

**ROGER RALPH TALK TO THE BEL AIR HIGH SCHOOL HONOR  
SOCIETY - INDUCTION CEREMONY, DECEMBER 10, 1996\***

I am very honored to be here today. I share in the pride of your parents, family members and friends for those who have earned the very real concrete and meaningful achievement of already being a member of the Bel Air High School Honor Society or now joining that distinguished group. You will be happy to know that if you interviewed with me for a job at the Bel Air Athletic Club I'd ask you how you did in high school whether you are fresh out of high school or college or are making a mid- life career change. I ask the question because if you do get good grades it says you work hard, or are bright, or are both. Its frankly just one of the interview indicators that works in your favor. So congratulations! All of you deserve to feel good about being here today

Traditionally on occasions like this speakers will direct their words to the students in attendance. They are likely to tell them to go forth and try to change the world and to do good deeds. Well, I want you to know that I am addressing the adults here today, and myself, and you as the learning and growing and communicating process should never stop whether you are 18 or 80!

**My core message to you is two parts:**

FIRST - THE 90'S MESSAGE WHICH SOME OF YOU WEAR ON YOUR T SHIRTS OR YOUR HATS - "NO FEAR" IS A HIP FASHION STATEMENT AND A TERRIFIC SOUND BYTE. BUT IT IS A LOUSY AND FALSE GUIDELINE FOR LIFE!

MY MESSAGE TO YOU IS TO IGNORE THIS MESSAGE BECAUSE ANXIETY, FEAR OF FAILURE, ACTUAL FAILURE , AND NOT GETTING WHAT



YOU WANT- WHETHER IT IS THE GIRL, THE BOY, THE GRADE, THE AWARD, OR THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS FOR ALL OF US IS AS MUCH A PART OF THE FABRIC OF EVERY DAY LIFE AS SUCCESS--- AND SOMETIMES EVEN MORE SO. AND ITS OK TO TRY AND THEN TO FAIL. ITS OK FOR YOU TO ASK YOUR PARENTS WHEN THEY FAILED AND WHAT THEY LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE. ITS OK FOR YOU TO SHARE WITH THEM AND YOUR FRIENDS-- SELECTIVELY OF COURSE-- SOME OF YOUR ANXIETIES AND FAILURES. IF YOUR PARENTS ARE HARD TO TALK TO ABOUT THIS FIND SOMEONE ELSE.

I AM NOT SAYING DON'T TAKE RISKS OR NEVER GET BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE - QUITE THE CONTRARY- I AM JUST SAYING THAT YOU WILL BE MORE GENTLE ON YOURSELF MORE WILLING TO OBTAIN POSITIVE GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES IF YOU ARE AWARE THAT YOUR OWN FEARS AND YOUR OWN ANXIETIES ARE NORMAL AND NATURAL. PEOPLE JUST DON'T TALK ABOUT THEM BUT ALL SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THEM. KNOW THAT YOU WILL BE IN GOOD COMPANY!

I will admit publicly that I loved Sylvester Stallone in the first Rocky movie. How many of you have seen it? Well, I like the underdog and one of the few movie scenes I can remember is Rocky running up the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum, turning around at the top, and raising his arms in triumph over downtown Philadelphia. Well that was 20 years ago and I hadn't thought at all about Rocky or Stallone until just the other day when I was thinking about this talk with all of you today. And there on the TODAY show is Stallone age 50 talking about doing his own stunts, having a new daughter, and able to do whatever film he wants for as much or as little money as he wants saying what he has learned is that "**SUCCESS IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO FAIL ON YOUR OWN TERMS.**"



I have been blessed and successful - voted by my campers the best camp counselor in my teens; a full ride at Columbia University in my 20's; able to work with my wife to start an athletic club business in my thirties, played racquetball with Cal Ripken in my 40's; able to help the Boys and Girls Clubs of Harford County in my fifties; wonderful friends and a wife and kids I love.

BUT there have been painful failures that I can remember as clearly as the successes. I know, you want examples so here are a few: Dropping an easy pop fly as a senior in high school in front of my parents to lose a crucial game; sitting in the audience at a high school honors ceremony like this and learning that I did not win the prize as the best history student which I had worked my butt of for and really really wanted and thought I had earned; almost being fired from an important job and knowing in my gut that I deserved to be fired; being a complete and utter jerk in terms of my treatment of people in two different business situations- and one was with my wife.

So my first message to you is to forget the bravado, know that fear and anxiety is normal as long as it doesn't incapacitate you and prevent you from growing.

Each of you has talent and discipline or you wouldn't be here today. Continue to use it and continue to be a player. Never ever be discouraged or incapacitated by feeling inferior, having anxiety, fear of failure, or failing on your own terms.

**MY SECOND CORE MESSAGE TO YOU IS THIS: SUCCESS IS A NEVER  
ENDING JOURNEY IT IS NOT A DESTINATION**

**TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS JOURNEY I ENCOURAGE YOU TO DEVELOP  
YOUR OWN LIFE VIEW . DETERMINE WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU.**

**HAVING A LIFE VIEW WHICH IS REALLY YOURS WILL HELP YOU BETTER  
NEGOTIATE LIFE'S CURVES AND BUMPS. FRANKLY, IT IS MUCH**



TOUGHER TO DO THIS TODAY THAN IN THE PAST.

THE WORLD AROUND YOU IS CHANGING MORE RAPIDLY THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME EVER. PARENTS, JUST THINK OF ALL THE WORDS NOT KNOWN WHEN YOU GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL. FOR EXAMPLE- FAX MACHINES; PERSONAL COMPUTER; CRACK COCAINE; CAM CORDER AIDS; CYBER SPACE; MTV; CNN; CHAT ROOMS; AND IN OUR INDUSTRY NAUTILUS/ LIFECYCLE; STEP AEROBIC TARGET HEART RATE, AND SPANDEX.

This rapidity of change coupled with increasing economic and time pressures on households, and frequent fuzziness about what is right and what is wrong suggests to me that teenagers and adults alike need to develop and periodically refine a life code that works for them. An August 1996 Hemispheres Magazine interview with Michael Josephson, President of the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Marina del Ray, CA. reports that one in three American high school students admits to stealing something from a store more than once in the past year and more than 40% say they would lie to get or keep a job.

One's definition of success may change as one changes ...but I encourage you - if you have not already done so- to develop your own definition of success for yourself now. Try to do it for yourself not for your parents, or your teacher or your priest, minister or rabbi, or your friends, or significant other - whether a significant other for three weeks or three years- but for yourself.

Write it down every year and go back and review it every year. And since life is multi-dimensional you should define successes in several categories - your relationships, your education and growth experiences, the development of your values and spirit, your fitness and health, and your gifts to others.



As you embark on this journey I'd like to leave you with some guidelines that may help you on your own journey:

1. BE AWARE THAT FAILURE IS NEVER THE END OF YOUR WORLD BUT THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE AND YOURSELF SO THAT YOU CAN LEARN EVEN MORE FROM YOUR NEXT FAILURE OR SUCCESS .
2. TRY TO SEE THE HUMOR OF EVERY DAY LIVING -EVERY DAY-;  
LAUGH AT YOURSELF A LOT; AND WITH OTHERS GENUINELY
3. TRY A LOT OF STUFF BECAUSE YOU WANT TO DO IT NOT  
NECESSARILY BECAUSE YOUR PARENTS WANT YOU TO DO IT -  
Lots of good things in life happen by accident and chance so be open to new experiences
4. WHEN YOU GO FOR A MAJOR OR A PROJECT OR A JOB BECOME  
PASSIONATE ABOUT IT IF ITS RIGHT FOR YOU

The "most successful people" no matter their personalities or careers or avocations all share one thing in common ---- they are passionate about what they enjoy.

5. LOOK FOR AND WELCOME MENTORS BUT BE VERY DISCRIMINATING  
ABOUT WHO YOU PICK AS YOURS

And remember, your mentor doesn't have to be great on all areas- they're human too after all- so learn from them in their areas that you admire and respect

6. GET SOME SORT OF EXERCISE EVERY DAY

The surest way to increase the odds of daily good health and good spirits for the long term is to insure that you engage in some sort of physical exercise or sport every day

7. WRITE DOWN YOUR GOALS EACH YEAR AND REVIEW AND REWORK  
THEM ANNUALLY ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR WRITING THEM



I am going to close by telling you a true but little known story about a famous man you all will know. As a young graduate student at Columbia University I went to Riverside Church along the Hudson River in 1966 to hear Dr. Martin Luther King speak. It was the early days of Vietnam and Lyndon Johnson was President of the United States. Johnson in many many ways was a much greater and more important supporter of the civil rights movement than John F. Kennedy. His support of Dr. King was vital to the historic movement which Dr. King was leading. Johnson was beginning to get criticized for his support of the US troop build up in Vietnam and he was seeking Martin Luther King's support for the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy. Dr. King at Riverside Church that night said "President Johnson has asked me to not speak out against his Vietnam policy. But tonight I must speak out against our President's policies in Vietnam. I ask you, how can I possibly as a man who has spent his entire adult life fighting bodily segregation possibly ever ever condone segregation of one's mind. I am opposed to the war in Vietnam and I am opposed to the President of the United States' policy in Southeast Asia I am here tonight speaking out against it as forcefully as I am able.

There was silence in the hall for a thoughtful moment ... then extraordinary applause .... and for me a clear memory forever of the importance of private and public integrity.

8. SO I LEAVE YOU NOW WITH THIS FINAL GUIDELINE AS YOU EMBARK ON YOUR OWN JOURNEY IN THE DIRECTION OF SUCCESS IN LIFE:

**STAND FOR SOMETHING AS A PERSON WHO RESPECTS ONESELF  
AND ALWAYS TREATS EVERYONE -REGARDLESS OF APPEARANCE,  
BACKGROUND OR STATION IN LIFE -WITH RESPECT**

**THANK YOU**

\*Roger Ralph is President of the Bel Air Athletic Club, Bel Air, Maryland