



*Neodesha Promise Benefactor Ben Cutler's Graduation Speech*

*August 1st, 2020*

"Thank you Nathan for those kind words. I am a Neodesha product. I was born and raised here, so this is truly an honor to be asked to speak today at your 2020 commencement. Since we are outside with a pretty hot day I will keep my remarks brief. But I do want to share a couple of things with the graduating class. We've got a lot of friends and family here today, but I hope you don't mind if I focus my remarks directly on the graduating class. So, speaking directly to you graduates, why are you here today? Why are you here today? WELL, On the one hand, this is a commencement ceremony. You are receiving a diploma for successfully completing your high school graduation requirements. It is a recognition of your achieving an important milestone in your academic life.

BUT On the other hand, it is just the beginning, a starting point, an initiation, literally a commencement.

What you have done for the past 17 plus years is irrelevant. It's ancient history. The world you will be living in from now on doesn't really care if you made the honor roll, lettered in sports, or came in first at a science fair. Likewise, it doesn't care if you flunked algebra, got in trouble for fighting at school, or was a pest at home. So the good and the bad news is that you are literally starting over. What will matter is what you do with the rest of your life starting [today](#). Let me pause for a moment and let that sink in. What will matter is what you do with the rest of your life starting today. So, where do you go from here. Short answer, it's going to be up to you, to figure that out. Now, as you deliberate on that, I would like to offer three things that made a huge difference in my life. If you take them to heart they may also be important in your life.

First, find something you can be passionate about. In a way it sounds trite to say find your passion. I came close to deleting the idea of passion from my remarks today for that reason. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how important having a passion has been in my life. When I graduated from high school I was convinced I wanted to be a computational mathematician. Unfortunately, my first year college calculus course convinced me I was sorely mistaken. I was really lost for a while, I felt myself drowning in self-doubt. Here I was nineteen years old and I had no idea what to do next. I knew I had better figure it out or there would be hell to pay at home. So my sophomore year I took some business and economics courses, and luckily I found my passion. I fell in love with business problem solving. Finding out why some businesses succeeded and others failed was captivating to me. From my sophomore year on I

became a business problem solver. And I spent four more years studying how to do that and then 47 years applying that in figuring out how to make a business more successful. And what was amazing to me, people paid me to do what I loved doing. Not one day did I ever wake up feeling like I had to go to work. I woke up every day excited to go and have fun solving problems. So, my hope for each of you is that you can find out what you can be passionate about. I know from reading your scholarship essays, that some of you think you have that figured out. You have a clear idea of where your passion is at least today. Many of you don't yet have a clue. That's OK you have plenty of time to figure it out. But all of you need to get comfortable with the fact that your passion may change as you mature and gain experience. My point is whether you aspire to have a career as a plumber or electrician or aspire to be an engineer, a teacher or a business person having a passion about that career is what counts. I have met so many people who are miserable in their job because it doesn't meet the passion test. I don't wish that on any of you graduates, so give this some serious thought, please.

Second, develop a relationship with a mentor. AND, don't be embarrassed to ask someone you think you can trust to be a mentor to you. I was lucky enough to have several when I was growing up here in Neodesha. Ray Heller, Murlin Blackstun, Bud Osterbuhr all gave me terrific advice and counsel. They helped me avoid making some really bad decisions. Now you may be saying to yourself, why would I possibly need that kind of help. I just graduated from high school. I'm smart enough to take care of myself. I don't need any help. Well let me disabuse you of that kind of thinking. I can assure you that growing up in Neodesha, Kansas has not in any way prepared you for the big bad world out there. You have no clue what is in front of you. You lack the wisdom others have developed over years of making good and bad choices and then having to live with the consequences. So again, my suggestion, find a mentor. Mentors don't drop in your lap. You need to search them out and that again may take some time. But a mentor can be a huge asset to you.

I had great mentors throughout my career and still have a mentor today even though I am retired. I know my mentors made a huge difference in my life. Let me provide some context for my last suggestion. I have been blessed to have worked for and with some incredibly successful people over my career. And, I have spent a lot of time studying why some people were successful and others weren't. What I discovered was that successful people make a habit of exceeding expectations. I mean, they wake up each and every day with the intent of exceeding the expectations of the people they associate with. It becomes ingrained in the way they approach everything. They are constantly raising the bar. But listen, exceeding expectations is not as easy as it sounds. Most of us do a lousy job of being clear as to what our expectations are for those around us. As proof, take this little test when you go home. Don't put it off too long, so do it within the week. Write down a list of what you expect from your mom and another list as to what you expect of your dad. Then also do a list of what you think your mom and your dad expect of you. You need to be as specific as you can as to your expectations. At minimum you should fill out an entire page so you need to give this some serious thought. Then ask your mom and dad to do the same. One page on what they think you expect of them and another on what they expect

of you. I promise you will discover some things you never even thought of. It's hard to exceed someone's expectations if you don't have a clue what they are. Here's another eye opener. Sit down with your best friend and compare notes on what you expect of them and what you think they expect of you. Again spend some time thinking and fill out at least one full page. You may be surprised what you discover from that exercise. The truth is that most people are pretty clueless about what others expect of them and also do a pretty lousy job of letting others know what you expect of them. And yet one's success in life really boils down to regularly exceeding people's expectations. In fact, it's true of people, it's true of companies, sports team, you name it. Success is usually measured by how well you exceed expectations. Making this a habit is not easy and it requires one to have a unique mindset focused on constantly learning and studying people's expectations. But making this a habit in your life will go a long way towards ensuring your own success. So those are my suggestions. They worked for me and I know they will work for you. I plan to stay close to our Promise Scholars for the next 4 to 6 years, as I have a vested interest in your success so plan on me being involved with you for quite some time. And for the rest of the class, you will be in my thoughts as well. All of you please stay in touch, and thanks for your attention. "