**Year 12 Graduation 2011**

**Charles Gauci**

Welcome special guests, parents, teachers and Year 12.

Before I give my official thoughts let me remind all of you that Cowra High has some very generous scholarships on offer. Applications are available from [Name of teacher] at the school. Please take advantage of these.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge that we meet tonight on the lands of the Wiradjuri people. I pay my respects to Elders past and present. I also extend that respect to all Aboriginal people present tonight.

Congratulations Year 12. In front of me, ladies and gentlemen, are an incredible group of young men and women who have been inspirational and instrumental in moving Cowra High School forward. Year 12, I am proud to be your Principal and it saddens me that this will be my last address to you because as graduate students you have come to the end of a chapter and a very important one at that. I hope when you revisit the pages of your journal of your schooling and reflect on all the years you have been at Cowra High, that the pages reveal happy and exciting times but more importantly, growth in confidence and knowledge.

Do you remember learning to tie your shoelace and practising writing your name before starting kindergarten? Think about what you knew then and what you know now. Think how much more confident you are today. You can debate, answer questions, socialise, read, write, express feelings and use technology. In each chapter of your life I hope you will realise that learning will always be important becauselearning gives you knowledge, and knowledge gives you confidence. The greater your knowledge, the greater your confidence. The greater your confidence, the greater your success. I hope that we at Cowra High have inspired in you a love of learning and as our school motto states ‘Knowledge is Power’*.*

As I have only known you for one year I can only imagine the nervous Year Seven students you must have been, but I do see the confident young adults you have grown into. You have grown in stature and confidence. You now have ideas and thoughts that you didn't know existed when you first entered this school. Now you have different aspirations and today you are on your way to making them become real.

This year has marked for you a great transition from students to graduates and all that entails. This year has seen big changes for you. You have had to take on more responsibility and you have become more adult and mature. You are wise and sure of yourself. Ahead of you lies the future whether in university, TAFE or the beginnings of your work life. This is exciting because you can now really appreciate this chapter of your life. You should have a great feeling of achievement. I think you will agree that all the hard work and the long hours of study were certainly worth it. I hope too that you will take time today to reflect upon the help and support you have had over these years from your families and friends... They have worked hard for your success as have all the staff here whose responsibility it was to guide you to your full potential. All of those who have contributed to your success deserve your thanks.

Today gives you the opportunity to appreciate the gifts you have been given. Some of you have extraordinary talents of course, but each one of you has something special to offer the world. It may be your caring nature. It may be your generosity. It could simply be the warmth of your smile.

None of us can know with any certainty what lies on the other side. The beauty of starting a new chapter in your life is that as soon as you embark upon a journey, more doors appear and more choices are apparent. The story line you are now following may well change. The wonderful thing is however, you can always write your own story. The ability to make choices and make decisions is, in part, what we are celebrating today. Those choices, of course, extend to far more than what to eat or what to wear. They extend to the great freedoms and decisions that we make that actually change and alter our lives.

When you were younger those choices were made for you. This is just as well; when we were babies after all, what did we know? Many of the very people who made those decisions on your behalf are probably here with you today. They made those decisions based on what they knew and what they thought would be good for you. Now, you will be responsible for your own decisions, which can be frightening but ultimately empowering.

Today you stand eager for the future about which you have dreamt for so long. Today is the day for you to look around you, to thank those whose guidance and support and advice has meant that you can enjoy the triumph that you have so richly deserved. It is a reflection of your family and your teachers that you stand so tall today. Amongst you stand athletes, scientists and artists with a magnitude of hopes, talents and ambitions. This is a thrilling moment for us all to celebrate the diversity and the range of wonderful young people about to take their place in the world. Amongst you are the engineers and musicians of the future. The poets, the dancers and perhaps even a Prime Minister. I believe many of you will be remarkable leaders.

What is the next chapter of your journey going to be? Whatever you decide – but remember we will always be here to guide and celebrate with you. There will always be a ‘welcome home’ mat awaiting you at Cowra High School.

Finally as Dr Seuss said *“Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.”*

**Contributor details**

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Charles has been Principal of Cowra High School since 2011, currently on secondment as Employee Performance and Development Coordinator for Teacher Performance Management and Improvement in Rural South and West. Charles has been a member of the SPC Executive since 2016 with the portfolios of Assets/Maintenance/Cleaning, Rural and Remote Education and Aurora College. He enjoys spending time cycling, both human-powered and petrol-powered.