

NECC Commencement Speech

By: Ray Florent

Thank you for the introduction President Glenn, now I don't have to talk about myself as much. Oh and just so you know I'm wearing those socks today.

Good morning everyone. I would like to start by thanking everyone for being here today, sooooo thank you.

When Kristin Arnold from the PACE Program asked if I would mind being nominated for commencement speaker, I told her I had to think about it. But after talking with others on campus, I

decided that I was fine with it. I mean what were the chances that I'd be selected, right?

Before I knew I would be standing up here, my biggest worry about this day was whether or not to shave my beard. Now my thoughts were Dear Lord what have I gotten myself into...a speech in front of 3000 people on top of having to decide whether to shave my beard. Yeah, I know full plate. Good thing my cap and gown were chosen for me or I would have been in trouble.

Since learning I would be today's student speaker, I've been wracking my brain trying to

decide what to say. There has been so much that has impacted my life and it was hard to decide what to share in my three minutes.

I have a little more life experience than most college graduates so I decided to talk about a few of the things that I've learned along the way....things that might not be covered in the classroom. And here's where I throw in some partially stolen quotes of inspiration. Because, what would a commencement speech really be without them.

1) First of all, whenever you do something, do it well! When you do your best, success isn't

guaranteed but it's much more likely. Just one word of caution. If you do it too well, you might end up having to give a speech in front of 3000 people.

2) Second: Immerse yourself. It doesn't matter what it is you are doing, get involved and give it your all. I came to Northern Essex with intentions of going to class, getting my degree, and getting out of here as fast as possible.

Now it's shameless plug time. Once I got here, everyone was so welcoming I couldn't help but get involved. As a result, I learned a lot about myself, found direction in life. I also found my voice in

college, you poor, poor people. Meeting all the wonderful people I have met here, along with joining the Student Senate, Phi Theta Kappa, Community Outreach Group, and many other groups has benefited me in so many ways. It's because of this involvement, along with my great family and friends, that I'm up here right now and don't wanna leave.

3) And my third pearl of wisdom is: Don't be afraid to make a difference in this world.

There was a defining moment that happened last year, as a result of my volunteering, a moment that helped me make some major life decisions.

I was taking a psychology course and we had the option of writing a paper or doing community service. After learning that the average age of a homeless person in America is 8 years old, I decided to tutor children living in a local shelter.

While at the shelter, I sat and read with a little 7-year old boy. I didn't see him for a couple of weeks but when I did see him again he remembered me

even though I had shaved my beard and he sat down and asked me for homework help.

I had been struggling with deciding whether to pursue a career as a teacher and that 7-year old boy showed me that this is what I really want to do. He made the difference.

So whether it's volunteering your time at a food pantry, tutoring homeless children, or even just taking some time to talk with and get to know a person down on their luck, leaving your mark may have a very positive impact on them and on you.

4) And fourth, be your extraordinary self. Some of you might know that I'm an actor and I do a little work in the film industry. Okay now for some name dropping. One night on the set of *That's My Boy*, comedian and actor Andy Samberg and I were talking about *Shark Week*, a series of shows he hosted on the Discovery Channel. Andy—who is a TV and movie star—told me that he never felt he deserved all the fame. He attributed all to just being himself. That's all it takes...Just be the best you can possible be and you will shine.

5) Finally, one last thing before I'm done. I've gone through ups and downs in my life. I've lost

people, been hurt, been hired, been fired, gained and lost friends. When you experience losses, sometimes you think your options have narrowed but there are gains to be made from your losses.

After I got hurt in my job as a welder, I thought my options were limited but I made the decision to take charge of my life. I started to do things I wanted to do to better myself. That led me to Northern Essex at 34 years old and now here graduating with all of you at 37. It's never too late for change. With that I'd like to say something that I remind myself of all the time. It's something extremely important to me in more ways than one and should be poignant in

every person's life, every day in every way. If there's one thing that any of you take home from my speech today I'd like this to be it. Jimmy Valvano once said at the ESPY's. "Don't give up, don't ever give up". Only when you give up have you lost the fight.

Once again thank you all for being here today.

I'm Ray Florent and WE are the class of 2016!

Congratulations everyone!