment because it is truly a special time. You know that achievement doesn't come from getting pats on the back; you feel the happiest and most satisfied when you have completed a difficult task. And honoring that achievement is why we are all here.

A lifetime is days strung together into weeks, months, and years. But when you reduce it back to a simple day - it is the series of tasks, some good/some bad, but all part of what we do. Stringing together a set of successful tasks is what makes a good life. Hopefully, the fourth and final "a", adventure, is an important part of your journey through life. Saint Edmund once said, "Work as though you would live forever but live as though you would die tomorrow. I feel so sorry for some kids today who say, this is BORING - and explain to them (usually falling on deaf ears) that life is only dull to dull people. We need to be alive - we need to be thrilled to get up each morning. We must radiate success and it will come to us. The sense of adventure and hope should never be far from our daily activities because that is what makes life fun.

H.G. Wells tells how every human being can determine whether he/she has really succeeded in life. He says, "Wealth, notoriety, place, and power are no measure of success whatever. The only true measure of success is the ratio between what we might have done or been and what we have actually made of ourselves. And folks, you have made something great of yourselves.

So now, filled with a great attitude, positive action, incredible achievement, and a sense of adventure, we're poised on the brink of accepting recognition in this ceremony. I wanted to make sure I left you with a blessing of some sort so here it goes - may the dark fiber resonate throughout your PK-99 life. Just kidding, the real blessing is that we, your peninsula family and friends, are so very proud of you and your accomplishments and we wish you only the best. Good luck.