

GUEST SPEAKER'S ADDRESS (Scholars Convocation, April 4, 2009)

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When I was first asked to talk with you today I thought, what a privilege? After all, for those hard working students who have earned special recognition, this is your day and you are the guests of honor. As you might imagine, I also had to think about what I would say. I considered talking about how much you've grown since your freshman year and of course I'm sure you have. Then I thought I might talk about how education is more than just academics, but also about life. After all you had to learn how to navigate the paperwork of an institutional process, meet new people, perhaps live away from home, and so you have grown academically of course, but also culturally and socially. Then I remembered a quote, I think it was by Juvenal who said, "*All wish to possess knowledge, but few, comparatively speaking, are willing to pay the price*" and how many of you made decisions along the way that effected your grades and your attainment of knowledge. Maybe you turned down the chance to attend a social event, so that you might study; you were willing to pay the price for knowledge. Maybe you spent time at the writing and resource center. You were willing to pay the price for knowledge. Maybe you read so much in the Regina Library that you thought you should have your own space there. You were willing to pay the price for knowledge. I think what you gained here at Rivier College is more than rote memory, I think you gained knowledge. And so I want to talk about knowledge and perhaps define it for you. Now asking a psychology professor to define knowledge can be a dangerous thing leading to discussions on crystallized and fluid intelligence and memory including working memory and information storage and retrieval. But don't worry; I have another way to explain knowledge. But to do this, I need to tell you a story.

There was a fairly large ship just off the coast of Portsmouth, and it was having engine problems. The main power plant had stopped working and the ship was drifting dangerously in shipping lanes that are much like the super highways of the ocean. The ship's mechanic had tried cleaning valves, checking fuel flow, reviewing gauges and dials, but no matter what he did he could not get the engines to start. He reported to the Captain that they needed help. The Captain radioed to shore and asked for tug boats to tow him in, and further that they have experts waiting to fix the engine when the ship arrives in the dock.

When the ship was finally at port and secured, a man stepped forward with a small bag that looked much like an old doctor's bag. He stepped onto the boat and was immediately greeted by the Captain. The man said, "Hi, my name is Bob, and I'm here to fix your engine." The Captain had been expecting a team of engineers with large tool chests and heavy equipment and so he was a little surprised by Bob. Still, Bob was here and so the ships mechanic was ordered to escort Bob down to the engine room. Once there, Bob asked the mechanic to try to start the engine. He did, but it would not start. Then Bob opened his case and took out a small hammer. He walked over to an area of complex pipes and valves, and tapped a single valve once. Then he again asked the mechanic to try and start the engine. This time the engine came to life.

Before Bob left the ship he met with the Captain, and Bob handed the Captain a bill for \$100,000. The Captain said, "Look, thank you for fixing the engine, but you're asking me to pay \$100,000 for tapping an engine valve that seems much too expensive." Bob smiled and replied, "I'll tell you what

Captain, tapping the valve, I'll give you that for free. Knowing where to tap it, that will cost you \$100,000."

In this digital world human processes are all too often compared to computer processes. But I think knowledge is fundamentally different than data and information and, therefore, we humans are fundamentally different. Knowledge is different because it enables us to do something with data and information; to make decisions, innovate, and express original thoughts through reasoning. Knowledge is more than just the memory of experiences; it is the assimilation of these experiences. In essence, it is evidence that we are greater than the sum of our parts. As was true in the case of Bob, knowledge helps us to get the job done.

Knowledge is something that becomes part of you and in a very unique way. You can't post it in the FaceBook, you can't listen to it from an iPod. You can't text it on a cell phone. And yet you have it, and you know it, and we know it.

You have obtained something here at Rivier College that is important both to who you are as an individual, and to those who might need your skills. I think the trustees, administrators, faculty and staff of the college would all agree with me when I say that we have faith in you. We believe that if, at some future date, you are called upon to address an issue that requires your unique knowledge, you will know exactly where to tap to get things going smoothly.

Again, thank you for giving me the privilege to speak with you today, and congratulations.■

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