

Matt Noyes Commencement Speech

Northern Essex Community College

May 20, 2017

First and foremost - congratulations Class of 2017! It's an honor to be a part of your graduation - thank you to Northern Essex and President Glenn for inviting me to speak on this campus I've grown up admiring, in the City I adore, and thank you, graduates, for letting me share this moment with you.

So, here's my dilemma: how do I offer a Commencement Address you'll find worthy of remembering? I'd already forgotten my Commencement speaker a week later. That got me thinking, so I Googled who spoke at my graduation in 2000 and apparently New York Senator Chuck Schumer gave the Convocation - I'm pretty sure I wasn't there - and our school president spoke at Commencement. I was there, but have no idea what was said.

The irony of not remembering Chuck Schumer - who I'd surely remember if I saw today - is meteorologists and politicians probably have more in common than one might think. We broadcast to millions of people and a good number don't believe or remember a thing we say. The line I hear

most is: “It must be great to go to work and get paid to lie every day!” My first death threat came when rain arrived an hour earlier than predicted. I’ve been stopped in Walmart by an angry, red-faced woman with her children who sincerely believed winters have been snowier since I got my job and therefore I must be the cause. Bill Belichick bashes the profession every football season, we are the butt of the most jokes of nearly any job in the world, and I’m a guy who cakes on a thick layer of makeup first thing every morning because - get this - high-definition TV makes every imperfection stand out six times more than it does to the naked eye.

Many of you won’t remember my name after today. If you do: bonus. If instead we run into each other at Market Basket next week and you wonder where you’ve seen me before, I won’t be offended, I promise. But maybe, if this goes perfectly, you’ll subconsciously remember one or two things that could help make life a little easier along the way. Advice? Some might call it that, but college grads get more advice than one person can take, so let’s just call this “stories shared among friends.” On the topic of stories and before I dive into a few of my own, it’s worth noting I’m not a fan of presentations focused on the speaker. I’m here for you and your life ahead, not to reflect on

mine. That said, I'm a true believer we grow stronger when we help each other, and Heaven knows I have plenty of mistakes - euphemistically known as experience - that may save some sting along the way, so let's cross that line and hope it's worthwhile.

I'd love to stand up here and tell you I'm a polished, accomplished TV guy who had it all figured out from day one - not the case, but maybe that's why I'm just the right man for the job: who wants to hear about how smooth and swift the ride can be when the truth for most of us is it's a winding, hilly road lined with potholes?

There are so many stories about sticking to your dreams to make them come true. You can believe them! The six year old kid who fell in love when a hurricane moved through Haverhill still comes alive with every thunderstorm we get. But it's not always a straight line from dream to reality. My Northern Essex connection came after failing calculus twice...and withdrawing once - pass it, or never become a meteorologist. Just one summer was the remedy - Calculus clicked thanks to our NECCO Professors and a Bachelor's of Science in Meteorology became a reality...though it would take hours to share the complete list of those owed a debt of gratitude.

The Dryden Hotel was a local bar just outside of Ithaca, NY, and the first place I stopped after graduating college. The lure of this fine establishment wasn't alcohol, but rather the rooms for rent one floor above the bar that represented the only affordable living option for a full-time TV meteorologist making \$7 an hour. The bartender asked, "What'll it be, honey?" "I'd like one of your rooms upstairs, please." "Do you want it by the hour...the night...or the week?" Room #9 - including the furnished futon bed - looked exactly like you'd expect a room you could rent by the *hour* would look. After discharging two family sized cans of Lysol on everything in sight, two garbage bags served as inaugural sheets. My Hefty paper plates were washed, dried and reused every night, and saving up for a month meant a huge treat: McDonalds. I loved it. I was living the dream. Or at least, my dream.

That's the twisted reality about dreams - they don't usually happen like you think they will. My super-awesome six year old son and amazingly hot and talented wife of just under two years are here today. Love you guys. We have a baby girl on the way in a week or two. They are a dream come true. Did you catch the math on that? You know I struggled with math but this I got right - my six year old son and wife of just under two years. Yep. My post-college story included gaining 60 pounds, a

failed marriage by 32, moving back in with Mom, getting 3 hours of sleep a night to be the parent I needed to be and falling tens of thousands of dollars into debt. Now, what if I told you the other side of that? Hey folks, I lost 60 pounds then ran the Boston Marathon and raised \$14,000 for kids with Liver Disease, have an amazing son, met the woman of my dreams, found financial stability, own a house in my lifelong hometown of Haverhill and I cherish every single day? It's all true - but that dream wouldn't have been realized without the junk before it. Lots of people like to bury the junk - pretend it never happened or it was just an anomaly, and certainly never talk about it in a Commencement address - but let's face it, the junk is what makes us who we are, and that's why, once in awhile, I break my rule and inject some of my own stories into a moment like this - because your baggage, my baggage, all of our baggage - is an unavoidable tell-tale sign of a well-traveled life.

And guess what? The forecast calls for a 100% chance of more junk on the way. There are more sleepless nights after college, more scraping for cash, more heartbreak, more family drama, friends to be lost and others to be gained. But that also means, if you're up for it, there are so many more dreams to come true. Keep reaching for dreams, and there'll be more baggage you'll pick up - it goes with the journey.

The crazy part of all this is it happens in the blink of an eye. You hear that all the time, but get this: we took my Mom out for Mother's Day last weekend and I said to my wife: "looking forward to celebrating your 38 years of motherhood someday!" Then it hit me. Sometime between just yesterday and today I went from a 21 year old college grad to a 38 year old remarried guy rocking the slightly overweight Dad-bod, and 38 more years will put me at 76. I hope. We get one trip. One life. And it flies. So, here are some lessons learned from your friendly weatherman - weather stories, yes - deeper meanings, hopefully:

1. Push through the rain. That discovery was made storm chasing in an old Ford Bronco years ago...a chasing technique called "core punching" means bisecting the heart of the storm, and you learn there's either going to be a brilliant rainbow or one rockin' storm on the other side - either way it'll take your breath away and you'll never forget it. But you have to drive through the blinding rain to reach it.
2. Don't test your four wheel drive. Learned in that same Ford Bronco, this time during a snowstorm. Coming off a bend in the road, the wheels started slipping - "oh no!" I thought, "what if my

four wheel drive isn't working?!" So, I gave the wheel a tug to test it out. The fishtailing began, I skidded into a guardrail, flipped the truck over it, blew out all the windows, climbed out the passenger's side door over my head while gasoline poured out beside me and was later charged by the State of New York with damaging state property for the guardrail. Rest assured, you have what you need, friends - you'll slip sometimes, it's OK, don't test the four wheel drive in a storm.

3. Control is an illusion. If superstitions worked or the power of thought could change the weather, there would be no wrong forecasts. If we could change people, our lives would be a whole lot different. It's like the difference between either gripping the roller coaster bar with white knuckles or throwing your hands up in the air in a free fall. Either way, as long as you don't jump out of the coaster, you stay in the seat - one way is just a lot more fun.
4. Mistakes disappoint - but can be exactly what we need sometimes. People sometimes ask what my worst forecast ever was: in Upstate New York I predicted 1" of snow and we got 13. That was terrible. Snowbound, however, I sat inside and

watched the Patriots win a playoff game. One of the most relaxing snowstorms of my career.

5. When you forecast 1” and get 13...figure out what happened and fix it next time. Not many people actually do that - we love to tout experience, but what good is it if we weren't paying attention the whole time? Live and learn is only half guaranteed. We all live, but only the astute learn.
6. Fear is the most dangerous adversary. Fear of forecasting what your gut tells you can cost you an important win during a big storm. In June of 2011, I stayed on the air for over an hour warning residents near Springfield I believed a storm approaching would produce a tornado. There's always concern of being wrong - scaring people needlessly. I pushed that fear aside and an hour later, the strongest tornado to hit Massachusetts since 1953 touched down with no official tornado warning ahead of it, on the ground for an hour. We were the only ones to warn of it so far in advance. I'll never forget that feeling. Contrast that with just three years ago in Revere - I warned of a possible tornado for an hour, but there was no sign of such a storm. After that hour, still broadcasting, fear

won - I worried that I was scaring people for something that just wasn't happening. My gut told me a funnel was set to drop, but reports from the ground showed only a 13 mph wind and some rain, so I announced on-air that I must be wrong and no tornado would come. Two minutes later, a 120 mph vortex dropped from the sky into Downtown Revere. I'll never forget that feeling, either. We can be nervous, we can be anxious, but when we are afraid, we stop thinking clearly and we falter.

So, take these meteorological musings for whatever they're worth to you. Someday, when you look back on your Commencement Speaker, you probably won't remember my name, you may remember one of these stories, but my greatest hope is some of you will live by the theme each of these anecdotes is based in: authenticity. Accept and love who you are, baggage, six-times enhanced imperfections on a high-definition TV and all. It seems no coincidence that our world of escalating rage, anxiety, conflict and disconnect is advancing coincident with a growing chasm between our façade and our core. That is, we can't possibly be happy and at peace if we're aren't feeding our passions - in our home, in our work and in our relationships - and actually living those passions. In all too short of a time, you'll be rocking your own Dad-bod or Mom-bod 17

years out of college, amazed at how fast the time has gone, but hopefully, a true representation of who you are - perhaps thanks, at least in some small part, to whoever that weather guy was at Commencement.