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Principal Asks Students to Set Goals and Help Others Reach Their Dreams

Winthrop University

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Principal Asks Students to Set Goals and Help Others Reach Their Dreams

Quick Facts

- While Marissa's dreams may have kept her afloat, I missed an important opportunity to show a child how to be better and how to achieve success, and more importantly how to work toward her goals.
- Students like Marissa are who have kept me working hard in my professional life and they are what keeps me interested in supporting the Winthrop experience because here dreams do come true and futures are made and realized.



David McDonald

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Middle school principal David McDonald thinks back to a student he let down named Marissa when he looks for inspiration, Winthrop's Convocation speaker said Aug. 22.

McDonald, class of 2001, urged incoming students to become engaged and make Winthrop a better place.

Here is his speech:

Dr. DiGiorgio, members of the board of trustees, faculty/staff, and most importantly the reason we are all here today, to the students of Winthrop University, I would like to thank you for allowing me to speak to you. Being chosen to be the speaker for Convocation has been truly one of the most incredible moments of my life and I believe one of the most humbling as well.

As I prepared for today, I took time to remember the very first time I walked on this campus. I had always heard about the incredible reputation of Winthrop and the amazing programs and opportunities she offers all students. Nothing I had ever heard prepared me for the experience I had when I came here officially and sat in this very room in August 1997 at my very first Convocation. It was here for the first time I heard the challenge referenced in the Winthrop University Dedication of Excellence to "Make Winthrop a Better Place for Having Been here."

That was a charge I took seriously and to this day, do my best to ensure that others live that same message and challenge. For me the decision to go to college was easy. I knew I had to, the challenge was which college and even more importantly, what would I do with the experience once I was there and when I finished? It was easy for me at Winthrop. You see in these first few weeks, there were so many incredible opportunities and experiences; all for me. First, I was shocked at the caliber of professors, teachers, and staff members that I came into contact with. Each with an interest in me, and my success. Even still today, I keep in contact with many of the faculty and staff members of this university that have touched my life and inspired me to reach higher and higher for some level of success.

As I worked over the last few weeks to decide what exactly I should say to you all this afternoon, I thought I would give you David's list of five rules for being a student here and a supporter of the Winthrop experience. I couldn't narrow it down to five, so I thought maybe 10, and then I settled for seven because most of you have attention spans like myself, and have already stopped listening.

This is my list of the surest ways to have a tremendous experience here at Winthrop that will prepare you for a successful professional life and a future dedicated to helping the Winthrop cause.

First, be dedicated. For those of you just beginning your journey at Winthrop, don't expect this to be

easy. All of us have had to work hard. The key is remembering that people already believe in you because there are a number of folks at other institutions who could not get in. You made the cut.

Second, take advantage. Each of you should take advantage of the incredible education and wonderful opportunities that you are being offered. You have first-class facilities, amazing technology and a first-class faculty ready to move you into your professional lives. Take advantage of what they offer.

Third, be vocal. You are an adult, speak up, be heard, accept the challenges and make the most of them. Be who you are, what you are, and how you are. Remember that others may have a differing opinion and a different background, so always be respectful. Especially to the folks who give you a grade. Find yourself here at Winthrop and find your way. Many of you will discover yourself here and yet others, you'll figure out things later and get it together. Winthrop will be good for you as you move into the future and move towards success.

Fourth, work hard and commit yourself to excellence. Whether you are an academic scholar, which hopefully everyone in this room will strive to be and remain, or an athlete, an artist, or like me a person with no talent, average intelligence, but a hard worker, make it your point to reach always towards excellence. This university offers you so many top notch courses, professors and programs. Recognize that, realize that, and use that to help you spring forward.

Fifth, pay it forward. This is your university. It is my university. It is our university. Our duty is not only to live it up while a student, but to support it as an alum. To the alumni members of the audience, our duty is to support these students, support the community, and support our alma mater; that means to support in time, talent, and yes, in treasure. I am sure the development office will be at the back to collect your checks at the end of the program this afternoon. We all have to make it our point to pay the Winthrop experience forward to support the future groups who will come through this university and become the ones keeping all of our dreams alive.

Sixth, get involved. The experiences I had here as a student have continued to play a major role in my life. Whether it was serving as an Orientation assistant, a peer mentor, a resident advisor, member of the student government, or as a member of Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity, each of these experiences have shaped my life and continue to do so today. The friends I have made through my experiences have remained my lifelong friends. We often reminisce about the "good ole days at WU." Get involved. The relationships you make now, will support you personally and professionally for the rest of your life. You have the opportunity to build a global network of relationships.

My final piece of advice is not just advice but a challenge. Your job and my job must every day be to make Winthrop a better place for our having been here. Whether you are a professor, a groundskeeper, or a student, we must make it our goal to make this place stronger, more beautiful, better funded, more advanced, and more full of life-building experiences.

This was my list of challenges I presented myself as a freshman and a student here at Winthrop. The funny part is these things have become my challenge personally and professionally even today. If you do each of these things, you are sure to enjoy the success that is due you. I have had the pleasure of so much success as a professional due largely to the incredible opportunities this university presented me. I have continued to make it a point to rely on Winthrop to help me in my career as a school administrator and professional educator.

I want to conclude this afternoon with a story. In my second year of teaching, I had a girl named **Marissa** in my class. Marissa was a difficult young lady who had had a terrible life. She was a student at the children's home, had no family, and no one to believe in her. Marissa came to my class every day telling me that she would be the one in her family to make it. The one to get out of the mess of life and be successful. She often talked about what it would be like to have money, go to college and raise a family.

To be honest, I talked to Marissa about my experiences and how great this university has been to me and how it was making so much possible for me. In the back of my mind, the whole time I told myself that she was kidding herself. Every obstacle was stacked against this student and she would never make it.

I wish that I could tell you that she proved me wrong and I made a mistake. A few short months after she left my class she ran away from the girls home and was killed tragically in an auto accident in a car that was driven by a boy who had stolen it. While her dreams may have kept her afloat, I missed an important opportunity to show a child how to be better and how to achieve success, and more importantly how to work toward her goals. I failed Marissa as an educator and as someone who is entrusted to believe in the power of dreams.

The years since I have lived my personal and professional life thinking about this girl and how I would

never get to know how she turned out and how I joined the crowd of others who doubted her success. I can tell you that I have made it my point professionally to work hard to inspire others to reach to new heights and reach for their goals. While I can't undo the doubt I had for Marissa, I can share with you my hope that you will see the power in believing in reaching your dreams and goals and work hard every day to reach your potential.

Students like Marissa are who have kept me working hard in my professional life and they are what keeps me interested in supporting the Winthrop experience because here dreams do come true and futures are made and realized. Since each of you will be an alumni member of this university far longer than you will be a student, hopefully, I challenge each of you to see the good in others, see the power of belief in others, and most importantly accept my challenge to make Winthrop a better place because you have been a student, an employee or a community supporter. Don't do what I did to Marissa, accept the challenge to help others realize their goals. Start today, start here with Winthrop.

The strength that we build in Winthrop will change our world and create a culture of success where we can and will always make a difference for others and continue for the enormous success and reputation of this university FOREVER.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of my Winthrop career to speak to you today. I wish you the very best this year and as you reach for excellence.

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