

Senior Last Lecture  
Miami University  
1999  
Lawrence W. Young (Miami '65)

President Garland, President Shriver, Ethan Benore, Janice Law, Kelly Schrock, friends, faculty and staff and above all to you the Class of Miami University 1999. It is so thrilling to once again find myself in Wally World. In all seriousness, I cannot tell you the joy, the pride, the honor, and the obligation I feel standing here before you on this day on this occasion.

It was many, many, only a few short years ago that I stood where you stand rejoicing in my accomplishments, anxious about my future, and praying that the speaker would be neither long nor boring. I will try my best to heed the admonitions of youth – my own and yours. My theme this evening is leadership with values, and I do want to talk about that, but first I want to digress for a moment and talk about death. You see death is a reality even as you ripen into the fullness of your maturity. Those in my cohort have experienced the passing from the stage of loved ones, colleagues and friends. And in your cohort on this campus this year, you experienced the loss of Alex Garrote, Rebecca Andrew and Christopher Eggerton – too young, too soon gone. Death is a reality and life is a reality, too. From the day we are born until the day we die, we have this marvelous, wondrous gift called life. And we are each presented with opportunities and choices of how we use or abuse that precious gift.

A poem speaks of “The Dash.” The dash is what appears on a tombstone beneath one’s name – April 27, 1978 – Dash.

“For that dash represents all the time.  
That we spend alive on this earth.  
And then only those who really loved us.  
Know what that little line is really worth.  
For it matters not how much we own,  
The cars, the house, the cash.  
What matters is how we live and love.  
And how we spend our dash.”

Life is a precious gift, and I am certain that the preparations you have received in the halls of this magnificent University have prepared you for work, for service, for life, for leadership.

I recall the motto of a previous Miami campaign that was titled – “Greater Service Awaits” – Greater service awaits. And I am impressed by the Miami Leadership Commitment, which includes key words like participation, reflection, human dignity, diversity, dialogue, flexibility, purposeful risk taking, and responsibility.

When one works on a University campus, one is exposed to the voices of cynics and critics who point the finger at youthful excesses as pathological or emblematic of “moral slippage.” All the while forgetting their own youthful excesses.

And while we must all decry riotous behavior, which I know none of you participated in, I do not see a generation of slackers. A generation X – unknowing, uncaring and uncommitted to anything except personal gratification. Instead, I see a generation of youthful graduates searching for truths in an ambiguous world, seeking direction from preceding generations on what should be.

Miami has created a pathway to the door of the future for each of you and now you must step through and find your destiny. Each of you is obligated, commanded to wear the heavy mantle of leadership. It is the extra weight that comes when you place the mortarboard upon your head.

I would suggest to you today that leadership with values might come from the four C's:

Courage  
Character  
Consciousness  
and  
Commitment.

Leadership requires courage. For in this world it often takes more courage to do that, which is right and just, then to do that which is wrong and unfair. There will always be those who will doubt your decisions, question your competency and criticize your authority.

Lead with courage for it is your DASH that is at stake.

Character.

Moral strength. The ability to develop empathetic ties to other human beings. Spirituality, integrity, just plain decency, and honor. The ability to understand that even if we have the power and the right to do somethings, it is not always right to do those things. In other words, having the right to do something doesn't make doing it right.

Have we not as a nation experienced the terrible human suffering that occurs when character is absent from leadership. Character can make or mar your DASH.

Consciousness.

Awareness and sensitivity to others.

Leadership demands a consciousness of the reality of others than ourselves. Consciousness will dictate your relationship to the powerful, and the powerless. Consciousness will move you into active participation in the society in which you live.

Consciousness moves you from the passive to the active, from a casual observer to a catalyst for change. Consciousness will force you to ask questions like why do we as a nation have fourth class public schools and first class public prisons?

Consciousness can give new meaning to your DASH.

Commitment.

Dedication to something bigger than ourselves. A few years ago, 35 to be exact, about a half mile east of this spot, three young men, about your age then, spent what would turn out to be the last few weeks of their lives on the Western Campus preparing to fulfill a commitment they made to the ideal of social justice and human equality. James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman sacrificed their lives in full bloom, because of their commitment to an ideal, a dedication to something bigger than themselves. They did not become martyrs because some benighted bigots took their lives. They became martyrs because they were leaders of courage, of character, of consciousness, and of commitment. And there is no doubt of the commitment in their Dash.

Commitment doesn't depend on how smart you are, but on how you are smart. The words of the song make it clear:

Maybe you and I can't do great things.  
We may not change the world in one day,  
But we still can change something today in our small way.

And I would add, if we commit ourselves.

My own journey has been shaped by some that now rest here in Oxford. Marian Musgrave, David Frazier, Marjorie Cook, Robert Strippel and Barbara Griffith. These may be meaningless names to you, but their Dashes shaped and impacted upon so many of us. Their majesty was in their courage, character, consciousness, and their commitment to Miami and to young people of all colors and all cultures.

So think about it long and hard.  
Are there things you'd like to change?  
For you never know how much time is left  
You could be at Dash mid-range.

I am sure you have heard the command from a popular manufacturer of sports apparel, which says – Just Do It! I know the human mind can interpret that in many ways, but I would leave you with the admonition to – Do It Anyway!

### DO IT ANYWAY

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered.  
Love them anyway!  
If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.  
Do good anyway!  
If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.  
Succeed anyway!  
The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good anyway!  
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.  
Be honest and frank anyway!

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway!

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for some underdog anyway!

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway!

People really need help but attack you if you help them.

Help people anyway!

Give the world the best you've got and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you've got anyway!

Beloved Class of 1999. You have been chosen to undertake a sacred journey of discovery, of improvement, and of continuously expanding your visions of what is possible, what is good, and what is right. Learning to see clearly and deeply, listening to your intuition, taking meaningful risks and meeting all challenges along the way.

And from here you must only go forward. Shaping your DASH into a magnificent tale of triumph, of healing, of courage, beauty, wisdom, power, dignity, and love.

Know that all who love Miami University are proud of you and delight in your past and future accomplishments. Also know that we all place upon you the expectation of greater service and success that reflect positively on your alma mater.

I personally congratulate each of you and commend your teachers for preparing you well for the tasks ahead and pray that in all ways your Dash will be richly blessed.

Thank you.