

Thank you.

Let me begin by saying what an honor it is to be here tonight. It's an honor that some of you slept so soundly during my presentation here 4 years ago that you had no idea what you were getting into by inviting me back to speak again. But, really, to be able to share with you as you take this giant step from one phase of your life to another is a deeply felt honor for me, so, again, I thank you.

When Andrew Wooden contacted me several months ago and asked if I'd be interested in speaking at this Bosque commencement, I thought: Jeez, I'm not ready to be a graduation speaker! First off, I thought, that's something *old* people do... **and I'm not old!** And then I thought some more...I graduated high school in 1992, the year, roughly, most of you were born. Yup, I'm old; I guess I fit the bill for Part 1.

The second issue I had was that graduation speakers are supposed to be successful, erudite, and able to impart some wisdom upon the commencing seniors. Well, in all honesty, I've spent way too much time at high altitude, and have only a few brain cells that still fire, so I can't make any promises there.

But, at least I'm old...

No, really, when Andrew contacted me, I was terrified. Yes, terrified. Sure, I've climbed Everest. I've spoken to Fortune 500 Executives. I've even changed my kids diapers. But, this really terrifies me.

Why? you ask. Because you, all of you, each and every one of you, are the dreamers of today...and the leaders of tomorrow. And my job here today is to give you words of wisdom to carry you forward into the next phase of life. An absolutely terrifying, daunting task. But, I'll try.

As I looked at my two kids - Lila & Ryrie - a few weeks back, I thought about what ideas I would most like to share with them, and figured that was a perfect starting point for this speech. So, here they are; four of them, four simple guidelines for your lives, in no particular order:

- 1. Dream, and dream big**
- 2. Get a helmet**
- 3. Relax - it's only life**
- 4. Keep your humanity**

As a kid growing up in Massachusetts, I decided after climbing a mountain in New Hampshire – and note that in New England we call lumps of granite “mountains” – that I wanted to one day climb Everest. Kind of a crazy dream, especially coming from a kid who had not the slightest idea of *how* to climb, nor did I know anyone who *did* climb, nor was there any climbing to be had near my hometown. But, I had the dream, and was sufficiently stubborn to not let go of it.

I hung a poster of Everest over my bed. Every night I fell asleep staring at the mountain, and awoke each morning with it staring back at me. It came with me to boarding school in New Hampshire, and later made the 2000 mile journey to my dorm room at Colorado College. It was a constant reminder of my dream, of where I was versus where I hoped to someday be. And, it was the catalyst for my pursuit of climbing. That poster, trivial as it may seem, was the force which propelled me to learn to climb, to develop my skills, gain knowledge from mentors and teachers, and to keep going year after year, month after month, day after day.

17 years after the dream was conceived and implanted onto my brain, I found myself staring up at the slopes of Everest...although this time I was not in my dorm room, but at 17,000 feet in Tibet on my first Everest expedition. No more poster...the vision this time was reality, my dream had come true. Granted, it took 17 years. Nothing overnight here, no Fed-Ex dreams, emailed ambitions...17 years of hard work, effort, learning, successes and failures, triumphs and tragedies...but finally, I was there...

So the first nugget of wisdom I'd like to throw your way is to dream. And dream big. Don't settle for the summits you know you can climb. Shoot higher than that, look to the lofty peaks which scratch the sky, the objectives that you know will push you to your limits. Because it is only these goals which, in the end, are truly

worth the effort of pursuit. The goals which push us the most also teach us the most and allow us to grow the most. And, it is only these lofty goals which help ensure that we **don't**, as Henry David Thoreau once said, come to the time of our deaths...and find that we never fully lived, never grasped life by its proverbial horns and found out just how much we could accomplish, just how high we could climb, what lofty summits we all could attain.

So, again, dream, and dream big. Envision that Nobel Prize, the Gold Medal, the 4.0 GPA, finding the cure for cancer. Gain inspiration from the words of James Lane Allen: ***Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream so you shall one day become.***

But, remember, the path to the top is a slippery one, with potential pitfalls at every turn.

On that first expedition to Everest, I worked hard...toiling on the mountain for 2 months, up and down, carrying loads, putting in camps, carrying food, supplies, and oxygen. On summit day, as I gazed to the Southwest, I looked at an oncoming wall of monsoon storms moving in our direction. It was getting late, too late for us to reach the top and return to high camp before nightfall. I was 700 feet from the top, from my goal in life, and yet I knew what I had to do: turn around. Go home. Come back another day. It was the hardest decision I have ever had to make in the mountains.

But I did come back, 2 years later, for another expedition and crack at the top. On May 7, at the beginning of our summit bids, my team and I got involved in a rescue. We had to carry 2 sick glaciologists down off the mountain, piggybacking them on the Rongbuk Glacier. At one point, with one man on my back, I heard a loud POP in my right knee: I had torn some cartilage, and my expedition was finished, my dream thwarted once more.

So, this brings me to my second point: While you are pursuing your various dreams in life, moving toward your goals, never be fooled that the road will be easy, that security will be possible. It isn't. Again, the joy of aiming for the lofty summits in life comes from the challenges inherent along the path...But that joy comes with a price, and the price is lack of security. And lack of security doesn't

mean certain death, but it does mean trial and tribulation, struggle, and sometimes pain. In 560 BC - just a few years before I was born – a guy named Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha, wrote down as one of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism that ***to exist is to suffer***. Not a very uplifting statement at first glance. But, what he was getting at was not that existence is devoid of joy and instead full of hardship, angst, and struggle. But, rather, that even joy must one day come to an end, that everything is transient, that security is simply not a reality. Had he lived to hear the comedian Dennis Leary, he would have liked his line: **Life is tough...get a helmet.**

So, again, it is this challenge, this inherent transience of life and dreams, the risk of failure, the struggle of pursuit, the growth which emerges from pushing ourselves to our limits which gives us the greatest joy in life.

Our society, I think, teaches us to be too serious, especially when we're young. We get too caught up in schedules, to-do lists, Twitter updates and Facebook profiles, and frantically moving from point A to point B down the path to perceived success. Sometimes, it's important to take to heart the words of Robert Frost, and ***take the road less traveled by.***

In late 1998, I was in the frantic mode. I was 24. I was a partner in a successful real estate company in Colorado Springs. My partners and I were snatching up sub-prime mortgages, buying old houses, fixing and flipping them, and making great money. And then the phone rang.

It was my friend Eric Simonson calling to see if I wanted to help plan an outlandish Everest expedition. The idea was to go to Everest to search for 2 dead guys: George Mallory & Andrew Irvine. They were last seen in 1924, less than 1000 feet from the top. To make the trip happen, we needed \$250,000.

The “serious” voice in my head came on immediately. *Are you crazy?! You've got a business. You've got bills. You've got responsibilities. You're 24. It's time to focus and stop chasing mountains.*

Well, fortunately, I ignored that voice. I helped Eric raise the money, and in March, 1999, we were on Everest. And, on May 1st, we beat all expectations – including

our own – when we discovered the remains of none other than George Mallory at 27,000 feet on the North Face of Everest. It was a discovery that went into the history books. It changed my life forever. And it just as easily could have never happened.

In 2000, I was in a similar situation. I had just finished leading an expedition up Cho Oyu, the world's 6th highest peak, and then was off to guide a ski mountaineering trip in Peru. Right after, I figured, I needed to head back to Colorado to tend to my still-running real estate business. But, then I remembered something: a girl I had met 2 years earlier - a girl who I liked *a lot* - was living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Maybe I could meet up with her and we could travel a bit in South America.

But, that "serious" voice in my head came in, saying: *You've got work to do. You need to be successful. You need to be responsible. There's no time to go chasing a girl.*

Well, fortunately, I ignored that voice, and sent an email to Wende. A few weeks later, we were on our first date: a 10 day trek along the Inca Trail to the ruins of Macchu Picchu. And, today, Wende is my wife, my best friend, and the mother of our 2 children.

And now, parents, I need to ask you to please plug your ears while I talk to your kids for a second:

Don't take the next handful of years too seriously. They're not.

Sure, you need to work hard in school. You need to take the opportunities you have seriously and not squander them. But, you also need to take the time to explore, to embrace opportunities that arise, and not let them pass you by because you thought you were too busy, that you had responsibilities, that you needed to be serious. Trust me, there will be plenty of time for responsibility, for being serious. Right now, you need to explore, to adventure in your lives and find you passion and your calling.

And, in that same vein, **don't be so focused on the summit, on getting to point B, that you miss the chance to be human, to look out for your fellow beings and do the right thing.**

A couple of months after I last spoke here - in May, 2006 - a group of 40 climbers were ascending the Northeast Ridge of Everest, moving strong toward the top. At just under 28,000 feet, they came upon a surprise: a man was huddled in a cave, shivering, barely alive, next to the remains of an Indian climber who died there in 1996. The man could barely utter his name, saying he was David Sharp. It was obvious that he needed help, desperately.

The 40 climbers that day all looked at David Sharp, looked up at the summit - which they were only a handful of hours away from - and decided there was nothing they could do for David. They all climbed upward.

Eight hours or so later, those same 40 climbers were descending from the summit and they came to David Sharp again. He was still alive. Shivering uncontrollably, horribly frostbitten, suffering from cerebral and pulmonary edema...but still alive. Again, the climbers looked at David, and looked at their tents sitting less than a thousand feet below, and decided once more there was nothing they could do for him. David Sharp lies in that same spot today.

Two weeks later, there was another death on Everest. Australian Lincoln Hall reached the top of Everest on May 25th, but died of cerebral edema and exposure on the descent. The next day, American guide Dan Mazur was ascending with his clients and, at 28,300 foot Mushroom Rock, came upon a surprise, for there was a man, sitting upright with his down suit unzipped, saying: *I bet you're surprised to see me here*. It was Lincoln Hall, frostbitten, hypothermic, suffering from edema, but still very much alive. Mazur and his clients took one look at the summit, and knew what they had to do, what they wanted to do. Seven hours later, through their efforts and the efforts of several Sherpa who came to assist, Lincoln Hall was back down in the tents at Camp VI, and he is back in Australia today with his wife and children.

So, my final point to you tonight is this: **retain your ethics, your humanity, as you move toward the summits in your life. Remember that goals change...be ready to change with them. Make sure you have the strength of character and the courage to do the *right thing*, even when that "right thing" might mean sacrificing the initial goal.**

I mentioned earlier the rescue in 2001 when I blew out my knee on Everest. Two weeks after the rescue, a man came into our Basecamp; it was Mr. Go, the man I had carried on my back. He couldn't speak English, and I couldn't speak Chinese, so communication was limited. But, he gave me a box of pears - a rare commodity at 17,200 feet in Tibet - and a big hug. **Since then, I've stood on the summit of Everest three times, none of which I remember a fraction as much as I remember that hug, and the knowledge that I did the right thing even at the cost of fulfilling my dreams.**

So, I hope you remember these simple yet important points:

- **Dream, and dream big.**
- **Get yourself a helmet...it's a bumpy road ahead.**
- **Don't take life too seriously.**
- **And, keep your humanity – a box of pears and a hug means a lot more than summits and certificates.**

Once more, I wholeheartedly congratulate you all for making it here today. I am honored to have been a small part of this wonderful ceremony. I know you all have many mountains ahead of you, and I wish you the best on them all.

Climb high, climb strong, enjoy the journey, and as we say in Nepal:
Namaste...the spirit in me salutes the spirit which dwells within each and every one of you.

Thank you.