



Graduation 2008 – Prepare for the Long Haul

Summer time, for those who enjoy a change of season, is a favorite time of the year for many people and there are numerous reasons why that would be the case—the hot weather, the thrill of being outdoors often, cruising down the highway on a sunny day, and a change of wardrobe, to name a few. But summer time—primarily the months of May and June—also brings the annual tradition of college (university) graduation.

Recalling my college graduation, I could not wait to be done with long days and nights cooked up in the library studying for one test or another. I especially could not wait to be free of the campus food—it was not bad, but it was not that great either; although, the price was just right! But most of all I looked forward to getting my degree in hand and proceeding with some form of employment with a reputable firm and making some serious money—serious by the standards of a new graduate, that is.

Many graduates will go on to pursue an advanced degree; however, most will seek employment and initiate plans to launch a career or lay the foundation for a subsequent career. Consistent with the sound advice that many college graduation keynote speakers offer new graduates, I'd like to offer similar sound advice to this year's college graduates—specifically those pursuing employment.

To the graduate, first, a reminder — you are not in school anymore. Get used to this reality and get used to it fast. While in school, there were expectations of you—from your parents and from your professors and instructors. Similarly, as a new employee, there will be expectations of you by your employer. These expectations, in part, will set the tone for how well you advance with that employer. To create an advantage and give yourself an edge, there are several things you can do and I will share one such strategy with you — begin cultivating high personal standards.

Whether you realize it or not you currently possess a set of personal standards—relating to the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you communicate in writing, your sense of time, and so on. But how do these relate to standards, you may wonder? Standards refer to a measure of level of quality or acceptance. And so your personal standards refer to your level of quality or acceptance with regards to your way of doing things or your way of thinking. Some of your personal standards were forged at home by virtue of the value system put in place by your parents while you were growing up. These same standards were further refined by your college experience—for better or worse.

Before you graduated you could dress pretty much any way you wanted for classes and running around campus; you probably engaged the use of slang and street talk often amongst your friends and perhaps instructors; you probably arrived to class late on

Author of RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It

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occasion or maybe often; you most definitely relied on text messaging and email for much of your interpersonal communication; and maybe, just maybe, you settled for a “C” on that subject that you dreaded taking so much. All this was cool and for the most part fine—for today’s college campus experience, with the exception of settling for the “C” part! However, if these represent your personal standards going forward, think again!!

With the start of your post-college fulltime employment, you really are laying the foundation for your professional future. This journey may take your career through the halls of some the oldest and well established firms in the country, or through some of the new emerging companies poised to become tomorrow’s leaders, or through an avenue of public service to your community or your country, or perhaps through an entrepreneurial path where you create something new and pursue your passion. And so the refocus to begin cultivating high personal standards will be far reaching.

Get into the habit of establishing high personal standards in key aspects of your life. Present yourself properly and always dress appropriately for whatever occasion you find yourself—make provision in your wardrobe for a few formal suits and other formal /semi-formal attire. Go back to using proper grammar and clean vocabulary when speaking, always being thoughtful and considerate of those around you—lose the slang and street talk. Always exercise good judgment in your choice of action in the workplace—as it relates to your work ethic, writing style, personal conduct, or display of proper manners. Look for the most respected leaders, in your place of employment, and learn from them as much as you can by observing what they do, how they do it, and how they present and carry themselves. Do not settle for mediocrity—expect more from yourself. The high personal standards you set today will distinguish you and set you apart, and this can lead to the advantage you need as you advance your career. Furthermore, these high personal standards will help you establish a positive reputation and cause you to engender respect from people around you.

The Importance of High Personal Standards

High personal standards established at an early stage in one’s professional journey can build an advantage that can advance one’s career on a continuous basis and often when the competition is tough.

If you were interested in taking golf lessons and I presented you with a choice of two prepaid one-day golf clinics — lessons with Tiger Woods, the Pro, or lessons with a Tiger Woods look-alike who happens to be a fairly good regional golfer, which would you choose? You’d certainly go for Woods, the Pro—genuine, real deal, top notch, world class. Your choice would symbolize your preference for the highest standard (in golf). This mindset should be your guide as you reset your personal standards ahead of your lifelong career journey.

Cheers and thank you – N. Taiwo

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