

Here is the speech delivered by Professor Toby Wilkinson, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Lincoln University. It was an excellent speech and very relevant to students as they begin to contemplate their future careers. I would urge everyone to read it, especially the parts I have highlighted and to take on board the three pieces of advice he gives....

Caistor Grammar School Awards Evening

Thursday 20 September 2018

First, I would like to thank the Headmaster, Mr Hopkins, for so kindly inviting me to give the address this evening. It's particularly generous of him, given that he's a graduate of Oxford and I am a graduate of Cambridge. But more of that later.

You're probably miffed that you have me, not your famous Old Caistorian Dawn French, speaking to you this evening. Sorry folks, Dawn was unavailable. So was Kevin Clifton. But I did use to be a competitive ballroom dancer, so I hope I'm at least partially qualified.

We're here to celebrate success; and all of you who are receiving awards today can be very proud of what you have achieved. You are the embodiment of the school's motto, 'Ever to Excel'.

Although I'm a relative newcomer to Lincolnshire, and, I must confess that this is my first-ever visit to Caistor, I feel quite at home here. It's not just that, being an archaeologist and ancient historian, I'm delighted to be in a town named after its Roman camp, and in a parish church which preserves part of the Roman wall. No, the reason I feel at home here is because of this school and what it stands for.

I also went to a Grammar School, in my home town of Portsmouth. It wasn't quite as venerable as this school, having been founded a century later. But its ethos was very much the same. The school motto was in Latin, rather than Greek; in fact, I think your motto is better. Ours was 'The reward of virtue is honour' - which made it sound as if we were all being prepared for the priesthood. But my school did what this school does so successfully: give every pupil the chance to develop, to find their particular talent - whether ballroom dancing or something else - and to succeed.

I have three messages for you this evening, and my **first message** is that it doesn't matter what your passion is, as long as you follow it. Mine - and this usually either sparks a conversation or kills it stone dead - was and is ancient Egypt. When I did my A-levels, I didn't have the faintest idea what I wanted to do as a career. All I knew was that I loved foreign languages, especially ancient languages, and more especially obscure ancient languages. An unusual passion, perhaps, for an 18-year-old. But there it was. So I followed my passion and went to Cambridge to study Egyptology - the study of ancient Egypt.

What you quickly discover if you follow your passion is that it's easier to excel at something you enjoy. I enjoyed Egyptology, got a first at University, and one thing led to another. Still not sure what I wanted to do for a career, I stayed on at Cambridge for a PhD, followed by four more years of research. I then went up to Durham University as a lecturer. It then dawned on me that, if I stayed on the same track, I might be spending the rest of my life in libraries, hardly speaking to another soul all day long. That didn't really appeal.

So I changed course completely, went back to Cambridge, and set up the development office at my old college. Communications, fundraising, external relations: all of these are about people, about building relationships. It couldn't have been more different from life as an academic researcher. But I loved it, and found I was quite good at it.

So my **second message** to you this evening is, don't be afraid to try new things, to branch out in different directions. Flexibility and adaptability are fantastic qualities. They are also increasingly necessary. Not only will most of you have an average of 7-10 different jobs during your career, one study has predicted that 60% of young people at school today will earn their living doing jobs that don't yet exist. You will need to adapt to new technologies, new ways of working. Flexibility is an asset, not a sign of indecision.

After 12 years in development, I changed career again, and became the first Director of International Strategy at the University of Cambridge. I had no particular experience in international relations, but the interview panel seemed to think I would be able to do the job. The job involved negotiating with foreign governments, the European Commission, overseas universities and funding bodies - and, even more tricky, the academic staff of the University - to establish a range of strategic partnerships spanning the globe. It was amazing, hard work, but successful and rewarding.

So my **third message** to you this evening is, have confidence in your own abilities. Not arrogance or over-confidence, but a quiet belief in your own strengths. Don't let other people tell you you can't do something, and don't tell yourself you can't do something. With drive, determination and hard work, you can excel. You've already proved that, which is why you're here this evening.

I could have talked this evening about lots of other things: writing books; why I moved from the University of Cambridge to the University of Lincoln; or the new Lincoln Medical School which will open next September, and which will be looking especially for students from Lincolnshire, including those who don't get the A-levels for immediate entry into medical school but who none the less have what it takes to become great doctors. Ask me about any of those later, if you want to know more.

But good things come in threes, so I'll leave you with my three core messages. Follow your passion. Don't be afraid to try new things. And believe in yourself.

With those, you won't go far wrong.

Renewed congratulations on all your achievements, and thank you once again for inviting me here this evening.