**Year 12 Graduation 2013**

**Charles Gauci**

Welcome special guests, parents, teachers and Year 12.

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.

I thought long on what I would say tonight, what words of wisdom I would share with you that would inspire you to go forth and become great citizens of the world. Then I realised that I was speaking to teenagers and you already have all the answers. The realisation came to me when I remembered being 18 and thought about my HSC year exactly 30 years ago. 1983 was an interesting time to say the least. The Cold War was getting hot, Michael Jackson was a rising star, the spreadsheet program LOTUS 1,2,3 was released for IBM computers (machines that were designed for business and business only), personal computers were something that we only saw on Star Trek, as were personal communicators that would fit in your hand or electronic tablet-type devices that would provide instant information.

In contrast you have grown up with iPods, Smartphones, and SOCIAL MEDIA (something we couldn’t even have imagined and many of us still have trouble understanding). The Berlin Wall is now an object of historical interest rather than a symbol of oppression, and communist countries like China have become major trading partners. We have moved away from nightmares of nuclear war to Global Warming and Terrorism as being part of your lives.

I don’t raise this to reminisce about bygone years or make comment on the worth of Facebook – though I am happy to share what I really think of Facebook, but that should be for another forum. I speak of these changes to illustrate that more than any generation before, you live in a world full of change and potential. It was only last week I read of an ex-Cowra High student Dr Samantha Venables, who developed a database which will be used to enhance the usefulness of DNA in international crime fighting, and on the same day I read of the real difference a group of volunteer fire fighters made to the lives of people in the Blue Mountains and the difference a young man’s family made after he was seriously burnt in a farming accident. We see here the positive impact on our world that can be made by each of us every day. Not everyone is going to be a scientist, or famous, or financially rich, or influential on the world stage, but I put to you that you all have the potential to be successful in whatever you put your heart and mind to. So aim for the stars while realising they exist in all the elements of our lives. Discover what is truly important in your life and commit to it.

One of my favourite movie stars who became known as a man of great integrity put it very succinctly, *“It embarrassed me to be classified as a humanitarian. I simply take part in activities that I believe in.”* (Gregory Peck)

Belief is a power tool, one that can take you to those stars, but at times make you come crashing back to earth.

On 11 December 1998 a NASA probe designed to orbit Mars was launched from Cape Canaveral in the US. As you can imagine, this was planned to the last detail by extremely intelligent and well-educated people. The launch went beautifully and the flight progressed as planned, with the spacecraft arriving in the vicinity of Mars right on schedule in September 1999. Unfortunately some of the extremely intelligent and well educated NASA engineers forgot that while the US insisted on using American Imperial measurements, the rest of the world including the European engineers who wrote the Probe’s software for its flight systems work in Metric units. So instead of orbiting Mars and recording data about its climate, it disintegrated in the atmosphere. Billions of dollars and millions of hours of work destroyed by a simple mistake. So trust me when I say this, you are going to make mistakes. When you do, be like those extremely intelligent engineers. Be embarrassed, it’s OK, no one likes getting it wrong, but then learn from the experience, try again and succeed. If you are always able to pick yourself up and try again, there will never be anything in life that will stop you.

When you find yourself supremely confident in success and out of nowhere you find that you have been working in feet per second when the rest of the world has been using Newton metres and your spaceship disintegrates around you, try to remember what an old teacher once said, and I’m not talking about me here, though at times I feel nearly as old, *“Education is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity”* (Aristotle)

In closing, I pray that life provide you with the passion to be committed to that which you believe and that the education you received here at Cowra High provides you with the strength that you need when times are not easy.

Best of luck Year 12!

**Contributor details**

Charles Gauci (charles.gauci@det.nsw.edu.au) 26/4/19



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.