

Huntington High School's 154th Commencement

Principal Carmela Leonardi's Address

It is an honor for me to welcome students, faculty, parents, family members, our superintendent, Mr. Polansky, and members of the School Board here tonight. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Card and, the Assistant Principal, Mr. Cusack, all department administrators and deans for their continued support of students and their families.

A very special recognition is extended to the teachers and support personnel who are committed to the success of every student at Huntington High School and continue to take a personal interest in their academic and social development. Our gratitude is extended to secretaries, security and custodians who work daily to provide an optimal environment for students, teachers, administrators and parents.

Since this is my last graduation speech, I labored over it, wanting to make it a memorable one. So what could I say on this my fifteenth graduation speech when we know that my talk is all that stands between all of you and the final recognition that signifies graduation? I decided to be very brief and offer our seniors a condensed version of the three things I learned on the job:

1. Really listen to people.

You have heard the expression that you need to listen not only with your brain but also with your heart. Notice that the act of listening has very little to do with the mechanics of hearing. It does have to do with the engagement of your knowledge base and your ability to empathize. It does have to do with identifying the emotions people are bringing to a discussion and cutting through the words to

what people are actually sharing. Be forgiving and understanding as you listen, especially if you do not agree, and you might discover a point of view that expands your thinking even when you still do not agree with it.

2. Know that from now on where your education takes you is up to you.

Your experience in high school has been much more structured and prescribed than what you will experience in college, or work. Look critically at the selection of majors and courses, take courses that are not on the prescribed list and, just as Ms. Tedeschi has taught many of you, travel, learn firsthand what other cultures and countries have to offer. We know that the society you will continue to live in is a global one, embrace it.

3. Remember that your family is your greatest strength.

Don't forget your roots and the sacrifices your parents have made and will continue to make in order to give you a better future. What we have known for generations now is that, whether we like it or not, as we mature and age, we all get to resemble our parents. I know, at the moment that might be an unnerving thought, but that is why my advice to you is to start now to focus on your parents' good qualities so that when you see yourself doing something you swore you would never do, you can counterbalance it with reflecting on all the great qualities you also inherited from them.

And now, as it has been our tradition, I take pride in sharing some specific information about our seniors. As a group, the class of 2015 has not only demonstrated tremendous brainpower but has also shown the kind of heart and the dedication that are needed to make things happen. It boasts 9 of the original participants in the dual language program who have grown to be fully bilingual in

Spanish and English. It includes the most sophisticated, STEM minded group of individuals who know how to build. From Robotics to tractors, this class works hard and makes things happen. Members of this graduating class have successfully argued in Mock Trial and clocked the greatest number of volunteer hours in and out of school. From work done at the local YDA and Library to the support extended to students in our excellent Life Skills program, to the fundraising efforts during Relay for Life, our students have freely given of themselves in order to help others.

The class of 2015 received over 18 million dollars in scholarships, grants and financial aid. While in college students will participate in track and field, lacrosse, baseball and softball as well as swimming and soccer. These students have been accepted at very competitive colleges including Cornell, University of California, Fordham, Georgetown, University of Michigan, School of Visual Arts, University of Virginia, Worcester Polytechnic Institute as well as all SUNY and all CUNY schools. They will pursue majors in accounting, physical therapy, DGA golf management, nursing, film production, engineering, zoology, game design, mathematics, behavioral neuroscience, international relations, natural resources, supply chain management. This list truly represents the kind of young talent that our communities will need to rely on in future years in order to deal with the issues that will continue to face our nation.

I would like to end with a quote that is meant as much for you as myself as we move on to another exciting stage of our lives ...”What you leave behind is not what you leave engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven in the life of others.”(Pericles)

Congratulations class of 2015! May life continue to bring you satisfaction and joy.