

Following is the full transcript of comedian Mindy Kaling's 2018 Commencement Speech at Dartmouth.

**Mindy Kaling - Speech TRANSCRIPT**

Good morning... to the Class of 2018, the faculty, the parents, the grandparents, fellow honorees, and the paid laughers I have scattered throughout the audience.

It is an honor to join you this morning for this special occasion. It is also an honor to speak to you today from behind this gigantic tree stump. Like some sort of female Lorax with an advanced degree. That's right, you guys, I'm hitting Dr. Seuss hard and early in this speech.

Because Dartmouth grads have a privilege unique among all the Ivy League, we will be forced to be mini experts on Dr. Seuss for our entire lives.

On my deathbed, I'll be saying "Did you know that his real name was Theodor Geisel? Did you know that he was the editor of the Dartmouth Jack-O-Lantern?"

And yes, while no US presidents have gone to Dartmouth, we can at least lay claim to the wonderful Dr. Seuss. Another notable alumnus is Salmon P. Chase, the man on the \$10,000 bill, a symbolically powerful piece of paper that's largely useless in the real world. Like a degree in playwriting, which I received from this very institution.

Thank you for paying for that, Mom and Dad.

It's a thrill to be back here in New Hampshire, the Granite State, known for two things. The place where you can legally not wear your seatbelt and Adam Sandler's birthplace.

New Hampshire has one of the best mottos of any state: Live free or die. For outsiders, it sounds like an exciting declaration of freedom, but when you're here in January, die actually sounds like a pretty good option.

I remember the days when it was so cold, your sneeze would become an ice sculpture before it hit the ground.

In Los Angeles, where I live now, if I sneeze, I just call my doctor and have my blood replaced with that of a teenage track star. That's normal there. I'm mostly track star right now.

Before I get any further, I should actually probably clarify who I am for the parents and

grandparents in the audience who are thinking to themselves "Who is this loud Indian woman? Is that the girl from Quantico? She looks so much worse in person."

No, no, I'm not Priyanka Chopra. Not even Padma Lakshmi. I'm the other Indian woman we have allowed to be on television, Mindy Kaling.

Thank you, thank you.

You may remember me from my role on The Office as Kelly Kapoor, who internet commenters said was, quote, "shrill." And, quote, "Took up valuable time that could have gone to Steve Carell."

I then created and starred in my own TV show, The Mindy Project. Thank you, thank you very much.

It was an uphill battle to get that show on the air but it was worth it, because it enabled me to become Dartmouth's most successful female minority show creator who has spoken at commencement.

Oh wait, no. [Shonda Rhimes](#) went here. Yep, and she's created like 10 more shows than me, so great, no, cool. Cool, cool, cool, Shonda, friggin' role model, good for you.

But today is not about famous alumni. No, no.

It is about the men and women who have toiled in obscurity for years so that they might better our country. I speak, of course, of the 51% of Dartmouth grads who will go into finance. Highest in the Ivy League. Look left, look right. All three of you will be spending at least 10 years in a white-collar prison.

I know that going into the real world sounds scary but it's exciting too.

Finally, you'll be in control of your own lives. No longer will there be an irrational board of trustees telling you, you can't have hard liquor on campus. Thank you.

For the ridiculous reason that they don't want you to die. Come tomorrow, no one can stop you from filling your apartment with \$4.99 handles of Uncle Satan's Unfiltered Potato Vodka. Go crazy.

It's a real moment of reflection for me to be standing here speaking to all of you now, because it makes me hearken back to my own time at my Dartmouth graduation.

Madeleine Albright was my commencement speaker. And while I don't remember any specific quotes she said or even a general gist of what she was talking about, I do remember thinking "I wonder what it'll be like to have my own cell phone." How things have changed.

For all I know, at this very moment, most of you are posting this speech on your Instagram stories with a GIF of Winnie the Pooh twerking. If you are, please at least use my official hashtag, #MindyGoesBigGreen2018. Thank you.

I bet none of you remember a time before the internet. Hell, you probably don't even remember a time before the Facebook page Dartmouth Memes for Cold AF Teens. Yeah, yeah, I know about that. Made me feel like a real creep researching it.

Hello, I'm a 38-year old woman who wants to join your teen Facebook group. It's for research, I swear. Meanwhile, when I was in college, we didn't even have Google. You wanted to find out, say, how tall Ben Affleck was, you were out of luck. You just had to sit there not knowing and your entire day would be ruined.

Or say I wanted to meet up with a friend. I couldn't just text her, I had to walk outside and hope I accidentally bumped into her. Or I blitzed her. Ah, BlitzMail.

You know that feeling you have when you tell your friends that you blitz and they don't get it and roll your eyes all smug like "Oh, it's a Dartmouth thing." That ends today.

You try to say blitz 100 yards east of White River Junction and you will get laughed back to your one room triple in the Choates.

Fun fact. In 2001, the year I graduated, a pink eye epidemic broke out amongst my classmates because we were all using public BlitzMail iMac terminals and not washing our hands. Those are just kind of sexy stories indicative of my time at Dartmouth.

You have so many cool new things here now. Like look at the new logo, the D-Pine. It's beautiful. It reminds me of what college age Mindy thought a marijuana weed might look like but I was too scared to actually find out.

And this new house system, it sounds really cool. It's so Hogwarts-y. You know, you're sorted into your little Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, except they're called South House, West House, School House.

Okay, come on, guys, School House, really? We're just saying what we see? That's the laziest name I've ever heard in my life and I spent over a decade working on shows called

The Office and The Mindy Project.

Still, I remember sitting where you're sitting. I was so full of questions like "When is thing going to end?" and "How many friends can I invite to dinner and still have Mom and Dad pay?"

And most importantly, "Why didn't I wear any clothes underneath my gown?"

Now we're reaching the part of the speech where I'm supposed to tell you something uplifting, like *follow your dreams*. In general, advice isn't actually an effective way to change your life.

If all it took to make your life great was hearing amazing advice, then everyone who watched TED Talks would be a [millionaire](#). So don't trust any one story of how to become successful.

As Madeleine Albright said at my commencement... See, I don't remember anything and I do just fine. So here is some practical advice. That you may or may not remember at the end of the speech because, hey, that's the gig.

One. First off, remove "proficient at Word" from your resume. That is ridiculous. You're really scraping the bottom of the barrel of competency there. This is how you become proficient at Word. You open Word on your computer.

Two. Most of your post-college life is simply filling out forms. Car insurance, health insurance, W2s, W4s, 1099s. Guess what? None of us know what any of those forms mean but you will fill out 100 of them [before you die](#).

Three. You never need more than one pancake. Trust me on this. Cartoons have trained us to want a giant stack of those bad boys, but order one first and then just see how you feel later.

This one is just for guys. When you go on dates, act as if every woman you're talking to is a reporter for an online publication that you are scared of. One shouldn't need the threat of public exposure and scorn to treat women well, but if that's what it's going to take, fine. Date like everyone's watching, because we are.

Five, and this might be the most important. Buy a toilet plunger. Trust me on this, don't wait until you need a plunger to buy a plunger.

Commencement is a time of transition for parents too. That empty nest you were enjoying these past four years? Gone as soon as the speech is over.

I hope you like full time lodgers who don't pay rent, don't do laundry, eat all the food in your fridge, and binge Family Guy on your sofa for weeks. That is your life now.

Although some of your graduates will be making more money than you. 51%, to be exact. And to the parents of those investment bankers, consultants, and hedge fund analysts, congratulations. Your kids will be fabulously wealthy but still somehow sharing your cell phone plan because it, quote, "saves everybody money."

Okay, now let's get real. Let me rip off the Band-Aid for all of you, the 18s. The next year of your life is going to be bad. You have been in the comfortable fleece-lined room of Mother Dartmouth for four years now and you're going to go out in the cold, hard world.

Out there in the real world, there will be a target on your back. People will want to confirm their expectations of Ivy League graduates, that you're a jerk, that you're spoiled, that you use the word summer as a verb.

Though stereotypes exist for a reason. I mean, come on, the guy from the \$10,000 bill went to this school. You're graduating into a world where it seems like everything is falling apart. Trust in institutions are at a record low, the truth doesn't seem to matter anymore, and for all I know the President just tweeted us into a war with Wakanda, a country that doesn't exist.

So, class of 2018, you are entering a world that we have toppled - we have toppled like a Jenga tower and we are relying on you to rebuild it.

But how can you do that with the knowledge that things are so unstable out there? I'll tell you my secret, the one thing that has kept me going through the years, my super power. Delusion.

This is something I may share with our president, a fact that is both horrifying and interesting. Two years in, I think we can pretty safely say that he's not getting carved onto Mount Rushmore but damn if that is not a testament to how far you can get by just by believing that you are the smartest, most successful person in the world.

My point is, you have to have insane [confidence](#) in yourself, even if it's not real. You need to be your own cheerleader now because there isn't a room full of people waiting with pom poms to tell you "You did it! We've been waiting all this time for you to succeed!"

So I'm giving you permission to root for yourself. And while you're at it, root for those around you too. It took me a long time to realize that success isn't a zero sum game, which leads me to the next part of my remarks.

I thought I might take a second to speak to the ladies in the audience. Guys, take a break. You don't have to pay attention during this part. Maybe spend the next 30 seconds thinking about all the extra money you'll make in your life for doing the same job as a woman. Pretty sweet.

Hey, girls. We need to do a better job of supporting each other. I know that I am guilty of it too. We live in a world where it seems like there's only room for one of us at the table.

So when another woman shows up, we think "Oh my God, she's going to take the one woman spot. That was supposed to be mine." But that's just what certain people want us to do. Wouldn't it be better if we worked together to dismantle a system that makes us feel like there's limited room for us?

Because when women work together, we can accomplish anything, even stealing the world's most expensive diamond necklace from the Met Gala, like in *Ocean's Eight*, a movie starring me which opens in theaters June 8th.

And to that end, women, don't be ashamed to toot your own horn like I just did.

Okay, guys, you can listen again. You didn't miss much. Just remember to see *Ocean's Eight*, now playing in theaters nationwide. *Ocean's Eight*, every con has its pros.

Now I wanted to share a little bit about me, Mindy Kaling, the Dartmouth student.

When I came to Hanover in the fall of 1997, I was as many of you were. Driven, bright, ambitious, and really, really into the Black Eyed Peas.

I arrived here as a 17-year old, took the lay of the land, and immediately began making a checklist of everything I wanted to accomplish. I told myself that by the time I graduated in 2001, I would have checked them all off.

And here is my freshman fall checklist. Be on Hanover Crew, be on Launch Crew. Be in an acapella group, be in an improv troupe, write a play that's performed at the Bentley, and do a cartoon for the D. And try to be in a cool senior society. Guess what?

I completed that checklist. But before you think: "Wait, why is this woman just bragging

about her accomplishments from 17 years ago?"

Keep listening.

Then I graduated and I made a new checklist for my 20s. Get married by 27, have kids at 30, win an Oscar, be the star of my own TV show, host the MTV Music Awards. This was 2001, guys, it made more sense then. And do it all while being a size two.

Well, spoiler alert, I've only done one of those things and I'm not sure I will ever do the others. And that is a really scary feeling, knowing how far that I've strayed from the person that I was hoping to be when I was 21.

I will tell you a personal story. After my daughter was born in December, I remember bringing her home and being in my house with her for the first time, thinking "Huh, according to movies and TV, this is traditionally the time when my mother and spouse are supposed to be here, sharing this experience with me."

And I looked around and I had neither. And for a moment, it was kind of scary, like can I do this by myself? But then that feeling went away because the reality is I'm not doing it by myself. I'm surrounded by family and friends who love and support me.

And the joy I feel from being with my daughter Katherine eclipses anything from any crazy checklist.

So I just want to tell you guys, don't be scared if you don't do things in the right order or if you don't do some things at all. I didn't think I'd have a child before I got married but hey, it turned out that way and I wouldn't change a thing.

I didn't think I'd have dessert before breakfast today but hey, it turned out that way and I wouldn't change a thing.

So if I could impart any advice, it's this. If you have a checklist, good for you. Structured ambition can sometimes be motivating. But also, feel free to let it go.

Yes, my culminating advice from my speech is a song from the Disney animated movie Frozen.

I've covered a lot of ground today, not all of it was serious, but I wanted to leave you with this. I was not someone who should have the life I have now and yet I do.

I was sitting in the chair you are literally sitting in right now and I just whispered "Why not me?" And I kept whispering it for 17 years and here I am, someone that this school deemed worthy enough to speak to you at your commencement.

Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something, but especially not yourself. Go conquer the world. Just remember this. Why not you? You made it this far.

Thank you very much and congratulations to the class of 2018.

**Resources for Further Reading:**

[Ellen DeGeneres' 2009 Commencement Speech at Tulane University \(Full Transcript\)](#)

[Conan O'Brien's Dartmouth Commencement Speech 2011 \(Full Transcript\)](#)

[Oprah Winfrey Speech at Harvard Commencement 2013 \(Full Transcript\)](#)

[Admiral William H. McRaven's 2014 Commencement Address at University of Texas at Austin \(Transcript\)](#)