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Keynote Speech 2026

“Did not die wondering.”

My parents joke that this will be my gravestone.

Not because I am reckless, not because I chase attention, but because I have always asked questions. I would rather try, learn, and get it wrong than sit wondering what might have been.

This came down to two words - What if?

What if I try, even when I am not the obvious choice?

What if I fail, but learn something?

What if I keep going, even when it feels like I am not getting anywhere?

I am not naturally exceptional, academically or in sport. And I am definitely not the charismatic or funny one or loudest voice in the room.

But at some point, I realised; talent might get you started, but consistency and determination are what take you further.

Rowing taught me this quickly. In a boat, there is nowhere to hide. You cannot negotiate with the work, and you cannot skip the hard parts and expect progress.

When the alarm goes off early, when your body is tired, that is when you show who you really are.

There were mornings when sleep would have been my preferred option. There were weekends when it would have been easier to just switch off. And there were seasons where improvement felt slow and hard to see.

Many of you know I have some pretty big goals for rowing and US college after this year. It’s a journey I’ve been on since Year 9. But it’s not been without challenge and heartbreak.

I have missed out on the First VIII crew more times than I can count, even while posting some of the strongest metrics in the club, but selection is never based on numbers alone. Some days are yours. Some days are not.

But each choice I made mattered. I kept turning up. I kept working, even when the results were slow or when the odds seemed stacked against me.

I approached my academics the same way. I focused on doing the work, not whether it came easily.

Giving everything you have does not guarantee success. But not giving everything guarantees regret.

And regret is heavier than failure.

Asking “what if” does not just matter for our own goals; it shapes how we lead.

You do not make progress by doing things just because they have always been done that way. Progress starts when someone is willing to question whether it still makes sense.

Questioning does not mean rejecting the past. It does not mean ignoring tradition or legacy. Change does not erase what came before; change is how legacy stays relevant.

But that is not always easy.

From the outside, people assume Prefects and school leaders are just naturally smart, gifted, or lucky. What you do not see is the work, the late nights, and the moments that really test you.

And that pressure is exactly what change feels like.

Leadership is often confused with popularity. With being agreeable. With keeping everyone happy.

Everyone says they want change. Few though are willing to sit in the discomfort that comes with it, especially the rejection or lack of support.

But real leadership demands honesty. It requires integrity. And it means living your values, not just talking about them.

And values only matter when they cost you something, when the right decision is harder than the popular one.

But this can be difficult, especially at school. We all feel pressure to fit in. We all fear losing approval.

Good leadership is not about protecting popularity. It is about protecting, and honouring, your values.

It is about giving everything you have, even when nobody is applauding. Treating people with respect when there is nothing to gain. Choosing effort, honesty, and authenticity, day after day.

I am not standing here pretending I have everything figured out. I am still learning. Still getting things wrong. Still asking questions.

My story could be any of yours. The difference is not talent or luck. It is whether you ask, 'What if' and follow it through.

Because when you look back, success is not about how comfortable the journey was. It is about what happens in between.

I hope that when my time here ends, I can say I did not die wondering. That I asked the questions. That I took the risks that mattered. That I lived my values, not just talked about them.



So, do not wait to feel ready. Ask what if. Then act on it.

Because what you do in the in between, the ordinary days, the unnoticed choices, is what shapes where you finish.

Thank you.