



Morning Comment

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Mōrena koutou. It is truly an honour to be invited to address you all this morning for our 107th Founders' Day.

I graduated from St Andrew's College in 2019, making 2024 my fifth year out of high school. Because of this, I expect most of you won't know much about me at all, so I'd like to help you all get to know me a little better. As Mrs Leighton mentioned, throughout my time at the college, not only was I very proud of my academic success, I took part in many co-curricular activities, making the most of what St Andrew's had to offer.

I'd encourage you all to do the same – it won't cost you anything, just your parents! I was part of six productions, the Pipe Band, trapshooting, and the Ballet Academy, to name a few. In 2020, I moved to Dunedin for first year Health Sciences and I'm happy to say I've managed to continue some of my hobbies. I still love performing, and during my time at university I have been part of three medical school shows as well as the musical *'My Fair Lady'* which was performed in the Isaac Theatre Royal last year.

Mrs Leighton helped foster my love for singing and performing, as she taught me the ukulele as a young girl, I thank her for that because I've been hooked ever since! St Andrew's will certainly miss your passion for your students when you're enjoying your retirement next year, and I cannot imagine what the College will be like without your masterful guidance. I wish you all the very, very, best.

Currently, I'm in my second to last year of medical school, now at the University of Otago Christchurch campus. At the moment I'm on an eight-week placement for orthopaedics and advanced surgery, and loving every second of it.

Just like it was during my time at the College, life has been incredibly busy since I finished high school, but I wouldn't have this any other way. So, this morning, I'd like to talk about two main things. Firstly, focusing on the journey and not just the destination, and secondly, the power of making mistakes along that journey.

To focus on the journey and not the destination is a cliché as old as time, but it stands true. For everyone, the destination is a subjective thing – is it finishing the degree you're studying, making it to the end of the school term, or even happily retiring when you're 65? There are no time parameters that define this. Therefore, no matter how much we aim for something, there will always be another 'destination' on the horizon to achieve afterwards.



So, if we are fixated on future achievements, we can overlook the present and miss the chance to enrich our lives.

Don't get me wrong, it's vital that we have aspirations. We need something to aim for and keep us motivated. One of my dreams is that after I graduate medical school, I have always wanted to become one of the first female New Zealand-trained neurosurgeons.

Unfortunately for me – there is now a female who has been accepted to the training programme in Aotearoa and beaten me to it. It doesn't mean I'm going to give up on the goal though, maybe I'll be the second. They say good things come in twos!

Now, I'm sure that if I study hard every day and only focus on my academics, I will have impeccable grades and be able to get into a training programme in the future. In saying that, I would be an incredibly miserable, and very boring person to be around (though some may already say that I am)! This is where the value of the journey we take to get to our destination becomes apparent. If we can find passions outside of our primary commitments, we add fulfilment and zest to our lives.

Funnily enough, I experienced this phenomenon last year. 2023 was my first clinical year of medical school, after spending three years in Dunedin. I was nervous, I was excited, and I knew I wanted to keep up my hobbies. After getting into the swing of things, I thought that during the second semester, it'd be a good idea to take part in a full-scale musical. Successfully auditioning for and being part of *My Fair Lady* with Showbiz Christchurch was a massive time commitment, and people questioned if I'd have enough time for my studies on top of this. Even I had my doubts. I knew that I wanted to give my all to this show and do what I loved, so I kept pushing and made the sacrifices I had to. Because of how precious my time was, every day when I showed up to lectures or clinics, I knew that I had to get everything I could from them, even if the temptation to fall asleep in the back row was there. At the end of the year, I was pleasantly surprised to see that my grades from 2nd semester were leagues ahead of my grades from the first. By finding things that you're passionate about outside of your main goals, your drive to achieve increases, every moment is precious, and the journey itself becomes just as rewarding as getting to the destination.

"Make mistakes, especially in front of others. You never forget that you did it, and you'll always remember what not to do next time." A lecturer said this to my class just this week as he randomly called on people to give answers. While it sounds like he may just enjoy the embarrassment, averted gazes and awkwardness of medical students who don't know how to read x-rays, he had a point. No one's journey will be perfect. Everybody makes mistakes and this is something that we must learn to live with.

So, first of all, when – not if – you mess up, it's almost a little bit reassuring to know that the people around you will have, too. The word mistake has many negative connotations like they're failures and things that we should avoid at all costs. But I try to look at mistakes from a different angle, just like my lecturer. As the famous painter and TV presenter Bob Ross said, "There are no mistakes, just happy accidents." If he made a mark on one of his paintings accidentally, instead of scrapping the art, he would find a new meaning for the



blemish, and transform it into a bird, for example. When we recognise that mistakes are inevitable and accept them, this allows us to work towards constant improvement. We can also look at the mistakes that others make and observe how they respond and overcome their challenges.

Mistakes should be reframed as a stepping stone to progress – and though it may be scary to take the jump, the strides you make are invaluable. When we make mistakes, we are forced to innovate, overcome and get out of our comfort zones. The value of mistakes lies not only in the lessons they can teach us but also in the resilience and self-confidence they help us develop.

This morning, I leave you with the whakataukī, “kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua” – I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.

While life is always about making steps towards our future, we must progress along our journey aware of the experiences, mistakes and sacrifices that make us who we are. These are tools to be used in our future endeavours and are reasons to keep pushing forward, rather than things that hold us back. I look back on my journey over the last five years and not only do I think I'm a completely different person now, but I can see both the mistakes I've made along the way, as well as all the fun I've had.

This morning, I'd like you to think about where you are on your journey, not where the next destination is. Know that a mistake along your journey isn't a setback, but instead something that has transformative power and can help your progress, rather than hinder it. And finally, consider how you're making the most of your time right now, rather than letting all the fun fly by in pursuit of future achievements. Thank you.