**Year 12 Graduation 2016**

**Charles Gauci**

Welcome special guests, parents, teachers and Year 12.

Tonight we meet on the lands of the Wiradjuri people to celebrate the successes of our children. In paying my respects to Elders past and present, I also reach out to our future Elders in the audience tonight. Education is the key to improving the outcomes for all people, and the positive effect for Aboriginal people as a whole cannot be underestimated. Take what you have achieved at Cowra High and build on it into the future. I extend my respect to all Aboriginal people present tonight.

Year 12, congratulations! 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.

I am proud to be your Principal. One of the down sides of being a principal is not always having the luxury of spending as much personal time with students as I would like. Having said that, when I think of Year 12 2016, I have a clear picture of a cohesive, positive and dedicated group of young people. The best evidence of the esteem in which Year 12 is held is reflected by the eagerness with which [Name of teacher] agreed to fulfil one more duty as your Year Advisor here tonight.

I’ll also take this opportunity to speak of [Names of four students]. For almost 12 months I would meet with our captains every Friday for morning tea whenever my schedule allowed it. These morning teas were a great pleasure. Not only did I have the privilege of getting to know these fine leaders in greater depth, I also had the great benefit of having the insight and voice of the student body on hand. Year 12, don’t underestimate the active role your captains have taken as advocates for the student body and your year group in particular. I thank them for the dedication and service, as should you.

Year 12, you have now come to the end of a chapter in your lives and a very important one at that. I hope when you reflect on your schooling and on your years at Cowra High the memories will overwhelming be of happy and exciting times. There will also be memories of some sadness, some regrets and perhaps even some frustration. I see no issue in this mix, for that’s what life is. Without these harder times, the value of the good is lost. It is the mixture of experiences that help us all grow and develop into better human beings.

I ask you to think back to your first school memory. Many will be able to remember a significant moment in your first year of school, if not the first day. The world for you was a very different place to what it is now. I’m not talking about the state of the world as a whole, but rather your world. When you are five or six years old, the world seems huge, yet incredibly safe. There is always a grown-up you can turn to who has the answers or the warm hug when things don’t go right. Now shift back to today. If you are like most adults, you realise no one has all the right answers and the only constant in the world is change. You would not be wrong for thinking this. The world is in a constant state of flux but let me reassure you that you are equipped to deal with this more than any generation before you. You are the ‘I’ generation. I don’t mean this in the narcissistic way, though I’m sure at times your parents might think so. I refer to the ever present internet. You don’t really know a world without Google, Facebook, Snapchat etc.

As a result, I hope that you will leave us not only with the ability to recite facts, even if you needed to concentrate on this skill for the HSC, but with the ability to learn. One of the catch-cries in education at the moment is 21st Century learning. I’ve listened to a lot of educators use this phrase and for good reasons. The way we taught last century was not dramatically different at the end of the century when compared to the beginning. Those approaches are gone or are going, just as the value in reciting facts is disappearing. How realistic is it for a person to stay abreast of facts when many experts estimate that, conservatively, knowledge is doubling every year. Facts we thought to be solid truths are regularly changed and any person can pull out a phone and get the answer at the push of a touch screen. This might seem like small consolation after all the hours of study you have put into your HSC. But (and it’s a big but) the value of your HSC is not in the mark you will receive, it is in the growth you have achieved over the last two years. I would like to think each and every one of you is now better equipped to deal with our new world. To be a true 21st Century learner and, for that matter, a citizen of the 21st century, you need to know how to find knowledge, validate answers and adapt. In other words, you need to know how to learn and to embrace learning for life. I hope that we at Cowra High have inspired in you a love of learning and as our school motto states ‘Knowledge is Power’, never surrender that power.

Ahead of you lies the future, whether this is in university, TAFE or the beginnings of your work life. This should be exciting and perhaps a little daunting. Enjoy these feelings, this is a moment in your life which only comes once and it is a very special time. You should also 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 the 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 that will hopefully take you to the top of your chosen fields, but by the nature of the world, not everyone can be number one. But I honestly believe each one of you has something special to offer the world. Whether in your career, your caring nature, your generosity or the joy you bring to others, never forget the world is a better place for you being a part of it. How much better the world will be is directly proportional to the life choices you make. As I said earlier, when you were younger those choices were made for you. 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 of 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 on your family and your teachers that you stand so tall today.

Where will your choices take you? Wherever that might be, 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.