

Many thanks, Trey.

Honored graduates, trustees, distinguished faculty and staff, Academy alumni, family, and friends, and all you internet trolls out there, I would like to welcome you all to the stupid part of Interlochen's 57th annual graduation.

Let me explain.

I'm here because President Devey asked me to be over a year ago after hearing me speak at my induction into the Advertising Hall of Fame. My fellow inductees were all really heavy hitters, like Ken Chenault, who is the CEO of American Express, and Arthur O. Salzburger, who is the fourth-generation publisher of the not-quite-failing New York Times. Their speeches were brilliant and sincere, intelligent and moving, but as an Interlochen grad, class of '64. I decided to go a slightly different way: I talked about the dumbest mistakes I'd witnessed in business, because stupid is memorable.

I was thinking Polonius would be a great inspiration for a commencement talk. Polonius was the bloviating old man in Shakespeare's immortal *Hamlet*. As his son Laertes prepares to head out to France, the old guy tries to give him advice (a typical setup for comedy, and Polonius is indeed presented as worthy of ridicule), but the double joke is that Polonius's advice to his kid Laertes is actually really good: don't blurt out everything that comes into your head, don't do crazy stuff, be careful who you befriend, and if you find a good friend, grapple them to your soul with hoops of steel. Learn how to take criticism, but keep your thoughts to yourself. And two nuggets that need no translation to current English, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be, for loan oft loses both itself and friend" (and it's way too easy to spend borrowed money). And finally, "To thine own self be true, and then it follows as the night the day thou canst then be false to anyone."

So Shakespeare wrote these lines over 400 years ago, it was a joke then, and it remains a joke today because no matter how good your advice, you can't tell kids anything. We all have to make our own mistakes, in our own way, and in our own time.

Now, if there's one thing Interlochen teaches you, it's how to zig when others zag, which is ironic, because so much of the canon of dance, music, drama, art, film, writing, and academics are essentially classical. Learn how to do it right before you learn how to do it well. Learn their way, your way will come.

Still, I am surprised I was given the privilege of addressing this august gathering of people in medieval dresses. It kind of looks like a casting call for meisters in *Game of Thrones*, and why are they called meisters, anyway? Wouldn't it be meisters or something? Anyway.... I am not particularly famous, despite what Trey said, or wealthy, or powerful. I'm sorry to say I cannot pay off your current or future student debt. I made my career in advertising which I've characterized as a pseudoscience and a bastard art.

Now, how did this happen?

Well, I had a history teacher who wrote on one of my papers, "With work you could be impressive. Or you could just end up a clever phrase maker." And I sat there and thought to myself, "People will pay you for clever phrase making?"

And I'm sorry to say that I'm actually not a very good musician, although I had the honor to study with some of the very best teachers in the world, including Gregor Piatigorsky at USC. Now, there were 12 students in our master class. Ten of them got to go to Moscow for the Tchaikovsky Competition in 1965, and of those, they won places one through four. Meanwhile, I was back in LA playing a Greek wedding for 25 bucks.

So exactly what did I get out of my charter experience as one of the Academy's first graduates?

Well, first and foremost, I learned to recognize the real talent in my fellow students and in our terrific faculty. Interlochen was just an experiment when it began in 1962, and we were the lab rats. Still, noble experiments often draw extraordinary talent, not just in students, but in faculty and staff as well. But frankly, we had no idea what we were doing.

We had an English teacher who was so terrifying that people broke into a sweat walking into her classroom. Her personality could best be described as "New England flinty," but she taught me to write, and a lot of us to write. We had a lovely older art instructor who had been with the Camp forever, for decades, and was always concerned that our very, very old kiln would blow up at any moment, so every time before she fired it up, she would evacuate the entire building. so every time before she fired it up, she would evacuate the entire building. We had a Latin teacher so inspirational that she changed a fine clarinetist's career path from Juilliard and an almost-guaranteed symphony job to classical Latin and Greek. He's now head of humanities at Cornell.

A lot of us wound up not doing what we originally went to Interlochen to do: playing an instrument, welding sculptures, dancing *Swan Lake*, singing on Broadway. Some famous ones, did and continued famously in their careers, but many of us became doctors and lawyers and bankers and advertising people and film composers and computer programmers and a dozen other careers that didn't even exist when we were in school. So whether or not you become the next Josh Groban or Linda Hunt or Peter Erskine, there is a 100% chance you'll be somebody, and the lessons you learned here—artistic, academic and social—will all bear on your future success and happiness, whatever that means to you.

I learned the power of "ensemble" here. There's something magical in coming together for the purpose of creating beauty. You learn about combinations of voices, tones, colors, rhythms, people, and how very human they are. You learn that a concert can't start until you're in your chair, ready to play your part. One of the best-known designers in New York said to me, "Teams are only good for putting up Amish barns," but to me, teams have been everything, and

have proven to me time and again that we can achieve things together we could never do on our own. Steve Jobs was truly a genius, an individual genius, but he was never a soloist. iMac, iPhone, iPads were all team efforts.

Of course, there is extraordinary power in the individual artist, the soloist, the person that can take the stage and do it all, the revolutionary who helps you see the world in ways you never have before, who teaches us the meaning of that wonderful phrase, "the shock of the new."

In learning, you also learn something about teaching. That scary English teacher terrified me into writing better than I ever knew I could. My German teacher taught me so well I got into graduate German classes at USC. My cello teachers, including the august Mr. Piatigorsky, taught me how to play in ensembles, gently guiding me to the rather obvious conclusion that I could become a decent orchestra cellist but never a soloist. So, thank you, esteemed faculty. I am in awe of all you do.

Now, I am neither the best nor the brightest Interlochen ever produced, but I'm committed to this place because it saved my life. I grew up in San Jose, California before it became Silicon Valley. It was essentially a farming community, more like the small California town in *American Graffiti* than the home of Apple, Google, and Facebook. Imagine, if you will, a tall, gangly teenager struggling to get on a school bus with a cello in a cloth case. Now that is "dork" with a capital D. When I walked into my first high school gym class, the coach yelled, "Hayden! I remember your brother! He broke his arm playing chess!" So I was a weirdo, an outlier, a very lonely kid in the nerd capital of the world before there were nerds there.

But then I got here. Yes, there were popular kids, there were superstars, there were beautiful people, but for me, vitally, there were lots and lots of nerds like me. Even the beautiful people could be pretty nerdy, and everywhere you looked, kids were trying something: Writing songs when rock-and-roll was considered the devil's music by Dr. Maddy, making films with eight-millimeter home movie cameras (if you want to know how hard that is, have a look at Spielberg's early work), performing in groups that had nothing to do with their majors.

Now, college is important. That's still, for most of us, the real-world launch pad. But college was a breeze for me after Interlochen. I already knew most of the first year's curriculum, so of course I got in a lot of trouble at USC, better known as the university of spoiled children.

Of course, I also got into a lot of trouble at Interlochen. I've heard there is a scurrilous rumor that my roommate and I stole a dump truck from maintenance and drove it into the lake. This is completely false. We had we had no more than two tires in the water, max. That was it.

Now, the psychological part of the talk. My educational career, indeed my whole career, has been a series of ego inflations followed by ego deflations. The balloon never popped entirely, but it seems to have developed some sort of a pulse pattern. One day a prince, the next day a goat. Hats off, ladies and gentlemen: a genius! Hats back on, ladies and gentlemen, an idiot. A

friend of mine once expressed this combination of self-loathing and egotism this way: "I am a piece of garbage... at the center of the universe!"

Okay, so try to remember that your opinion of yourself is always inevitably wrong and it's entirely beside the point. The best any of us can hope for is the ability to play again, maybe better next time, and develop true friends along the way who can help us find our truth.

It's unlikely that you will remember a single thing you hear today, from me or anyone else, but I'll try to leave you with a couple of cliches along with make your bed, and follow your dreams, and lies are toxic, but it is possible to fool 40% of the people all of the time. One of my all-time favorites comes from Alan Kay, who was the head of Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center, where they invented the Mac, basically, and allowed Steve Jobs to steal it. Alan said, "perspective is worth 90 IQ points." Good news for someone who is in need of IQ points. That's really what the artist brings to the party: looking at things from a different point of view and perhaps seeing things as they've never been seen before. Perspective is the birthright of the artist, however perfect your perfect pitch or photographic your memory or finely trained your muscles. Seeing things differently is both your curse and your greatest value. Also rather useful for science and other human endeavors, except of course for driving. Don't try it there.

Finally, some words of wisdom from my older brother David. After observing me struggle with demons, no matter how much good fortune I was blessed with, he gave me two simple pieces of advice: Eschew negativity, don't get nuts. Now "eschew" is an old French word that came to be an English word that was kind of Anglo-Saxon. It means reject, put down, get rid of, eschew negativity. Face it: artists are nuts. Prone to narcissism, manic episodes, dark depressions, suicidal risk-taking, obsessive-compulsive disorders. If you're normal, you're just not trying hard enough. Or you could be a genius, in which case, god bless you, live long and prosper, and please have lots of kids.

But even if "normal" only remains for you a notional concept you read about in books, eschewing negativity means embracing life with all its twists and turns, setbacks and surprises, boredom, terror, and elation. The best antidote to both negativity and getting nuts is simple gratitude. Be grateful for what you've experienced during your time here, good and bad. Be grateful for today, be grateful for your parents, your friends, your teachers. Be grateful for the unknown that lies ahead. You have the power, the talent, and the ideas to make this world better, and one day soon, to make this very place better. You have created amazing here. Now it's time to take it on the road. Thank you, and congratulations.