

BACCALAUREATE SPEECH
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Baccalaureate Rites
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Allow me first to say thank you to the University of Baguio for giving me the opportunity to speak in front of you graduates.

Today is a pivotal moment of your journey, and I am honored to be here, speaking to you. Today is not just getting your diploma. Today is a day of celebration. We celebrate the people that you have become...and the many years of hard work that got you in this moment.

Class of 2016, please give yourselves a big round of applause.

The fact that you are here today means that you have accomplished so much. But we could not have come here if not for the people who have our backs.

Today is a day of gratitude. Ladies and gentlemen, a big round of applause for our dear parents and families who have sacrificed so much for you to be here. Thank you. I also include the applause for my own dear parents who are also in the audience today. May our lives be dedicated to conveying our utmost gratitude for their love.

Let us also clap for our teachers, our mentors who gave so much of themselves for you.

Graduates, may your life be dedicated to being the people they hope that you become.

Today is a day of reflection. As today marks the end of an era and the start of a newer, more exciting chapter, we reflect on all the good and bad that came with the past years, as well as what awaits us in the future.

So I think the logical question here is, What can I say to you guys that will help you as you set you out into the vast exciting unknown called the real world? What could I possibly teach you?

First, let me tell you that a little more than eleven years and two months ago, I was sitting on one of those chairs for my own graduation. I remember – somewhere near the leftmost row, just a few chairs behind the front – I remember going through the entire graduation process full of so many conflicting emotions. I was excited, but afraid. I was happy that college was over and done with, but at the same time, I did not want everything to be over so soon.

So last night, when I was editing this speech for the thousandth time, I asked myself, What are the things that I wished I had known back then that could have helped me when I was 21 and starting to venture into the world?

First, reality check.

Does it get harder from now on? Yes, and a lot more complicated.

Does it involve a lot of feelings? Yes, and sometimes a lot of ugly crying and ice cream.

So is there a reason to be excited for the future? Yes, because there are so many infinite possibilities that include you being the king of the world.

I want to share with you some lessons that I learned in the more than a decade that I have been out there. Nothing fancy, just a few truths that have guided me in life.

YOU ARE NOT EXEMPT FROM THE HARD STUFF

No matter what they tell you, know that you are not special.

I think the sooner we acknowledge this truth, the better that we accept the reality that we are not exempt from the trappings of our humanity. No one is exempt from sickness, or heartbreak, or failure, or death. For all of us, it is not a question of if it will happen to you, but when. So don't feel that, just because you are cute, or rich or have all the virtues, that somehow you can just wink this off and then be exempt from all the hard stuff.

What am I driving at?

I am saying that unless you have an over-indulgent genie, or hyperactive fairy godmother, there is no going away from the fact that you need to be prepared to work hard if you are to succeed. That is a truth that we cannot cheat. Well we can always work smart, that is a good way to look at it, but the hours you put in would always speak volumes. The hard stuff is life's requirement in building character and you gain more strength here more than being comfortable ever will.

When people see me, they see the glamor of the job that I have. Don't get me wrong, I would be excited by the fact that I get to be on TV, too. But what they do not see is the hours spent preparing for a story, digging with sources, going on field, interviewing, chasing after interviewees, writing, arguing with editors, voicing, editing and then having your story aired. Celebrating the prestige of the job without acknowledging the hard work that goes with it does not benefit you. Life does not happen like in the movies when the protagonist gets to be a strong warrior in a matter of minutes via a movie montage set to rock music.

The truth is, the movie montage takes months, years or even an entire lifetime. There's no rock music. Only sweat, tears and a lot of repetitive stuff in between. Sometimes this entails waking up hours earlier than you would want to, or sleeping at night at a later time than most other human beings. Most of the time it entails doing the things that you don't want to do, like the boring stuff, or the painful stuff, because that is what being an adult is all about.

One tip that you would thank me for later:
NO MATTER HOW YOU FEEL, GET UP, DRESS UP AND SHOW UP.

I believe that the reason why I am where I am now is because no matter how intimidated I felt, or no matter how exhausted or unprepared I was, I have always decided to be there.

We all know those days of dread when it feels that all that awaits us is either too overwhelming, too scary or too unpleasant to face. During those days it is very tempting to call in sick, stay in bed and hide yourself from the world. I almost never showed up for my screen test for ABS-CBN. As you know that was an important part of the screening process for new reporters. During that time there were so many things going around my head. I didn't know what a screen test was. How do I do this? What if I'm not good enough, what if I embarrass myself? Well, maybe I did make a fool of myself that day. Maybe I did great. But the thing is, despite how I felt, I chose to show up and take the challenge. With all the things that happened after that VTR, I am convinced that I made the right choice.

It is true what they say – showing up means that you have already won half the battle. It means that you have already conquered the hardest step – deciding to take on the challenge. The rest, I assure you, would be easy. Because what's the worst that could happen? Yes, you can fail on an epic scale. Yes, you can end up on YouTube and be a viral sensation for all the wrong reasons. But even then you get out of there a better person. And then you can always succeed... and be a reporter for the biggest news organization in the country. And this brings us to another truth: LET YOUR FAITH BE BIGGER THAN YOUR FEAR.

I am not saying that being afraid is bad; in fact it is perfectly natural. It is but natural to fear the uncertainty of the next years ahead. (We fear the unknown because we are blind to it. We do not know what is coming.) But fear is necessary, because it teaches us to be cautious and careful, and to avoid the dangerous and potentially painful. Without fear, we would probably be hurt more that we should. Fear, however, can also mean living in your own toxic world full of "atras ka dyan besh, mapapahiya tayo." When you let your own insecurities and self-doubt conquer you, you close yourself to what the universe has in store for you. More than that, you close yourself from your own strengths, your own talents. Through such fear-induced thoughts, you crush your own dreams even before they are born. You dismiss the possibilities even before they happen.

Fear cripples us. It confines us in a small circle called our comfort zone. It may be safe inside our comfort zone, but it is also here where possibilities are limited and opportunities are minimal. It is here where the chance of growth is zero.

There comes a time, like now, when you have to choose between being courageous and comfortable. Though both are good, we can never be both at the same time. If we are to have any shot at growth, then we should gather courage and get out of our comfort zones. For many, it would be like an impossibility – either we feel that the odds are too great or that we are being set up for failure. It may be hard, but know that it would be worth it. Everything we can ever hope to achieve is on the other side of fear.

We need to get past the walls of fear. We can do it through small baby steps... slow and steady. But sometimes, your only available way out is through a leap of faith. Faith trumps fear because even in the face of uncertainty, you are confident that things will eventually be alright. Faith is knowing that when you take that leap you would either land on soft ground, or you grow your own wings and fly. So when you have to choose between faith and fear. Choose faith. Feed your faith and your fears will starve to death. All this proves that your mind is a very powerful thing. It can be your best or worst enemy.

Another truth: LIFE IS ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR MINDSET. Sometimes the battle starts and ends in our minds. We have to look into what we entertain here, and then see how it affects our lives. The quality of your thoughts defines the way you live and even the people around you. Because whatever you hold in your mind will tend to occur in your life. You lose if you fill your mind with self-doubt, with resentment, with anger. You win if all we accommodate are full of positivity and hope. What you give power to has power over you.

I have proven that a positive mindset, free from negativity, is a powerful thing whenever I go on air. Before I show myself to the world, I always need to silence those little nagging thoughts that I have in my head. Thoughts of "you are not good enough, you will fail, you will stutter and forget everything." When I give power to those thoughts I would automatically fail. When I turn it off, I win.

We need to embrace positivity and look at the world at a better light.

I cannot stress enough the importance of decluttering your mind. Not only should you free yourself from negative thoughts. You should also free yourself from negative people whose only role in your life is to bring you down. You cannot hang out with negative people and expect to live a positive life.

Another example of the power of mindset:

After graduating, I worked straightaway at the Office of the Publication and Media Affairs of UB. I lasted for only a month, before plunging headfirst into something I was not trained to join: the world of broadcast media.

I am an English Major, and though there are many things that I think I still had to learn before becoming a reporter for ABS-CBN. I found myself doing something that I was not prepared for and competing with others who are better than I am. My deepest insecurity was the thought that I was not trained for the world of broadcasting. I was too young, too inexperienced to be reporting for TV.

Like me you may feel sometimes that you are not ready for the world, or that you are just not good enough like the rest of them. That is okay. Just go ahead and do it before you convince yourself that you can't. That is what I did. The secret is to act like you are meant to be there. Walk like you deserve to be where you are. If you show the world that you feel that you do not belong, then that is how other people would see, too. But when you show the world confidence, then people would believe in you. The trick is to do it, like you are meant to do it all along. Trust in yourself first before others could trust in you. Eventually, you would be so accustomed to it that you become the person that you present to the world. By then it would no longer be an effort to believe in what you are trying to project, because it has become your own self-fulfilling prophecy. Sometimes all it takes is to believe in your own strength first, before other people.

MAKE THE WORLD BIGGER THAN WHERE YOU LIVE IN YOUR HEAD

Everyday, we always have two options: one is to take one step forward towards growth, or to take one step backward into safety. Choose the first. Our goal is to be better than who we were yesterday. Take advantage of your youth, your energy to learn new things, and develop yourself.

Think of yourself as a brand that you need to develop over time; continuously innovate and if necessary, rebrand to remain relevant amidst competition. Ask yourself, What do you want to be known for? Why would people invest in you? One of the best ways to do it is to widen your horizons, by every way possible.

The best way to know the world is to become friends with people who aren't your age. Hang out with people whose first language isn't the same as yours. Get to know someone who doesn't come from your social class. Travel. Read books. Enroll in classes that have nothing to do with what you are doing now. The trick is to always gain new experiences, never stopping to learn. Try to do at least one thing that scares you everyday. Go ahead, strike a conversation with that pretty stranger. Try to go a different route on your way home. I learned that the quickest way to acquire self-confidence is to do exactly what you are afraid to do. You can never quantify that sense of satisfaction you feel when you have conquered a fear.

This is the last truth that I want to stress: DO NOT FORGET KINDNESS. Basic, right? It's something that has been taught to us even before we started school.

Why talk about kindness?

You are being thrust upon the world at a time when the world has seemed to have forgotten the lessons it has so painfully learned in the past... lessons that have been brought to us at the cost of lives.

The value of human life.

The value of freedom.

The respect for institutions.

The respect for the diversity of ideas and even something as basic as the color of skin.

There is a tide of hate and confusion that has divided all of us. And you, as the educated youth, have the responsibility to hold on to the values that have been taught to you way back in kindergarten. Be kind and considerate. Share your toys. Respect your teacher and classmates. Clean up after yourself. And nap in the afternoon. As we move forward we have to go back and remember all of these. Let these hold you firm even as people are pulling you into different directions.

*In a world of anger, be the voice of reason.
In a world of confusion, be the beacon of truth.*

We may be of different ideas. You may not like me because of where I come from and what I stand for. But as human beings with shared ideals we owe it to our country and the next generation who will bear the consequences of our actions now *to not forget to be kind.*

Thank you and congratulations!