

Keynote Address to the Medical Scholar Pipeline Graduates

Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine

July 21, 2016

Thank you for this nice introduction, and I thank you for giving me the privilege and the honor to be the Keynote speaker, to be the one to salute the accomplishments of these incredibly smart young men and women, completing this wonderful and empowering program of Medical Scholars Pipeline. However, this evening is not about me. It is about a message! It is about you Pipeline Scholars. If I fail to connect with you, your hopes and your aspirations, I will be forgotten as soon as you walk out of this auditorium. My ambition is that 20 years from today, you will remember one thing or two from this speech, perhaps an idea, an advice that will make a difference in your lives, that will be a guiding principle in your careers. To make it simple, I will divide my address in five segments that you are all too familiar with : Who? What? When? Why? And How?

First, this evening ceremony is about WHO?

Certainly, we have to thank Dean Smith for leading such initiative within the Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine. Congratulations are also in order to all the faculty members and organizers, particularly Gina Granger, for making this program so successful and giving you this opportunity for intellectual growth and development.

However, this evening is mainly about you, the most important individuals in this room. Give yourselves a big pat in the back, because of your hard work, because of your determination, because you have chosen to ignore the temptations of laziness and complacency, because you have chosen instead to seize every opportunity to better yourselves.

Make no mistake about it. You are the privileged ones. You are the torchbearers. You will be the leaders of tomorrow. You will be the agents of change.

This leads to my second question. WHAT?

Just close your eyes for a minute and envision what kind of world we will live in, 20, 30 or 50 years from now. Will it be a world of chaos, bigotry, hatred, endless conflicts? Or, will it be a world of peace, fairness and progress?

Ask yourselves what kind of vision you have for your future, the future of your fellow human beings, the future of our planet and the future of the universe.

The past 50 years have seen incredible advances in Genetics, Immunology, Cybernetics, miniaturization and communication, allowing instantaneous sharing of knowledge from one end of the earth to the other, eliminating frontiers and boundaries, eliminating distances, making our planet so small and at the same time, taking us to the moon or to planet Mars and at the same time giving us access to the Universe, peering into black holes, etc...?

The pace of change is quickening.

The sky is no longer the limit, as we start to cast our attention on other planets, other galaxies, other constellations, other worlds.

That is the world that you will be living in.

That is the world that you will be leading, that you will have the opportunity to mold according to your vision!

Some of you may ask WHEN?

Some may think that these changes will take a long time. To them I would reply: think again! Changes are happening faster and faster. Just think where you were four years ago. Grammar school? Junior High School? Four years feel like it was yesterday. Ten or 20 years go by so quickly. The train is pulling out of the station and lest you jump on it, you will be left behind and miss on all these wonderful opportunities. These changes that we are talking about start today.

Others may tell me: Look! Everything is fine! I like my music! I have fun playing basketball or I like playing video games with my friends! I am happy! Why should we try to change all these good things? WHY, you ask?

Because the world is in perpetual motion. Good things are happening, just like bad things are happening as well. This is best described in the ancient Chinese philosophy as the Yin and the Yang, a perpetual equilibrium, harmony and balance in the universe between good and evil. We all know what happened in the world when evil overcomes good. Need I remind you of World War I or World War II? The restoration of harmony is always very costly in human lives and in material assets.

Thus, all the good people that you are, that we are, have a mission to ensure that good always prevail over evil.

Now, I am sure that some of you are thinking: "How can little me do all this?" How can we be agents of change? How do we make our vision a reality?

Well, who remembers in the Bible, the parable of the talents? We all have been given talents. Physical talents and Intellectual talents. So far, by being here, you have shown yourselves deserving of these unique gifts that have been lavished on you. However, going forward, what you do with these talents is up to you. Are you going to be content with what you have now and rest on your laurels or are you going to invest yourself and become the best that you can be?

In passing, I would like to mention to you that if you go to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, you will have a chance to see the brain of Albert Einstein in a jar of formalin, preserved for posterity? Why do I bring this up?

Well, because the brightest minds do not exist without a body. Your body is the temple of your soul, the vector of your intelligence. If you do not take care of it, you can say good bye to all these dreams. Drugs, alcohol abuse, risky and reckless behaviors can shatter these dreams so quickly. In latin, they say: "Mens Sana in Corpore Sano" A healthy mind in a healthy body. They go hand in hand. Take care and respect your body so that you can achieve your goals and ambitions for yourselves, your families and the world.

**So my friends, the next phase of your lives begins with you and ends with you.
You will be the agents of change by being open to change.
Do not be afraid of new ideas!
Ask questions!**

**Do not accept ideas or principles just because they have been generally accepted for decades or centuries! There is always a better way and that is what drives progress.
Be daring! Be bold!
Do not be afraid of failures!
You may fall or you may fail, but the shame is not in failing or falling, it is in not getting back up. The shame is in giving up!**

**As Thomas Edison was working on creating the incandescent light bulb, he tried over 250 different elements and alloys that all failed. A journalist asked him then: "Now that you have failed so many times, aren't you going to give up? He replied : At least, now I know that these 250 elements do not work. With that, he proceeded to try with the tungsten filament and he went on to revolutionize the way we light up our streets and our homes.
Opportunities for new discoveries are all around us but we must be prepared to notice and interpret them.**

**Apples have been falling from trees from time immemorial, but when one fell in front of a young scientist by the name of Isaac Newton, the concept of gravity was discovered.
Be ready to seize on new developments and envision new possibilities. Jules Verne read about preliminary research and saw many possibilities. He described television sets, telephones, electric or atomic sub-marines, the conquest of outer space more than 50 years before they actually happened.**

**Think of Steve Jobs! Think of Mark Zuckerberg who took inventions beyond their initial concepts and have now completely changed our way of life.
You too, can be these instruments of change. Dream big! Big realizations start with big dreams!**

**In parting, let me say :
Put your talents to good use!
Educate yourself!
Think with all your five senses!
Be aware of the world around you!
Respect your body!
Respect yourself!
Respect others!**

We are all passengers on this small ship called planet earth. Our lives have become global. Everything that takes place in the most remote corner of this planet affects all of us. So we are our brothers' keepers. We must understand. We must love one another. Making your fellow human beings happy is also the key to your success and to your happiness.

Louis-Joseph Auguste, MD, MPH FACS