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Keynote Speech 2026

This year I've been thinking a lot about role models. And the more I've thought about them, the more I've realised that role models are something we often get completely wrong.

The people we are supposed to look up to on social media seem 'perfect'. They always seem to wake up at 4.00am, meditate for two hours, read 12 books before breakfast and somehow still have time to invent a sports drink. But my belief is that the true role models aren't the perfect person. Like all of us, they are flawed, and they are real – and through their humanity, they teach us how to be better.

Good morning, Ms Clark, Mr Angus, Mr Featherston, Dr Swann, teachers and boys.

Throughout my time at Brighton Grammar, I've found myself paying attention to the people around me. Sometimes it's been teachers or coaches, sometimes my friends or family, and sometimes it's been someone I've only crossed paths with for a few minutes.

And I've realised that those ordinary interactions have shaped me far more than the stories of people like Nelson Mandela or Michael Jordan ever could. Not because those people aren't inspiring, but because the role models who have changed me most are usually the ones I know personally.

None of the people who've influenced me most have ever sat me down and given me a formal lesson on how to live my life. Instead, they taught me without even realising they were teaching me.

It was in the early mornings when they still showed up despite being exhausted, the conversations after a bad day that somehow made everything seem a little less overwhelming, and the way they treated people when nobody else was watching. Looking back now, those small moments have shaped who I am far more than any motivational speech or life advice ever could.

My parents have probably had the biggest influence on who I've become. They never expected me to be perfect, and looking back, I'm grateful they didn't. What they cared about was effort.

Whenever I got out of the car when they would drop me off at primary school, they would always say, be kind and be humble. Put in effort with other people, and that's all they could ask for. Showing up, doing your best and if your best wasn't good enough. It really doesn't matter because effort is the most important part of anything you do.

My sisters have had a different influence on me. Throughout their schooling journey, they would always put their hand up for anything they had an opportunity to. Whether it be the choir, the school musical, a niche sport or just a new subject, they taught me to give things a go, which would result in even greater opportunities like both being high achievers and being School Captains at Star of the Sea. Along with that, they also taught me how to lose an argument more than once and accept it, which I guess taught me humility.

My mates remind me every day that success doesn't mean much if you don't have people to share it with. They've celebrated my best moments and, more importantly, they've been there for the worst ones too.

My coach, Josh Bortolussi, is an old boy from BGS. Whether training had gone well or terribly, his attitude was always the same. Turn up tomorrow and do the work. That idea has stayed with me because it applies to far more than just sport. Everyone has bad days. Everyone falls short of their own expectations. What matters is whether you're willing to come back and have another crack.

I could go on about a mountain of people who have influenced me, but the best people I've met don't spend their time trying to prove they're the smartest person in the room (even when they are). They ask questions. They listen. They make people feel valued and leave people better than they found them.

I think that's what a real role model looks like. It's not having all the answers. It's making the people around you believe they're capable of finding their own.

That's why I think being a role model has very little to do with being perfect. It's about consistency and choosing to do the right thing when nobody would notice if you didn't. It isn't someone who is famous. It isn't someone who is perfect. It's someone whose actions quietly make somebody else want to become a better person.

So, by the time we all leave Brighton Grammar, I hope every one of us has been that person for someone else.

Not because we won the most awards or because we were the smartest in the room or because our names ended up on a wall, but because somewhere along the way, maybe



through one conversation or act of kindness we didn't even realise we were doing, we made someone else's life just a little bit better.

Because the best role models rarely know the impact they've had.

Thank you