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I have donned cap and gown only twice in my life... and Babson made both occasions possible. I'm particularly grateful that my mother and my uncle were able to be present on both occasions - I believe they remain dumbfounded that I ever got to put cap and gown on the first time, let alone a second time.

So, to them, to my family, faculty members, distinguished guests, members of the graduating class and parents of the graduating class, good morning.

I should acknowledge at the outset that I'm painfully aware that being a commencement speaker is a bigger deal for the speaker than for the audience. I must also confess that I can remember neither the identity nor the topic of the speaker at my own graduation exercises. And I also am aware that if there is any suspense in the air, it has to be with whether - or when - the exercises will be streaked. And what, if anything, at that momentous point, will speaker say to streaker?

All of which remains to be seen. In the meantime, what does the speaker (not streaker) say to a group of men and women as worldly-wise as today's college graduates?

- That the world has changed?
- That virtue triumphs and cream rises to the top?
- That you get out of life pretty much what you put into it?
- That the best way to improve a system that's been found wanting is to work within - not outside - that system?
- And who - from my generation - has the right to say? The world has changed - it has changed more in the time between my graduation and yours that it did between my great-grandfather's and mine. In point of fact, my sense of values at graduation was probably closer to my great-grandfather's than yours - today - is to mine, or your father's.

In the 22 years since I received my degree from this institution - and that, incidentally, roughly corresponds with the life span of the average graduate in the audience - the knowledge, philosophy and way of life that we carried through college have been largely outdated and outmoded.

Outdated and outmoded, and not just technologically. Not only has man landed on the moon in the interim and perfected the computer, invented the jet plane, nuclear sub and color TV and discovered Salk vaccine, but the political and economic systems of the country and world have been significantly altered (in real life, if not on paper) - and not always for better. A seemingly endless war in Southeast Asia has been fought to a vague conclusion, the President of the United States has been assassinated, another stands in the shadow of impeachment and the government from time to time seems to be in a state of near collapse.

A case could be made that if Lt. Hiro Onoda - the Japanese soldier who straggled into the world after three decades in the Philippine jungle - were given an instant replay of everything that has happened, he might come to the conclusion that we really ain't made much progress, except technologically, and that's a mixed blessing.

So what does a representative of the generation that ain't made much progress - and, on top of that, a representative of the business establishment - tell young people heading into a world where all the institutions of the establishment - not only business, but government, church, education, professions, military, labor, press - receive universally low marks in public esteem?

- Good News and Bad News...

Well, as always, you tell them that there is good news... and bad news. In this instance, the bad news comes first.

Part of the bad news is that you're going to find that your ability to control your own destiny - a prime objective of all of us idealists (I use the term "us" advisedly) - is less than you think it should be... and certainly less than it was 22 years ago.

Compromise Essential...

The decisions that are made today are made by a committee - in business, government, community and social life - and even in the home. The old saw that a camel is a horse designed by a committee contains an element of truth. A committee decision, by its very nature, is a compromise that completely satisfies no individual. In fact, one of the truisms that can be applied to life itself is that it is a compromise. And compromise is foreign to an idealist, particularly a young idealist of the 1970's, as well as foreign to the theme of most commencement messages.

Usually, the charge is don't compromise, don't surrender. But I would submit that there is a distinction between compromise and surrender... and it's a distinction that is difficult to perceive when you're on the charge to make a better world or build a better life. To surrender is to give up, to quit; to compromise is to find a way not to give up - to move forward, or sideways, or even to find a way to live to fight another day.

Compromise may seem neither a noble nor a manly art. But it is an essential ingredient to making some kind of peace with the world in which you live, while retaining some kind of peace with yourself.

No Man Is An Island

To be sure, there will be exceptions to this generalization among you. Some of you will be able - because your objectives are different than most and the price you're willing to pay is perhaps greater than most - to work your way through life doing pretty much what you want to do, the way you want to do it, with principles and ideals untrammeled. Others of you will try - and fail - and will come face-to-face with compromise as the only alternative to frustration and defeat.

For the vast majority of us, the phrase, "No man is an island," rings increasingly true; and to the extent that you're tied to the mainland - to society and the rest of humanity - to that extent, some degree of compromise becomes inevitable. To cite a superficial illustration in connection with the automobile business (if you'll permit one regression), you may feel you have the inalienable right to buy a car that will go 150 miles per hour, rip off the muffler and drive without seat belts - and you may, if you own your own island. But not on the mainland, if, in its wisdom, the establishment ordains 55 miles per hour speed limits to conserve energy, ordains noise and pollution control devices to protect the environment and ordains seat belts and shoulder straps (or air bags) to protect you against yourself - in the interest of the common good, as it perceives it. The latter distinction is critical.

For the definition of common good has largely fallen to the two great, overpowering institutions of the day - the government and press (or media). Along with that power of defining the common good goes tremendous control over the private life - and especially the business life - of the individual. The government will define - to a greater or lesser degree - who you hire, what you pay, who you promote, what hours are worked, the design and price of your product, how you advertise, how you package, how you distribute, what warranties you give, what services you provide, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

MEDIA REIGNS

The power of media cannot be described, let alone quantified. Joseph Goebbels, presumably the premier propagandist of the ages, would have been dumbfounded at the speed and impact around the world of what is called the news and communications process today. It would not be an overstatement to say that the
With regard to media, I would only note that in my youth we must have had all kinds of bad news — or hints of potential bad news — going on all around us all the time. Fortunately, I guess, we didn't know about most of it. On the other hand, you, as a generation, have been so bombarded with instant news of corruptions of all kinds, scandal, crime, greed, natural disaster, rebellion, labor dispute, race riot, military arrogance, murder and assassination (to name a few) that you have to be convinced:

1. That everything is going to hell in a handbasket and
2. All the people who have been running things are either crooks or crooks or both.

Think of it — you have matured to news of the first truly unpopular overseas war in this country's history. All we ever had were "good" wars — "lovable" wars — that everybody supported. Wars that were against really bad guys, who now, ironically, are considered to be good guys.

You are witnessing the potential impecuniousness of a president of the United States, on the media, more than any other institution (including church and school), shape the public psyche today — and it is the public psyche that determines, in the final analysis, whether an economy thrives — a government falls — whether there is war or peace, inflation, depression, anxiety, or the total collapse of the moral standard and the gold standard.

The purpose here is not to contribute to the growing pile of diatribe (much of which is self-serving) against governmental intervention or the power of the press, but simply to point out the fact of impact and degree of impact that these two institutions will have, for better or worse, on the life you're about to lead. My generation has been unable to control or contain that impact — whether yours can, or does, will depend in large degree on whether or not it wants to, and how badly it wants to.

But, at a minimum and with regard to government, I would hope that yours will recognize more quickly than mine that any definition of the common good requires trade-offs — that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

MY WORLD, YOUR WORLD

The objectives of energy conservation and a clean environment, for example, tend to conflict — not only with each other but with a third objective: that of maintaining a high level of employment, investment and economic development. Compromise is necessary. Your right not to be discriminated against for any reason whatsoever runs hand in hand with my right — not my right to discriminate — but ultimately into my right to select — to select on the basis of talent, experience or desire. And the wicket gets progressively stickier because there are just so many "rights" and the rights of any group tend to come at the expense of others. Ask the "do-gooders" for the definition of the concept of priorities...and to list the costs of getting from here to there — from where we are to where they want us to go.

NO FREE LUNCH

For there are no free lunches, even in this area, and there is as much legitimate need for truth-in-lending or truth-in-advertising.

heels of the ouster of a vice-president. All we ever had (from age five to 18) was one president...and nobody, but nobody, ever fooled with him — except once every four years somebody ran against him and got clobbered and that was all there was to it. The institutions may have been rent and we may have chafed under them, but no one ever challenged them successfully. So, in my day, we were content to wrestle with the real issues: whether, on average, you made out better at Pine Manor or Wellesley...and who had the book on Clint Petersen's last four exams.

So I would say to my generation, which tends to despair because your values are so different, that we should stand in awe that you have values and that they bear any resemblance at all to ours...that it is a minor miracle that you accept any of the teachings you have received, have any respect for the institutions of the day and, in fact, approach life with some measure of hope and determination. And therein lies the real bedrock of the good news of the day — that, on balance, you have and you do.

ATOMIC HOLOCAUST

The other piece of good news is related to the same perspective. People have been giving commencement speeches on the same theme for decades; the theme that things aren't what they used to be, that the world is going to pot and it's up to you — the young — to get your heads screwed on right and get it fixed. Admittedly, the problems may have seemed less complex in days of yore, but the consequences were as dire:

- By now, according to the prognosticators of the late 40's and early 50's, we should have disappeared in atomic holocaust...and we have not.
- The earth should have been struck by at least two other heavenly bodies.
- The church should be dead, our cities in ashes from race riots, the environment poisoned to the point that it could no longer sustain life and
- Anybody who escaped that chain of disasters should have been felled by Asian flu.

Incidentally, on the side of trivia, a United States senator named Robert La Follette predicted that gasoline prices would go to $1 a gallon...in 1923. The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company advertised, in 1916, that the gasoline supply of America, at the then present rate of production and consumption, would be exhausted in 27 years...or by 1943...but if everybody used Goodyear "Cord" tires, it would last another seven years...until 1950.

THREE OUT OF FIVE

The point, I guess, is that while the middle-aged tend to despair of all the bad news — probably out of sheer frustration — the young do not. They head out into the world and, if they don't fix it (it's probably not fixable), they're going to do something to keep it running somehow. For virtue does triumph and the cream does rise to the top...in the long run. You do get out of life about what you put into it...on average. The good guys do lick the bad guys...about three out of five.

And — most importantly — there are still mountains to climb, sunsets to watch, girls to
kiss and wine to be drunk. All are worth doing (with the possible exception — in deference to the memory of the founder of this school — of drinking the wine) . . . and all are worth doing well. And none, incidentally, are resources in danger of depletion.

REBELLION BUILDS NOTHING . . .

So the message is — don’t you despair; don’t you despair of the institutions of the day. Rebellion is a nice, self-satisfying luxury . . . but it doesn’t build anything. Rejection of the system is O.K. — and may even be desirable on a limited scale — but somebody still has to go in and run the system. Compromise need not be surrender.

And there is continuity, in the midst of change. It is a reasonable assumption that one of the highlights of your life — 25 years or so from now — will come when you go to your son’s or daughter’s commencement . . . wondering how either of you ever made it.

And it is also a reasonable assumption that the only sour note on that day will be a commencement address . . . by a self-styled oracle who will talk too long and say too little. But even that will pass, eventually.

THE BABSON TEAM . . .

A final note . . . about Babson and about continuity. Only three men (two of them deceased) have served as its president since I came here in 1950 . . . and all three . . . Edward Hinckley, Gordon Trim and Henry Kriebel . . . were on this campus in 1930. On the campus also were the others who run this institution today — Walter Carpenter, Everett Stephens, Paul Staake, Clint Peterson, Carl Bowen, Joe Alexander, Wally Mors, Ed Handler, Ed McGee and Bob Wertheimer. The purpose is not to say that they’ve grown old (I don’t think I have) . . . but to pay tribute to almost unprecedented continuity in the midst of change, and of unparalleled progress . . . progress whose physical evidence can be seen in any direction you choose to look.

They have built this school — as individuals and as a team — without ever taking a single step backward or even succumbing to the impulse to tread water. Their is a truly remarkable record — and I think it contains a lesson for us all. God bless you and Godspeed to you, Henry Kriebel. Thank you, very much.

Bennett E. Bidwell, '52, is presently Vice President and General Manager of Ford Motor Company.