

Miss Hall's School Commencement June 5, 2022

Remarks by Belinda Enoma, Data Privacy and Cybersecurity Leader and Global Empowerment Speaker

Graduating Class of 2022, thank you for choosing me to be your speaker. Thank you Head of School Julia Heaton, students, and all faculty and administration. The message I have as you embark on this fabulous journey is “Press forward. You and folks connected to your destiny are not going backwards.”

First — Sometimes, life will bring challenges and responsibilities, but how you handle them will determine whether you succeed or fail.

Some of you may need to take a gap year for various reasons (some of you have to do it for financial reasons, some of you for other reasons). As a teenager in 1993, I took a year out. Whichever decision you have made, use your time wisely. Work. Be intentional about your future. I worked during my gap year so that I could save enough money to start university the following year.

Some of you are here right now, graduating from MHS, and you have important family obligations at your age. You are thinking about how your family will handle them as you go on to invest in your future, their future. Your future is their future, because you are part of the generation that is going to change the trajectory of familial connections. What you have learned at MHS will take you very far. No matter the challenge that comes your way, you are an overcomer. Do not give up.

To parents, godparents, grandparents, aunties, uncles, family, and everyone that has invested in MHS Class of 2022: Your little girl is grown up now and going to be just fine, wherever she goes. If she has chosen a certain career path, trust that she will be fine.

Second — Your life path is different from others.

Because you are on the same road or lane doesn't mean that you are heading to the same destination. When you see several cars on the road, they may be in the same lane, going the same direction, or taking the same exit on the highway, but they are going to different places. Don't allow people's ideas and “drama” to pull you into a direction that is not for your destiny. Be yourself. Be authentic. You have gifts and talents that will change the world. It's a disservice to humanity to freeze your purpose, hide your gifts and talents when the world needs them.

Third — Don't discard any life experience. It teaches us to be wiser, stronger and more determined to achieve our goals.

Why am I saying that? When I was a teenager, just like you, I took on part-time jobs waitressing, working in catering, or working in clothing stores to have enough money to

get ready for my university semester. My mother could only do what she could, so I knew that I had to help myself if I wanted to get to where I desired to be.

Sometimes, we think that jobs we do in our youth won't help us later in life, but they actually do. I shared a story recently with one of the ladies that I coach. I told her how I worked in the hospitality industry in my teens back in the day in East London England. It was a temp job, and I worked in some of the fancy hotels in London as a waitress. I did some housekeeping, too. I used to look at the folks coming in to eat at the restaurant in the posh hotel and say to myself, "One day, I will get there. I will also eat here, sit the way they are doing in this posh place, and tip good, too."

More than two decades later, I hosted an empowerment conference at the same hotel that I worked as a waitress. It was not intentional but by divine design. I reached out to a few hotels for meeting venue quotes so that I could get the best deal. Lo and behold, the one that gave me exactly what I needed (plus more), was the same hotel that I temped in back in the day!

Here's a life lesson: What you think is irrelevant in your life is actually meant to prepare you for the future.

Waiting tables taught me many things. The experience helped me during times when my finances were about to run out. Heaven smiled on me, and the catering agency called to ask if I was available for a couple of hours some evenings. I was able to work a few hours during the Aston Villa Football Club season in Birmingham, when I didn't have too much schoolwork. The experience helped me to manage my time and not be a hungry law student. I was able to study with food in my belly.

I offer some affirmations to help you as you start this awesome life journey:

1. Whenever you feel like you can't do it, look in the mirror and tell yourself: "***I am authorized. I have what it takes to do this.***"
2. Whenever you feel like you don't belong in the room, remind yourself that you worked hard to get to where you are. Tell yourself: "***I am qualified. I belong here. I know my stuff. I am going to achieve my goals.***"
3. Whenever you feel so busy, and all your college work is getting to you, when it seems like you don't have enough time to complete your tasks, tell yourself: "***I activate. I don't procrastinate. I can do this!***"
4. Whenever you feel like your back is against the wall, and you seem stuck, tell yourself: "***I implement. I am not going to stop now. I have what it takes to break through. My quest for elevation will not be stopped by circumstances or life issues.***"
5. Whenever you feel like giving up because life just has a way of throwing curve balls, tell yourself: "***I have faith. I refuse to quit. Even though I don't know the end from where I am now, I believe that things will work out for my good. I believe that everything will be alright.***"

6. If you ever feel like you are stuck in a group or inner circle that doesn't align with your values or goals for your life, and you feel a lot of destiny-interfering pressure (perhaps peer pressure), tell yourself: "***I emancipate me. I free myself from anything that is not aligned with my destiny. I have a choice.***"
7. If you are ever in a situation where your knowledge, gifts, and talents are being "negotiated," downgraded, and doubted; where you are placed in a position to dim your beautiful light, tell yourself: "***I value my brilliance. This light of mine is going to shine brightly for maximum impact.***"
8. Whenever you feel like quitting, tell yourself: "***I start and finish. No unfinished projects. I am authorized and qualified to finish powerfully.***"

Class of 2022, you have come this far. There's no stopping you now from achieving your goals. You are the generation that we are entrusting to make things happen and shift trajectories. Wherever you go now, remember, you did not get there by yourself. You are standing on the shoulders of those who went ahead before you. I share a quote by Isaac Newton: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

You are the generation that speaks up and uses their voice. You are the generation that studied at Miss Hall's School with students from different backgrounds, cultures. You are the generation that understands the importance of representation and will implement changes to ensure that not only are seats available at the table, but that you will open the door from inside to ensure that marginalized groups are represented, included, and made welcome. And, if there is no table, you will intentionally create a table for all.

I share the words of Toni Morrison: "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." You are the generation that presses for change. You are the generation that makes things happen.

Class of 2022, pioneers have paved the way, created the path. Now it's your turn to help polish the path, enhance the path, educate folks you meet along the path, and positively impact your generation and my generation.

Congratulations! We are proud of you!