

Dear Class of 2007:

by The Peoria (Ill.) Journal Star

If you were expecting the famous "Wear Sunscreen" commencement address - a giant shout-out to its author, Chicago Tribune columnist Mary Schmich - forget it. Come to think of it, most of you were 7 or 8 years old when she first delivered it, which explains the puzzled expressions. So never mind, though wearing sunscreen is good advice. You don't want to show up wrinkled for your 20th reunion, do you?

That's not the last piece of advice we'll dispense today, though we promise to keep it short and simple. At 17 or 18 it may seem like you have all the time in the world, but forever isn't as long as you think. So use your forever wisely. Do not turn on your spaceship radio 30 years from now while cruising between galaxies to hear Crosby, Stills and Nash singing this golden oldie: "I am older now. I have more than what I wanted. But I wish that I had started long before I did. There's so much time to make up, everywhere you turn. Time we have wasted on the way" OK, so what's a Crosby, Stills and Nash? Never mind, though making the most of your time is good advice.

Get far enough into forever and, yes, it's possible you will turn into your parents. It's not such a bad thing. You ought to thank them - like, this very moment - for getting you this far. Maybe they'll pop for dinner now, plus college. You can return the favor to your own kids someday.

Whatever your plans - more school, a job - keep in mind that the expectations of you only go one way: Up. The least you can do is show up to class or work on time (set two alarm clocks). Dress for the occasion, and cover all tattoos. Remember, slang impresses no one who's in any position to help advance your career. Be nice to people, even when they're not nice to you. Know that today isn't the end of anything, and that learning never stops. While you're exercising your mind, don't neglect to exercise your body, which houses it.

You may think the people sitting next to you are the best friends you'll ever have. Maybe they are, maybe they're not. The years to come will test that. If you want friends, be a friend. It will require effort on your part.

But do nothing just because your friends are doing it. "No" can be the most valuable word in your vocabulary; sometimes it's a lifesaver. Your real friends will understand. While there's some truth to the statement that the things in life you regret are those you didn't try, you can also lament what you did try. Buckle up. Strive for balance. Even too much of the good stuff can be bad for you. Too much of the bad stuff is always bad for you. Do not go handing out your Social Security number to just anybody. Know that credit cards are instruments of evil. Text messaging can only lead to carpal tunnel syndrome. Prepare for life as if there were no computers. Post nothing on MySpace that you wouldn't want to see on a Downtown billboard.

Mostly, we just want you to make good choices. Aside from those rare moments when you're just blessed by dumb luck, that usually means making informed choices. So read newspapers.

(Don't worry, we're wrapping up here.)

We're all human, and as such we're all fallible. But you're old enough now to realize that Mom was right: Honesty is the best policy. That means being truthful not only with others, but with yourself. You buy yourself no end of grief when you're not. Finally, the world is full of people who do the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Often, they know it's wrong beforehand, but they do it anyway. May yours be the generation that knows what the right things are, and does them. To all those graduating, we say congratulations.

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