

Graduation Address
Christopher Newport College
January 7, 1980

Graduates, distinguished faculty, members of the Board of Visitors, honorable Rector, parents, spouses, children and relatives, friends of Christopher Newport College, ladies and gentlemen: we have gathered here to commemorate a significant and happy occasion.

A graduation ceremony is prized in our society in that it publicly recognizes the cumulative efforts of those who would be masters of their own destiny, captains of their own ships. They would do so through the process of formal education which is offered by an enlightened tax-paying citizenry to those who are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to be educated. And, unlike so many things in life, all participants in this process are winners: the society adds more enlightened citizens, the graduates partake of and apply the summative wisdom of the past, and the advocates themselves - faculty, support associates, and governing boards - vicariously share in the achievements of the graduates.

I am indeed honored to have been selected to participate in this significant and happy occasion.

You, of course, have honored me previously by asking me to become President of CNC following in the large footsteps of past president Dr. James C. Windsor, who has led this college successfully through times which I believe will be said were the most trying and difficult in American educational history. To serve

as President of this college, a vibrant and positive force on the Peninsula, is indeed an honor.

Three is a magic number in our culture, and it is possible that even a third honor has been bestowed upon the advent of my arrival. Knowing that I have lived in Florida and Georgia, you have somehow arranged to make up in one weekend all that I have missed in the past 21 years. Snow. I am indeed honored; I do believe that you have perhaps overdone it, but I thank you anyway.

Of the many topics which lend themselves to discussion on the threshold of a new decade, most, upon analysis, are beyond the jurisdictional power of you and me to change, and as such are interesting rhetorical exercises, but of little practical value. As we enter the 1980's, the return to practical values, to a functional ethic, will be uppermost in the public mind as a necessary precondition for survival. To assay this concept further let us modify for application the notion of Triage, the old battlefield operating principle wherein the casualties are divided into three groups, and differential medical ministrations accorded thereto. This modified notion of Triage goes something like this. We, as individuals, have finite resources with which to confront the world. They include our skills and knowledge, our healthful energy, and our concentrated time.

Events, too, seem to fall into three categories. They are:

1. Events over which we have control.
2. Events over which we have influence.
3. The other 95%. Thus, on a daily basis we

live by pitting our resources against an external world which, in interaction with these resources can be hostile, neutral, or benign. Unfortunately, our tendency is routinely to expend our resources, that is, our skill, energy, and time, in contending with problems over which we have no control or influence, and which fall within the third (95%) category. Thus we tilt at windmills, we mind everyone else's business, we second-guess, we criticize without accountability, and (paraphrasing Biblical metaphor) we point to the speck in our brother's eye while ignoring the boulder in our own.

The efficient and productive matching of our personal resources to events is, of course, to the contrary. We ought to spend the 95% of our skills, energy and time in meeting challenges over which we have control and influence, and most specifically, in the management of ourselves.

As a consequence of this modified Triage and a return in the 1980's to minding our own business with self sufficiency and survival in our national thinking, I have chosen to say to you some things which perhaps will have a personal and functional value, reserving for a later time perpectives on the political scene, the economic outlook, the educational dilemma, and the psycho-social environment.

In keeping with this approach, I searched my own mind for germane comments from among the numerous graduation ceremonies at various levels and with diverse speakers which I have attended. One of the most memorable speakers was a businessman who had been

inordinately successful financially and was venerated for his philanthropy, both of which qualities had thrust themselves onto the graduation selection committee as prepotent factors in recommending him as the speaker. This was a prestigious university graduation encompassing the conferral of doctoral and master degrees as well as the baccalaureate.

As the ceremony progressed and it became time for the distinguished gentleman to proffer his synthesized knowledge to the awaiting graduates and audience, he came to the podium, acknowledged the solemnity of the occasion and began.

He said, "I believe in short meetings. I have three pieces of advice for you graduates, and the rest of you better pay attention. They are:

1. Take care of your body. It is the only one you will get.
2. Don't take yourself too seriously. You will last longer that way, and if you are good you will do better by everybody by living longer.
3. Give whatever you do a good try. If you try, everyone else will too, and you will be surprised at what you can accomplish together."

Whereupon he turned, tipped his cap to the President and sat back down. Elapsed time was 1 minute and 30 seconds. The audience was somewhat stunned as they were geared to up a 40-60 minute peroration on his formulary for success. After a moment of pause, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (who was next on that particular program) recovered and proceeded with the

ceremony.

I have never, as you can see, forgotten that occasion, since I agreed with the premise that brevity and wisdom are intertwined with perhaps the latter being a curvilinear function of the former; that is, too brief a commentary does not permit the audience to focus their attention on what is being said; too long a commentary allows their attention to wander. Also, I wished that he had amplified his three points, because he had essentially captured the three critical attributes we humans have. They are: our body, our mind, and our relationship with others and the outside world. Were he to have expanded on these three elements, I believe he might have done it something like this: The first, our biological body. Within this fragile integument, the necessary, vital energy, purposive force, and sustained stamina each of us has must be carefully fostered and nourished if we are to accomplish what we are capable of. In the flush of youth, as we drain the genetic batteries, as it were, the care and feeding of the body appears relatively unimportant in our glandular rush to go and do. It is only when the body breaks down through abuse that we pay attention to it, and true to the auto repair model that we impose on modern medicine, we go to the doctor and get whatever ails us fixed. As the histological evidence grows that fatty deposits in the blood vessels are appearing at increasingly earlier ages in a growing percentage of our youth; as the clinical data indicate the increasing lack of physical fitness in our entire population; as it becomes more evident that there

are more breakdowns than doctors to fix them; as the attendant cost in dollars in attempting to build garages, or lapsis linguae, hospitals, staggers us, it becomes apparent that we as a nation are in serious difficulty in this area of bodily care. We simply do not take care of our bodies. We seem to prefer to think alternately that, one: if something goes wrong, we can take a pill, get a shot, have an operation, or otherwise get it fixed; or, two: that disaster may happen to someone else, but it won't happen to us. This dissociation from reality is on a national scale and bodes ill for us in the 1980's.

Fortunately, there is presently a counter-trend to this growing health problem. It manifests itself in increased emphasis on diversified and comprehensive athletic programs designed for both men and women of all sizes, shapes, and especially ages. It emphasizes carry-through activities which may be engaged in throughout a person's life. Specifically this counter trend expresses itself in jogging, running, aerobics, therapeutic exercise, and even body building, along with more customary activities such as tennis and golf. These activities, if engaged in with a modicum of sense and moderation, can produce a distinctive enhancement of the quality of everyday living. Further, there is mounting evidence that we in truth become what we eat and drink. We tend to think of diet in restrictive terms, associating the word with the often vain attempt to lost weight. We must think of it instead in a selective sense, that is, what and how much we eat and drink have consequences which are long term as well as short term. We must

have targets and methods so that our true being is that which we are becoming.

Together, appropriate exercise and compatible diet will increase the probabilities of possessing the energy, concentration, and stamina to meet the complexities of the 1980's. And I share with you the feeling that the 1980's will bring a harsher environment to contend with, so I adjure you, take care of your body.

The second point I wish that the businessman had amplified was that of not taking yourself too seriously. This statement is usually misunderstood in our society, perhaps because of the historical association of pleasure with sin and pain with nobleness. We have confused taking our jobs seriously with taking ourselves seriously. They are two separate concepts and must be treated as such, for to do otherwise leads us to misunderstanding of motive, purpose, and style, all of which must reflect each individual's personality. To confuse these two very different notions produces the burn-out so evident in our younger leaders, who have not learned how to relax and roll with the punches. Most of us read daily about the fatal coronaries which occur at increasingly younger ages, or to the mounting suicide rate reaching into the teenage years in scandalous proportions, or to the enormous use of tranquilizers and other psychoactive depressants by those who need them just to get through the day. We must loosen up in our society and begin to laugh at ourselves on occasion, for our sense of humor can be the cheapest, easiest, and most promising way, on a grand scale, to turn our societal

depression around.

As part of the purview which taking your job but not yourself too seriously gives, is the fact that those who will successfully meet the challenges of the 80's will be those who will keep their perspective on what is critical and what is peripheral. Successful persons will also have realistic expectancies of what can be done, and, what it takes to do it. And further, they will enjoy themselves while engaged in the process of accomplishment. The ideal of mens sano in corpore sano is still not outdated.

The third point of "Give whatever you do a good try," is a remarkable point. It is remarkable to me because it emphasizes the positive; it recaptures the "can do" spirit that creates and builds, and it banishes the guild-ridden, mea culpa atmosphere which has characterized so much of our society's recent past. I believe, on balance, that our nation's accomplishments, when matched with those of other nations rather than with a Plotinian emanation or a utopian ideal, need not be apologized for and, to the contrary, are something to be proud of. As the author E.M. Foster wrote in a collection of essays entitled Two Cheers For Democracy, published in 1951, about America and its place in the descending cloud of totalitarianism, in Europe during the 1930's, the American democracy may not be worth three cheers, but two cheers are more than any other society can lay claim to. I believe that his assessment was correct then, and even more so today. I further believe, that into the 1980's we must and will recapture the feeling

that what we have is good and worthwhile. We will once again "give it a try." There are signs of a change in this direction. One indicator is focused in the growing suspicion that we are being drowned and paralyzed in a sea of legalisms. Boundless litigation inundates every effort to do something or, equally often, it appears, to do nothing. Everyone cries for leadership and then proceeds to substitute his judgment for that of the duly constituted leader, and, when he is ignored, files suits, grievances or complaints which subverts the leader and ultimately brings that leader down. At the national level this is reflected in the growing tendency for one term presidencies. At the college level, among Library Directors, the average tenure is four years. Further, and perhaps more well known, is the fact that an extremely high turnover rate of college presidencies bespeaks the lack of support that constituencies give their academic leadership.

Any college which has recently undergone a search to replace a departing president understands all too painfully the monumental task of having the various constituencies such as governing board, faculty, administration, alumni, students, and the community merely agree on meeting times, let alone the final candidate for nomination. It knows indeed how precarious the Presidency is. At present, the term of office seems to be about five years.

At all levels of our society unrealistically high expectations of leaders coupled with the selfsame leaders' low power to meet those expectations have created frustration and withdrawal not only on the part of the constituencies but on the part of the

leaders themselves. The anxiety thereby produced creates a chilling effect on the attitude of "giving it a good try." Nevertheless, it is necessary to do for one's own satisfaction, if for no other reason. Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that in the stentorian call for positive leadership it is often forgotten that there must be positive followership as well. It is good for us to all be potential leaders; it is rumored that even college presidents may amount to something some day; but while potentiating, it is critical that constructive followership be practiced; that is, a followership of loyal opposition along the lines respected by the British where those not in power make up "Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition." To do otherwise perpetuates an endless series of increasingly powerless leaders whose very presence presages disaster for the institution over which he purports to preside.

So I say to you graduates "as you give it a good try," practice active followership as the necessary preparation for developing your potential as tomorrow's leaders.

Finally, as an extension of this point of attitude, perhaps dissenting but unquestionably loyal, because that is essentially what a "good try" is all about, think for a minute about the last time you heard of someone being fired for incompetence. It does not happen very often. What does happen with great frequency, however, is that people are discharged or not promoted for what is termed a "poor attitude." Typically this term embraces such elements as apathy, unconcern, negativism, or open hostility. It surrounds

and often overwhelms us in our society. But this does not have to be. The remedy is simple. It starts with liking yourself. Not in a smug sense of satisfaction or complacency, but in the sense that you are willing to put yourself out for the benefit of someone else. If you like yourself, you will project that good feeling onto and into others who will in response contagiously communicate this attitude to still others thereby creating the "can do" atmosphere necessary for a viable society. As illustration, instead of telling someone to "Have a good day," a vapid and solipsistic slogan at best, instead, say to them "Help someone else have a good day." This helping of others is the essence of a positive attitude, and I recommend it to you.

So in summary, I can do no better than my memorable graduation speaker of yesteryear in saying to you:

1. Take care of your body. It is the only one you will get.
2. Don't take yourself too seriously. You will last longer that way.
3. Give whatever you do a good try. If you try, everyone will too, and you will be surprised at what you can accomplish together.

THANK YOU,

John E. Anderson