

'Always Sunny' star Charlie Day gave this funny yet insightful speech at the 2014 commencement address at his alma mater Merrimack College. We produce here the full transcript [*verbatim text*] of the speech for the benefit of everyone. You can also download this speech in PDF file. Read the instructions at the footer.

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Read the full text of Charlie Day's commencement speech below.

Charlie Day - Speech TRANSCRIPT:

Good morning Merrimack.

Thank you, President Hopey, faculty, trustees, students, parents, grandparents who have absolutely no idea who I am.

And I love to say there is nothing more exhilarating than getting to follow a great speech by Ugandan refugee - a terrible position to be in but I'll do my best. And well done, Kennedy.

You are graduating from an excellent school today. Alumni have gone on to be CEOs, politicians, professional athletes. However this year you'll get to receive wisdom, life lessons, knowledge from a man who has made a living pretending to eat cat food.

Now I do however have some qualifications, some insight, because like you are becoming today, I am a Merrimack College Graduate.

Thank you.

I know what it took to get here today. I was in this very room. I sat in those uncomfortable chairs. I dressed like some sort of medieval pastry chef, and I too desperately hoped that my hangover would wear off. Yeah, that one knows. If you can just make it to brunch you should be alright.

Take note. A quick observation today.

Apparently the higher you climb in life the more ridiculous your hats will become. Like the one I'm wearing today, or the Pope or Pharrell. So in some way you fear success, just think of the hats, that should motivate you.

Well, this may be hard to believe but it was roughly 20 years ago that as a freshman I came to this campus. I remember it well. My parents who are here today and I am not thinking my mother as much as Kennedy, I am sorry.

But I remember the tears in their eyes. I remember my own nervous excitement. I can recall entering the Ash dormitory, walking to my room. My heart was pounding with what the future might hold. I grabbed on to the door handle, I held it tight, only to discover that someone had covered it with Vaseline.

It was a real lame prank by the third floor boys. And I thought to myself, "OK, this is how it's going to be here. They have no idea who just arrived on campus."

Later that day, I befriended a man named Ed who had a similar penchant for mischievousness. And that night Ed and I went to the third floor boys community bathrooms and we cut all their shower curtains at waist high.

Thank you. That's right.

Leaving those boys with a diabolical option for the next morning. Don't take a shower or take the most embarrassing shower of your life. My apologies to the school for the destruction of school property. I promise to donate two shower curtains. You'll have to dig up Ed to get the third.

Well, Merrimack has come a long way since my time. The campus has grown. The quality of student clearly improved. U.S. News & World Report has ranked Merrimack as one of the top ten regional colleges in the northeast. Well done. Well done.

In my time there was a man here who scored in the zero percentile on his SATs. Meaning no one in the nation did worse than this man. This was a man who once told someone "he wished he lived when it was black and white." This is the same man who said to someone with complete seriousness that "he would take their advice in to cooperation." This man, of course was my roommate.

Did you think it was me? No, you're confusing me with my television character. No. I am much smarter. In fact, I'm a doctor now. I have a PHD. And I would like to thank the school for bestowing me with this prestigious honor.

And although I realize today I am joining the ranks of my fellow Honorary Doctors like Mike Tyson and Kermit The Frog, and although I acknowledge that Dr. Charlie Day sounds like some kind of club DJ. I assure you I intend to go by this title from now on. And I plan to begin writing my own prescriptions immediately.

All right. Now, I know that having a honorary doctorate degree will do nothing for me. But I'm here to tell you today that your degrees, the ones you toiled to get, the ones you actually took classes to earn, those degrees, will also basically do nothing.

Let me clarify that.

You can't exchange your degree for cash. You can't have your degree do an audition or interview for you. You cannot eat it. Please, do not make love to it. I think you could probably smoke it but I wouldn't advise it.

A college degree does nothing. It collects dust. It does however mean something. It tells something to your community, it says "I have expanded my mind and destroyed my liver but I didn't give up."

And although 44 of you today took more than 4 years to accomplish that goal, you don't have to tell anyone that.

Think of the plus side, you bought your parents a few extra years of nobody living in their basement.

Now all jokes aside, you should be very proud. This is an impressive chapter of your lives. And I know you are curious of what will happen from here. So let me tell you, Dr. DJ is here to help.

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I have been in your shoes. Not literally of course. I wouldn't go anywhere near your shoes. I'm sure they all reek of beer and vomit.

But my point is this. I was in this room and this is a rare opportunity for me to say something to myself 20 years ago.

Here is my advice: "Charlie, lay off the dark beer and the bread. You're getting puffy. Don't worry about that girl. I mean she's not into you. Let her go. She's going to regret it." That's right. "There is going to be a whole Y2k thing; don't worry about it, like nothing's going to happen." All right.

Now I realize this isn't the most useful exercise for you but I am pretty happy with the choices I made after Merrimack. My life is pretty sweet.

So I'd like to tell you three quick stories about some of those choices I made when I left here, some of the things that led me from that chair to this podium. And I hope in some way you can draw parallels from it; they can help guide your own experience. If not, feel free to tune out. If you're anything like I was, I lost you at "Good morning Merrimack."

When I left this school, I was presented with two options. I could move to New York City and begin my acting career, a city where I knew next to on one, or I could take the entry level position that had been offered to me by Fidelity Investments.

Now I know what you are thinking. "Why would a major financial services corporation offer this numbskull a job?" The answer is simple, because I tricked them.

Merrimack's business program was offering interviews with the company. The students would be given a score on their interview. I had never been on an audition. It seemed like it would be a similar experience. And I liked the role of aspiring banker. Or whatever they do at Fidelity.

I had a game plan. Deflect from me. Get this guy to talk about himself. I wasn't going to lie. I was just basically going to interview him. If I recall correctly we talked at length about the intricacies of water skiing, an activity I know nothing about.

Now had the man asked me what eight times seven was, there would have been an unbearable pause in the room. But he didn't. And the interview went so well that they offered me a job. And this was a real job. I am sorry I am making your children cry.

This was a real job. This was a big boy job. And this threw me for a

loop..."Should I take this job? Is this my destiny? Am I the next great financial genius? Should I come up with a plan B? Should I work in Boston for a few years and make enough money to have a cozy transition to New York?"

Well, I've always had a half baked philosophy that having plan B can muddy up your plan A. I didn't take the job. I moved to the city. I bussed tables. I lived in a basement apartment next to a garbage chute that was filled with cockroaches. And I could not have made a better decision.

Well maybe not the apartment thing. I think I could have looked a little longer. You'll find better apartments. Stay away from the trash area.

Now there is an obvious lesson here about believing in yourself, for the plan A, plan B stuff, excuse me while I navigate this thing.

But I think the lesson is this. Had I worked at Fidelity I'm sure they would have fired me eventually. I can barely do long division.

But I didn't want to fail at Fidelity. And I did not want to fail in Boston. If I was going to run the risk of failure I wanted it to be in the place where I would be proud to fail, doing what I wanted to do.

And let me tell you something... I did fail over and over again. I was too short for this or too weird for that. I had one casting agent say "This main will never work in comedy."

But I was in the fight. I was taking my punches but I was in the fight. That's a metaphor of course, I don't think I have any actual ability to take a punch.

Now my second story is about creating your own opportunities instead of waiting for them to be handed to you.

After a few years in New York, my foot was in the door. I was doing pretty prestigious parts like Mailroom Kid #1 and Junky #2. But after many failed attempts of getting cast in a television show something popped up. It looked as though I was going to be offered a job on a big network television program called “Life on a Stick.”

Now around the same time because I was tired of waiting for my break to just happen, I along with my friends Rob McElhenney and Glenn Howerton started filming my own television show in my apartment.

I had a sense that maybe I could create an opportunity that was better than the ones that were being given to me. So I borrowed cameras, I had friends hold microphones and we shot a show in our apartments that we were going to call “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia.”

Thank you.

Now suddenly there was another decision to be made. Another crossroad. Do I do “Life on a Stick?” Do I take this big network television opportunity, or do I make another bet on myself and this time my friends as well? Do I make no money, do I try to sell a home movie as the next great television series?

I mean, I was trying to tell people I was a writer and I didn’t even own a personal computer. This was a risky bet, a real long shot. But I said no to “Life on a Stick” and I went with “Sunny.”

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“Life on a Stick” went one season and thirteen episodes. We are currently filming our tenth season of “Sunny.” We’ve written and produced 114 episodes. We are signed on for another two years making “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” one of the longest running comedies of all time.

Thank you. Thank you.

Again a bet on myself and this time on my friend — you don't want this. This will be better.

This time a bet on myself — That's not better. A bet on my friends and self as well paid off. It paid off in spades. There was power in numbers. And "Sunny" changed my life.

Not only did I have a career as an actor and a writer now, I had complete control over everything I wanted to do. If I wanted to dress in a full body green spandex suit it went in the show.

If I wanted to drink coke, or wine from a coke can as perhaps some of you are doing it went in the show, and if I had a weird idea about putting mittens on kittens, it went in the show.

This was the riskier road but I could not have made a better decision. 'Sunny' changed my life and it led to everything: "Horrible Bosses," "Pacific Rim," "Saturday Night Live."

Thank you.

Creating the job as opposed to waiting for it to be offered to me was the way to go. Now I think this is an obvious lesson here. Don't wait for your break. Make your break. Go make it happen for yourself.

All right. One last story, then I am out of here.

The last story of what led me from there to here is the literal act of agreeing to be here today. When President Hopey came to sit down with me in Los Angeles my first thought was, "Here it comes, they're going to ask me for money." Yeah, they haven't yet. Thank God.

But when he asked me to speak to you today, I happily accepted. And then as is the case with all great opportunities, the reality of what I had to do began to set in. “Dear God” – the kid’s still crying. People are laughing and the kid’s crying. I am worried about that one.

“Dear God”, I said to myself, “I’m going to have to actually give a speech.” I am not a public speaker. I have a voice like a ten year old who smokes. “How am I going to do this?”

I YouTubed commencement speeches given by [Conan O’Brien](#), [Steven Colbert](#), [Steve Jobs](#). This was a terrible idea. Their speeches were so intelligent, so well informed and so eloquent that only more panic began to set in. “What am I thinking?” “How could I ever compare?”

And the truth is, I can’t. I don’t host a talk show or do stand up. As an actor normally you have cut away from me a long time ago.

Now I am not nearly as smart as Steve Jobs. I don’t know how my computer works, I don’t even know how my toaster works!

And the YouTube comments, Oh the world of snarky comments we’re living in. And perhaps that’s the most terrifying thing of all. And what we do now is permanent.

But I didn’t back out. I’m here speaking to you today. And I know I will be judged by all those who care to watch on YouTube and compared. But my lesson is this: I don’t give a shit.

OK. I am sorry.

Now listen up. You cannot let a fear of failure or a fear of comparison or a fear of judgement stop you from doing what’s going to make you great. You cannot succeed without this risk of failure. You cannot have a voice

without the risk of criticism. And you cannot love without the risk of loss. You must go out and you must take these risks.

Everything I'm truly proud of in this life has been a terrifying prospect to me. From my first play, to hosting "Saturday Night Live," to getting married, to being a father, to speaking to you today. None of it comes easy. And people will tell you to do what makes you happy, but a lot of this has been hard work. And I'm not always happy.

And I don't think you should do just what makes you happy. I think you should do what makes you great. Do what's uncomfortable and scary and hard but pays off in the long run. Be willing to fail. Let yourself fail. Fail in the way and place where you would want to fail. Fail, pick yourself up and fail again. Because without this struggle, what is your success anyway?

Look, as best we know we have one life. In it, you have to trust your own voice, your own ideas, your honesty, your vulnerability and through this you will find your way. You do not have to be fearless; just don't let fear stop you.

Live like this as best as you can and I guarantee you will look back on a life well lived.

You are capable of greatness in your profession and more importantly in your quality of self.

Stay hungry. Stay young at heart. Take those risks.

You are going to change the world around you in big ways and in small and I greatly look forward to being a part of the future that you will shape.

Congratulations graduates. And good luck.



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