

LANDON SCHOOL
Commencement Address
David M. Armstrong
June 5, 2009

Good morning, everyone.

I am honored to be here today with all of you to salute the Class of 2009. We are certainly blessed to be together this morning, although we are not in the traditional amphitheater location. But, as the silver lining, we are making history together as we gather in the Coates Auditorium and, by technology, in the Lindner Dining Hall, with friends and family.

Last night at Baccalaureate, Coach Bordley suggested that we have not held Commencement inside since 1966. However, I am told the first time this space was used for an indoor graduation was 1989. In any event, this does not happen often. I extend special greetings to those watching in the satellite location.

Today, weather notwithstanding, nothing can damper our spirits. Truthfully, can there be a happier day than this one -- so many years in the making? This morning, some of you will be remembering vividly that September day when you, or your son, first came to Landon. Still others will recall those moments along the way when you wondered (you boys, as well) if you would actually see this glorious day! And here we are. You made it!

Today we gather to celebrate your great achievements and your sacrifices. We pay tribute to the individuals with whom you have made this journey -- your classmates, your teachers, your parents, and your friends. More so than with any other class I've known, those key relationships define what is important, even essential, to the 81 young men seated before you today.

This is a class of contrasts. A class with quiet leaders, but with enough spirit and Landon Pride to rock the stadium and bring down the rafters. And speaking of pride, this year we had an historic first to which these boys contributed: four (count 'em four) IAC titles: Football, Basketball, Hockey and Lacrosse -- all in the same year -- the first time this has been done in our 80-year history. Congratulations!

This is a class with 15 athletes recruited to play Division I or III football, basketball, soccer and lacrosse. But it's also a class that submitted an unprecedented 5 AP art portfolios and will send one student to art school. Three boys were the first to have their own shows in the Landow Family Gallery. Boys also juried into exhibits at the Yellow Barn and at Strathmore.

It's a class with some remarkable musicians, one of whom was selected for the Maryland Senior All State Orchestra and the All-Eastern Honors Orchestra. Some participated in the String Ensemble's new community service initiative, playing at retirement homes on their lunch hour. And let's not forget our actors and that wonderful co-production of "Urinetown" with the young ladies from Holton-Arms, just a couple of weeks ago. What a well-rounded and talented group of scholars, athletes, artists and citizens!

Soon, the Class of 2009 will scatter to 48 great colleges from Maine to Georgia, from New York to California -- and even to Beijing, China. One will enroll at the U.S. Navy Academy, preparing to serve his country.

These Landon Bears have grown up a lot over the last few years. Together they have endured adversity and they have been there for each other. Asked to describe themselves, they use words like “camaraderie,” “fun-loving,” even “on the edge.” They seem like a group that will go through life with smiles on their faces, and that is a gift unto itself.

As Andy Katz said at the Senior Dinner, these boys “bleed brown and white.” They believe in working hard and playing hard. I must admit that I am quite intimidated to be standing in front of you on the heels of the trio of spectacular speakers who entertained us last evening at Baccalaureate – the wise and eloquent Nick Freeman, the poised and witty Brian Reilly and, of course, the delightful and inspiring Coach Bordley. So I thought that I would ask each of them to come forward to repeat their works so I can just sit down and relax – just kidding!

One thing that resonated in each of their remarks was the importance that developing relationships and friendships were in defining their Landon experiences. They expect their friendships to continue, beyond this moment and beyond this place. And so, this morning in this moment and in this place, I’d like to share some parting thoughts with the Class of 2009 about Friendship.

I believe friendship is the art of making friends and the commitment to retaining them. All of you boys -- and parents, too -- have made some wonderful friends in your days at Landon. You’ve made friends with your fellow Bears, and with many of your teacher-coach-mentors, and let’s not forget those girl-friends.

At Landon, we expect you to excel in your intellectual, artistic and athletic endeavors, but we understand that nothing is more important than the kind of person you become and the relationships you build while you are here.

As you leave Landon today, I hope you will remember that keeping old friends close -- even your Landon Bear pals -- and finding new ones will require some effort on your part. It’s an art you must cultivate.

Tony Jarvis, who led the Roxbury Latin School for many years, calls the ability to make and keep friends “a skill, a mindset, a courage that is a critical component for happiness.” It informs the happiness of now, of college and beyond and, yes, of marriage, as well. Parents and faculty here today can attest to that.

The truth is: friendship does not always come easy. It is not obtained without a willingness to give completely of yourself and to risk failure, rejection or disappointment. It takes courage to lay yourself out and put it all on the line, to share yourself fully with no strings attached. But I can assure you the risk is well worth the reward, and once you make the commitment to find true

and lasting friendship, I would submit that there are 3 qualities you need to better your chances of success.

The first is an attitude of hopeful commitment or guarded optimism. People are not perfect. They have flaws. Invariably, those flaws will disappoint, discourage or even harm you. Think for a moment about the people who are important in your life. To be sure, we all have flaws including those you most admire at Landon, but we learn to take our friends as they are with all their imperfections. We maximize their best qualities and minimize their worst. Even if it comes at your own expense, you have to be willing to celebrate and commiserate in equal measure. You celebrate his peaks, and support and guide his valleys. To use a Landon value, you approach treasured friendships with Perseverance.

So you begin this art of friendship with hopeful commitment and guarded optimism.

The second quality for friendship is: Openness.

By this, I mean an open mind to differences in others and an openness toward -- and acceptance of -- change in others. In the first instance we know that the richness of friendship comes from the acceptance of -- and the appreciation of -- differences in others. Certainly there's a comfort in befriending people whose interests, attitudes and backgrounds are similar to your own. But you already know from your Landon experience, that you have made friends here with Bears who are not just like you. In fact, the most meaningful relationships often develop when your views are mixed with differing perspectives. That's when you grow. That's when you learn. That's a recipe for growing, evolving, enduring friendship.

The second part of Openness is being receptive to change. Not only are people different, but they change. Yes, your friends at Landon will change. They have their own unique life trajectories. They find passion in different things at different stages in their life. And, frankly, as your friends change, you may experience confusion, discomfort, rejection, even jealousy. It's then that you need to develop an attitude of acceptance -- no, an attitude of appreciation and of support and celebration.

It can assure you that you will have a friend who changes from a young man who was willing to do anything, always on the edge, with a well earned and cherished nickname like "Goofy," who transforms in a matter of months to a serious, intense world-class scholar who takes umbrage at even the mention of his past sobriquet! I have my Goofy (sorry, pal). He remains to this day one of my dearest and closest friends.

So, be open to the amazing people you are about to become and, as you embrace Openness, you will allow a friend to grow and change, including the 80 brothers who leave this campus with you, today. To use a Landon value, you show Respect.

The third quality is Loyalty, a genuine and heartfelt concern to support your friends, in good times and bad times, in the easy times and the tough ones, in success and in defeat. Yes, even for better or for worse. But loyalty is not blind. It does not mean I'm going to agree with you 100% of the time.

Loyalty, often, is best defined by expressing disagreement or by challenging your friend. True loyalty, in fact, is the obligation at the core of friendship, and that is: to guide your pals and to truly cover their backs, just as you would expect them to cover yours.

I believe loyalty represents the long-term commitment to sustain a relationship and help it endure, despite momentary disagreements or disappointments. When you face concerns openly and up front, you are acknowledging that your differences may cause a temporary setback in your friendship; but it's one that will yield a stronger bond in the years ahead. To use key Landon values, you maintain your relationships based on a foundation of Honor and Trust.

Well, there you have it. Hopeful Commitment. Openness. Loyalty. Those are the three keys to the critical art of friendship.

Gentlemen, you are leaving Landon today with many accomplishments and with a superlative education, an experience that has been a gift to you from the faculty and your family. But make no mistake: the most important gift you carry forward from here -- and the one that is the most enduring -- is the brotherhood of your fellow Bears.

So, my parting advice to you is just this: Do all that you can to be the best -- and the truest -- friend you can be. Make the commitment to sustain and develop enduring friendships; value this commitment as most important as you go through life; refine your skills in the art of friendship; and by doing so, set the foundation for happiness and success. To my way of thinking, this is at the heart of Landon's greatness and is the greatest gift Landon offers.

We are a community that cares about one another, and we are there for each other, forever linked to each other as Bears. We are Landon Forever.

Good luck to all of you. I know you will continue to make us proud!