

The Victory Mindset
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(Class of 2022)

President Rose, members of the College, and esteemed guests. I want to thank you all for gathering here to today to celebrate the Commencement of the Class of 2022. We are finally here. Through a global pandemic that claimed the lives of 976,000 brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, mothers, and fathers. Through economic challenges that gave many students the extra burden of working additional hours to contribute to their family's survival. Through the challenge of living in a nation where white supremacists feel emboldened to target Asian American women in Atlanta, Latino Americans at a Walmart in El Paso, and most recently, African Americans at a Tops Grocery in Buffalo. To the social challenges of living away from our comfort zones and safe havens. Through the loss of our classmates, Theo Danzig, Finn Woodruff, and Henry Zietlow. We still arrived at the end of our 4 years. Some whole emotionally and mentally. Some in many pieces emotionally and mentally. But still looking to the future, hopefully.

I know some of you may be saying, "why did Journey start out the speech so darkly? Talking about Covid-19, white supremacy, and economic hardship, jeez". And you are 100% right, this was a bleak start. However, in reflecting on my experience at Bowdoin, and consulting others about their experiences, I realized two things. Firstly, orienting yourself in reality is never a bad start. In many ways, being aware of any aspect of your reality, whether that be your social reality, economic reality, racial reality, can be the start of moving forward and accessing the resources needed to do that. Secondly, not acknowledging the different realities of the Class of 2022 would be erasing the many sleepless nights and tears students shed over their losses, challenges, and pains. With the

loss of my mother in October of 2021, I had many of those nights. I want anyone who has struggled to get here, no matter the reason, to know that as your peer I am *proud* of you. I am *overjoyed* to be sharing these moments with you. You *deserve* to feel every bit of the excitement of this day.

These reflections, however, are surprisingly not the focal point of my speech. And to that you may say, “well you just spent 3 minutes on this point. You had a fancy lead up and everything”. And to that I say, “you are right...again. gold star students you all are”. I talked about the journey to graduation, the challenges along the way, the realities. However, my real interest lies in the mode of this journey. What carried us here? How can we arrive at feelings of success and elation, despite going through extreme realities? This is where I introduce something that my father, who is in the audience, taught me throughout my whole life: the victory mindset.

Now, although he introduced this concept to me. I am just going to take this concept on as my own. As a member of the Judicial Board, I know I should know better and not plagiarize but I have valid reasons! One, I am the one making the speech so “speechers keepers” or whatever. And secondly, I am a Sociology major, which means that I reserve the right to take a term and talk about it ad nauseum. But in all seriousness, I am talking about the victory mindset because I have seen how it has worked to carry me and many others, through the hardship and challenges I described above. How it has worked to carry us to a place like today.

What is the victory mindset, exactly? It is a mindset that declares that any action you take, no matter how small, especially in a time of hardship, whether global or personal, is a victory. Now let us sit with that. An action, no matter how small, taken during a time of global or personal

hardship is a victory. Some may think this claim absurd, being that many of us have been raised in a society that deems only big accomplishments victories. Landing a new job after a tough interview process. A brand new car. A big move to a new city. A big win on the field against a tough rival.

But what about the small moments? Putting yourself out there after heartbreak. Finding the will to eat when someone you love passes away. Finally taking a shower after an internal mental battle. Getting out of bed to go to work and make the money that your family desperately needs. Stepping foot back in the gym after a tough loss. These are victories too and they deserved to be celebrated like every other victory you will have in your life.

Now, some may believe the word victory is a little “off color” considering our current global context: the ongoing war in Syria, the war in Ukraine, the famine in Yemen. The word “victory” does traditionally denote that there is an enemy to be captured, subdued, and eradicated. But when I speak of a victory, I am not speaking of a victory over another person or group. I am talking about a victory over the little voice of self doubt and dejection that lives, rent free and comfortably within our heads.

For us to actively practice the victory mindset, it is going to mean killing the voice in your head that tells you that your actions are nothing special. “You got up out of bed today, so what”. “You’re communicative at your job today, who cares”. “You’re being confident in your body, wearing something you haven’t worn in years, you look a mess”.

That voice is annoying, and hard to kill like a mosquito in the nighttime. It always comes around during the wrong times and it will return throughout the toughest moments in our lives. It will follow us from Bowdoin to our graduate schools, jobs, fellowships, homes. But there is another smaller voice that lives behind this louder, roaring voice. It is the voice of optimism, which I believe is like to believe is present in all human beings no matter how small.

It will take active mental exercise to expose this voice. You must wake up every day during times of turmoil, affirming the smaller voice that is surprised and happy you got out of the bed. You must affirm the smaller voice that is proud of you for stepping up at work. For trying that new food. For loving your body. For speaking out against micro aggressions you experience. For trusting people again. Over time, this voice will get louder and eat the smaller voice in a Pac Man like fashion.

Once you affirm this voice and hold true to the belief that victories come in all shapes and sizes, you will never lose, no matter what you experience. Now *that* is a victory. Thank you.