

## DEVELOPING COURAGE

Speech prepared for St. Anthony Middle School's Induction into the NJFL  
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. . . This is a night of firsts. For tonight, St. Anthony's students and parents have made a commitment to developing skills that go far beyond the trophies and trips to tournaments. This activity, we call forensics, develops skills for life. The skills to succeed. You are doing what Fortune 500 CEOs describe as their worst fear--Speaking, more feared than nuclear holocausts or death. You are developing speech skills that employers say they want. You have had the courage to make a decision that will benefit you for the rest of your lives. It is on this theme, courage, that I would like to expound upon tonight. For as Claire Boothe Luce once stated, "Courage is the ladder on which all other virtues mount." You have demonstrated your courage by making a commitment to Forensics Community, by choosing to be a part of the St. Anthony's program, and most importantly, by choosing to prepare yourself to be educated.

So you ask, why is it courageous to make a commitment to the Forensics Community? You have made a commitment to the community of forensicators--no matter where you go or what you do this network of friends will be with you forever. In no other arena, do "friends" debate to the best of their abilities and then socialize as friends. All the van rides, the conversations, the attempts to improve the world, will stay with you. . . Thus, it is true what famous UCLA basketball coach John Wooden told his players before every game, "Don't wait for somebody else to decide your life for you, go and get it." Your parents, your teachers, and your community have given you the skills to begin. Now it's time for you to step out on the court with courage, to

play ball.

Second, you have had the courage to be a part of St. Anthony's Forensic Program, to surround yourself with some of the brightest and most gifted, to accept diversity, to make a commitment to deadlines and to being prepared. Now you must accept the challenges of learning in new environments and be willing to take risks--dare to and be willing to fail. An anonymous author said it best, "If you're not failing occasionally, then you're not reaching out as far as you can." I found myself in this very situation this semester. You would think that after earning a Ph.D. that my education would be complete. But as comedian Will Rogers once stated, "Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects." And believe me, I'm ignorant. I envy those of you who can communicate in more than one language. I envy the richness of the culture and the diversity of opportunity that speaking another language allows. So, I'm taking Spanish, 16 years after taking my first Spanish course. I have reversed my roles and am now a student once again. Let me tell you, I much prefer to give the tests than take them. It's been tough not knowing, to rely on others for knowledge, to fail time and time again. But we can't move on without pushing ourselves to the verge of failure.

Finally, you have had the courage to be educated. Economically, this is a wise decision. Recent studies have concluded that the only salaries increasing in the United States today are those jobs which require college degrees. But more importantly, you have made a decision to be prepared for life. Let me tell you what I mean. Gone are the days when careers begin

and end in the same place. The buggy makers of the 19th century became the auto workers of the 20th century, who will become what in the 21st century? In fact, we not only can expect to change jobs three to four times in our lifetimes but careers. So you say to yourself, how can I prepare for these career changes, for careers in the future which maybe are unknown in the present? The answer is simple. You have chosen to be educated. You have chosen to develop your communication skills. You have chosen to study those who have preceded you and to contribute to the development of the knowledge of mankind. You have chosen to take on the process of learning. It is this that allows one to respond to the changes around us, to survive the knowledge explosion, to be able to change careers four times in your lifetime. My grandma was born in 1899. In her lifetime, she experienced the horse and buggy to the space shuttle. What will I experience? From Sputnik to what?, and for you, the space shuttle to . . .

Remember the words of an anonymous sage, "You can't control the length of your life--but you can control its width and depth. You can't control the contour of your face--but you can control its expression. You can't control the weather--but you can control the atmosphere of your mind."

I congratulate St. Anthony Middle School for your monumental accomplishment. Remember to continue to make courageous choices, to be willing to risk failure, and to control the one thing that can be controlled--your mind.