

Lachie Roberts
2024 Keynote Speech

At any moment we face a myriad of choices, and we must think of what to do. Let me give you an idea – what if our brain's job wasn't just to think, it was also to restrict thinking.

The brain is like an inhibitor switch, if we thought too much, we wouldn't focus on or achieve anything. We would be overwhelmed by information, images, sounds – so much that we could not function. The world around us would be an encrypted mess.

The 'encrypted mess' was what Englishman and scientist Alan Turing faced in World War II. It was Europe, 1940. The Allies were losing the war, and the black uniforms of the Third Reich were gaining ground all through Europe.

The world was scrambled, Germans operating in disguise, the incessant thud of explosions and piercing shot after shot were the songs of war. Turing was tasked with breaking the enigma code, the code responsible for encrypting the messages of the Germans. If the allies could break the code – an impossible task at the time – they could find out where the enemy was and where they were vulnerable.

By focusing on the basics, ignoring the distractors, Turing created the Bombe Machine that broke the code to win the war. Not through strength, but through persistent, hard work under immense pressure. The Bombe Machine is now known as the precursor to the modern computer – in a time of great challenge, through persistence and hard work a great change was possible.

Good morning headmasters, Mr Ickeringill, teachers, scholars, parents, and most importantly, boys.

Sometimes I feel like the whole world is working towards ensuring that we do no work – we have our phones readily at our disposal, we can ask Siri anything we need to know, and AI is the next big thing.

I wonder whether that makes us feel lost. Whether achieving something when we haven't actually done anything is an empty victory.

Today I am going to talk to you about the satisfaction of work and not shying away from challenges.

I have been rowing for the past five years and it is about to come to an end in just one month. A lot of people have called me crazy...and a most of the time I think so too. I've been asked, 'Why do all the training and experience all the pain and failure?' and 'How do I possibly have any time for school?'

But, as I say this, I do fear and dread when it will all be over. To me, there is nothing more satisfying and enjoyable than working hard with your best friends to achieve an almost impossible goal. Although the stakes were obviously much higher, Alan Turing had an opportunity to do something special, he did not shy away from the challenge and was ultimately rewarded with saving countless lives.

It was the experience of challenge that brought change – as the philosopher Marcus Aurelius says, 'Sometimes the obstacle is actually the way.'

At the end of the day, what we do now will set us up for our futures. We have so many choices to make. Do I want to challenge myself, make it easy or do I care? The danger is habits are difficult to break when we form them young by making the wrong decision. There are people out there, trying their hardest to escape poverty and to improve their lives.

They are highly motivated and are not complacently leaving it until the last minute, hoping for the best. As Pele, the Brazilian soccer player and FIFA player of the century said, "Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

I believe that hard work and effort has been underappreciated. It is so easy to stroll through life and get by and think that will do. And that is fine, it is easy. But is it rewarding? Will we feel better?

How often are participation medals given out to kids for just turning up, to please their parents or school, to tick a box, undermining those that showed up and gave it their all?

To me the idea that everyone gets a prize doesn't really represent anything. When we were young everyone won a prize at parties, we got a medal for our first 100 days of Prep, we are used to winning for just turning up!

It's just thanks for existing, I guess. That is why medals, medals that are rewarded for something you really care about and worked towards are so special. They embody the effort, and sacrifice that went into earning that victory. Success is not marked by what others see. It's what you have done to get there.

Two months ago, I won a race in rowing and received a medal. This happens to be only the third that I have received in the past five years, the most recent coming at the beginning of Year 9. Three years of nothing. And I tell you, I have never felt so good and relieved. It was almost laughable that a little, cheap piece of metal, could stand for so much and make me feel so unbelievably satisfied.

When things don't turn out well, it hurts, but when things feel lost, like there are no answers, there always seems to be a small glimmer of hope somewhere.

So that's the thing – if you gain something without effort your reward is emptiness. It's the process; the hard work and effort to succeed which gives you the most satisfaction.



If you do well in something, but know that it wasn't your best, you may feel regretful and possibly even guilty. However, if you try your hardest to achieve something, but fall short, there is no room for regret or guilt, or feeling sorry for yourself.

This is because you know that you could not have achieved anything more. You will feel satisfied, and that is what success is. Not results, not numbers, not victories, not podiums.

It is the ability to know, deep within yourself, that you put yourself out there and gave it your all, for yourself. Not for your friends, family, or anyone else. Success is inherently internal.

If you wake to who you are, you can reach your true potential. The only way to get there is to work hard to crack your code. Thank you.