



Federal Trade Commission

MEADVILLE AREA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

Deborah Platt Majoras
Chairman, Federal Trade Commission
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Thank you.

Assistant Superintendent Heller, distinguished Board members, Mr. Morgan,

gameboy; we played Pac Man and thought it was cool. You carry cell phones, instant message one another, and play computer games with one another without even being in the same house. We feared or despised the Soviet Union but knew nothing of terrorism. Today, the Soviet Union no longer exists and, tragically, yours is the first generation in our country to come of age with

that put us on a level playing field with all other Americans as we leave the safety of our family homes and begin our adult lives.

The first of the fundamentals is diligence, hard work. I know you knew that was coming; there is simply no way around it. I have worked and continue to work with people who are smarter than me or who have skills that I do not have. But I have never let anyone out-work me. In the end, anyone you work for or with wants someone they can always count on. Be that person, and you will stand out.

Hard work, though, does not mean just mindlessly putting in hours so the boss sees you there. It means putting your all into everything you do: in your work, making a sale or arguing a case in court, or even in making a sandwich, shoveling the driveway, or picking out a gift for a friend who has been ill. But, you might ask, isn't the purpose of some jobs just to collect a paycheck on your way to doing something else that's more important? And just because I cut corners shoveling the driveway, that doesn't mean I will cut corners at my job, right? Wrong. Excellence and a strong work ethic grow as we practice them – and so does mediocrity. While you don't know what you will be doing with your life years from now, I know that you would not tell me today, "I believe I was put on this earth to be mediocre." And besides, you never know who may be watching. I once read the story of a boy named Colin, who grew up in the Bronx in the 1950's, where it was not easy to find a summer job. But he needed money, so he went to the Teamsters Hall every morning to get whatever jobs he could. He was the only kid who volunteered to clean up sticky syrup at a Pepsi plant. He did such a good job that he was invited back the next year to run a bottling machine. Years later, Colin, Colin Powell that is, would become the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then Secretary of State, and he

would offer these words: “All work is honorable. Always do your best because someone is watching.”¹ Some day, somewhere, you will impress someone who wants to give you a job or help you in some way, when you least expect it.

I arrived for my first stint in Washington right after I graduated from college in 1985. I had no job, only enough money on me to live for about a month, and no contacts. But I had my new diploma, so I figured, “no problem.” Wrong. I was one of many new college students in D.C., all looking for plum jobs, and suddenly, I would have traded my good grades for the ability to type. I took a job as a receptionist in a law firm. Because I was considering applying to law schools, I thought meeting some lawyers would be a good thing. Now, I could have approached this job with disdain or made it clear that this was not what I wanted to be doing. But that attitude would have been contrary to what I had been taught.

the best male golfers in the world at the age of 15, you see that their positive attitudes and ability to shrug off the barriers and the naysayers has made all the difference.

say, “Deborah, what’s ‘a can’t’? ‘A can’t’ never did anything! Now do it.” To this day, I cringe if I hear myself say those two forbidden words. Then in college, I had a professor who worried that, because I was so determined to get straight A’s, I was not releasing my creative side and taking some chances. So, she asked me to take a Latin American literature class on a pass-fail basis; that way, I could just relax, enjoy it, and take some chances. So, I did, and not only did it turn out to be one of my most rewarding college courses, it reinforced the lesson about the importance sometimes of stepping off the cautious path.

Our fourth fundamental is connecting with other individuals. There are times when our society of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility may seem to value and reward only the cutthroat. It’s not true. Treating others with respect and caring is the American way and an important fundamental for a successful, fulfilling life. I agree with Dean Koontz, who rose from poverty to become a best-selling novelist today, when he said, “Some people think only intellect counts: knowing how to solve problems, knowing how to get by, knowing how to identify an advantage and seize it. But the functions of intellect are insufficient without courage, love, friendship, compassion, and empathy.”⁹

You only have so many hours to work or play; you can only be in one place at a time; and your body will sometimes fail you, especially as you get older. But, as I learned by watching my mother, your capacity to care and to connect is unlimited. And it is these connections, above any individual achievement that will enrich your life. Treat people with respect and say “please” and “thank you.” When someone at the FTC has done a particularly great job on something, I try to send a quick e-mail of praise and thanks. Not long ago, I sent

⁹Pockell, *supra* note 6, at 116.

such an e-mail to a woman who had assisted me on a project. She wrote back to thank me for thanking her! She said that it meant so much to her to hear from me personally that, there she was in her 30's, sending it to her mother to see. The point is that the e-mail took me two minutes. But it infused this young lawyer with pride and confidence. I remember her note every time I think I do not have time to reach out to say “thanks” or “how are you,” and that inspires one to reach out.

Even outside of the work context, you never know how powerful a kind word or a call out-of-the-blue will mean to someone. I have had some

ambition run out of control or of politicians who have mocked the people's faith in democracy by taking bribes, or of union leaders who have stolen the money entrusted them by their hard-working members. This may make it harder for you to maintain your own high standard; after all, if everyone else is acting this way, why not join them? I urge you not to fall into that trap. Listen to that voice inside of you that knows right from wrong. Fortunately, *everyone* is not behaving badly, not by a long shot. That is not the American way.

As long as we, the American people, continue to create in our own lives a culture of integrity and values and trust, and then stand up for that culture and show our outrage when the culture is weakened by a few bad actors, we will ensure that our principles will continue to guide us and our nation. Recognizing that acting with integrity and accountability is not always easy, however, it is important to remain humble and recognize, too, that all people, no matter how

Understanding this, we recognize while remaining true to principles is not always easy, it is essential that we do it all of the time, even when it seems that not much is at stake.

I hope you were able to recognize something of yourself and your life to this point in my discussion of fundamentals. I also hope that you can take something from what I did *not* include as part of the fundamentals, that is, it is not fundamentally necessary to have wealth or acquaintance with influential people as you go down your path. You do not need those. “Life consists not in holding good cards, but in playing well those you hold.”¹⁴

Friends, I have traveled this great country of ours and to other parts of the world. I say to you with great confidence that those who forget their roots and cease practicing their fundamentals are those who fail in the quest for a fulfilling life. Mr. Morgan told me that many of you wanted to know how I got from here to where I am today. I tell you this: I am there not *despite* the fact that I was raised in Meadville; I am there *because* I was raised in Meadville. Here is where I learned, developed, and practiced a set of fundame

cities throughout the country. Whether you make your life here in this wonderful community or travel elsewhere, I wish you every happiness and success in whatever you choose.