

St. Mary's Speech Day 2025

Lessons for a Lifetime

Good evening, ladies, and gentlemen. It is truly an honour to be here today, celebrating speech day at one of our nation's finest institutions. Looking around, I see so many accomplished alumni who embody the legacy of this institute. On a personal note, this place holds special meaning for my family too! It has played a remarkable role in shaping our son's journey. For that, we are deeply grateful. Thank you!

To the Trustees of Board of St. Mary's, Mrs Caroline Ross, Mrs Khisty, dignitaries, proud parents, dedicated teachers and administrative personnels, and most importantly, the incredible students of St. Mary's. Congratulations! Before I begin, a quick shoutout to parents and teachers. You are the real rockstars- providers of encouragement, pep talks, discipline, sacrifices and the occasional reality check. You have turned obstacles into opportunities, and for that, this society at large will be forever grateful.

Tonight, we celebrate medals and report cards, but also something more powerful: the habits and hopes that no certificate can measure. The medals will shine for a year, but the lessons you carry from your formative years at this Institute of excellence will shine for a lifetime. Now let me share few short stories and lessons thereon which will help for long time to come.

1) Elephant and the Rope

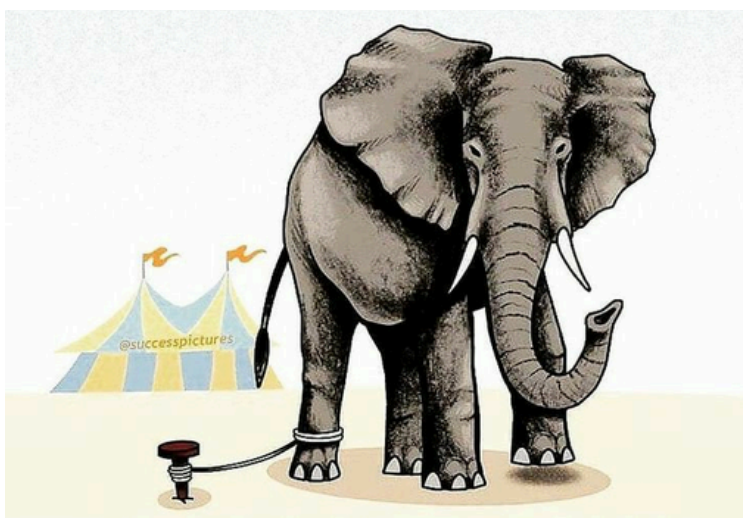
Huge elephants stay tied with a flimsy rope. Why? As calves, the rope held them. They grew; but their belief did not.

Students: Do not let old failures or doubts tie you down. You are stronger than you think.

Break free.

Parents & teachers: Beware the power of labels and stereotyping. "You're weak at math." "You're not athletic." "You'll never be a leader." Children internalize these ropes, and even when they are strong enough, they do not try. **Do not tie your children down with old judgments. Cut the rope.**

Let them try and find their Ikegai, their purpose and destiny.



**Sometimes the
thing that is
holding you back
is all in your
head!**

2) The Bamboo that Took it's Time

In some parts of the world, farmers plant the Chinese bamboo and water it every day and it shows nothing for five years. In the fifth year, it suddenly shoots up sixty feet. Was it growing in six weeks? No- it was building roots

Lesson? **Every meaningful outcome you want in life compounds over time-** Money, knowledge, health, trust, reputation, character, relationships explode when you grow them at a steady rate over extended periods of time.

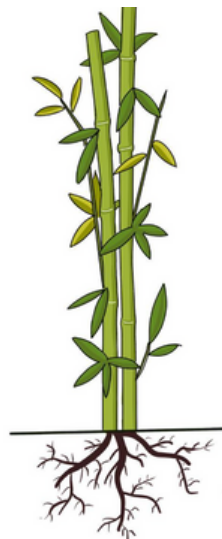
$$\text{Equation: Future Value} = \text{Present Value} \times (1 + r)^n.$$

Future value of everything explodes when you nurture them at a steady rate (r) over an extended period of time (n)

Bamboo in the first 5 years



Bamboo in the next 6 weeks



3) Boiling Water

Once you have broken that rope, life will still toss challenges your way. A boy complains to his dad about how hard life is.

Life boils us all. Potatoes go soft. Eggs turn hard. Coffee transforms water into something better.

Lesson? **Do not just survive adversity—transform it. Your response is more powerful than your circumstances. Be the coffee and brew something amazing.**



Would you rather be the potato, the egg, or the coffee bean?

4) Vantage Point Matters

In a rural school, a teacher asks her students, “If there are nine sheep in a pen and one jumps out, how many are left?” The class shouts “Eight!” But one boy says, “None,” The teacher laughs, saying he does not understand maths, but the boy replies, “No, teacher, you don't understand sheep, explaining that if one sheep jumps out, the rest will follow because that's what sheep do.”

Teachers & Parents, **children are like sheep – they follow examples more than instructions.** Let us not preach but be the role model they quietly follow out of the pen.

Students, the story of sheep warns **against herd mentality**—do not blindly follow others' mistakes or peer pressure in high school, like copying trends or answers without thinking.

Everybody's question paper in life is different.

Circumstances, responses and struggles are different.

Answer cannot be a uniform one.



5) Iceberg of Success: “Not all prices appear on labels.”

Now, imagine being twenty-one, a genius at Oxford, when doctors say you have a disease that will trap your body but not your brain—two years to live, tops. Stephen Hawking beat those odds for 55 more years, decoding black holes and the Big Bang from a wheelchair and wrote mega-bestsellers.

Oprah Winfrey rose from a childhood of poverty and sexual abuse in rural Mississippi, pregnant at 14 (losing the baby), shuffled between homes. With fierce perseverance, built a media empire despite weight struggles and skepticism. The rest is history.

J.K. Rowling, a single mother on welfare in Edinburgh, grieving her mother's death from MS, divorced, depressed, and suicidal while scribbling ideas on napkins in cafes. Facing twelve publisher rejections for "Harry Potter," she persevered by pouring her pain into writing, believing in her story's magic. The rest is history

Public success is often built on private suffering. Perseverance matters.

Grit is not loud. It is daily.

Parents, we often compare icebergs. But please remember — it is what lies beneath that keeps the iceberg afloat.



6) Learn to live through Failures: Be graceful in times of losses and setbacks. Learn to be a good loser

One night, **Edison's** entire research lab went up in flames. Millions of dollars of equipment and years of notes were lost. The next morning, Edison, then sixty-seven, said: "Thank goodness all our mistakes were burned up. Now we can start fresh."

Within weeks, he was back at work, and within months he produced some of his greatest inventions.

Michael Jordan - "I Have Failed Over and Over"

Jordan, considered the greatest basketball player, once said: "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost three hundred games. I have failed repeatedly again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Steve Jobs was fired from the very company he founded. Instead of collapsing, he created NeXT and Pixar, both of which transformed industries. Later, Apple invited him back, and he built the iPhone. Jobs said: "Getting fired was the best thing that could have happened. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life."

Before becoming president, **Abraham Lincoln** faced multiple business failures, election defeats, and personal tragedies. He kept standing back up. When asked how he survived so many losses, he said: "**My great concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with your failure.**"

YOUR GRACE IS GREATER THAN EVERY FAILURE

Students: **Adversity reveals who we are, but we can choose to let it make us better**, like those coffee beans turning plain water into coffee. Failure is not final unless you stop trying.

Grace in loss turns rejection into reinvention.

Grace means treating each miss as practice, not shame. Grace means not clinging to ashes but building again.

Parents and teachers, when children fail, do not rush to fix everything. Let them sit with the discomfort, then encourage them to try again. Just like Edison did after the fire, like Lincoln did after defeats, like Jordan did after missed shots.

7) Harvesting Luck: Show up Every Day and Act

Consider five frogs on a log: four decide to jump off. How many are left? Five, because deciding is not doing. One frog must leap to make it happen. Dreams and thoughts without action are just intentions.

I had the fortune to meet one of the wisest men alive in California, Peter Kauffman and ask him a question: how does one succeed in life and what are factors responsible for success? His calibrated answer was- Success will depend on your skill to the extent of 7 % and 25 % on courage and discipline to seize opportunities when they come up. This accounts for 33 %. What about rest? He said **luck** and saw my jaw drop. I was thinking if luck is all pervasive then what is the point of the rest, but he saw disbelief in my eyes and corrected me that I

Luck is pivotal with a caveat that the harder and smarter you work, the luckier you get!

Students: Luck visits the ones who show up, who practice, who work hard and smart. **Quality and quantity of your effort enlarge the surface area of your luck.** And when joy arrives by good fortune—be humble; it may not always be that easy and stay that way. I have seen many bankrupt billionaires in my life.

How to get lucky? **The formula is Preparation (hard and smart work) + Positive attitude and perseverance + courage to seize opportunities as and when they come = Luck**



8) The Empty Pot

An emperor gave seeds to children and said, "Return in three months with your best plant." On the final day, one boy stood holding an empty pot. He had watered and waited; nothing grew. Others had tall green plants. The emperor smiled at the empty pot and said, "You are the winner. I had boiled the seeds. No seed could grow. Everyone else cheated. You told the truth."

Integrity is a multiplier. In math, anything plus zero changes nothing, but anything multiplied by zero becomes zero. Life works the same way

The "zeros" of life are gambling, cheating, reckless risks, substance abuse, chronic dishonesty. One zero can wipe out years of effort. Never multiply your future by zero. **Some choices are additive and reversible. Others are multiplicative and irreversible. Health, honesty, safety, reputation – these are non-negotiables. Lose them, and the result is zero.**



Be bold with additive experiments. Be ultra-cautious with multiplicative decisions. **Remember: destruction is faster than construction.** Rome was not built in a day, but it could burn in one night. A reputation takes years to build and only a moment to lose. Guard it fiercely.

So tonight, parents, teachers, and students - lessons I want to leave you with and remember:
Build your roots like the bamboo tree

- Guard your integrity like the boy with the empty pot.
- Cut the ropes of old labels and break free from what holds you back.
- Be coffee when life gets hot and adapt to life's boils.
- And when setbacks come, rise with grit and grace to ace your challenges. Tough times never last long but tough people do.

Congratulations once again to every prize winner, and to the parents and teachers who made this journey possible. May gratitude, coupled with high attitude, give you permanent altitude on the ladders of life.

Thank you & God bless.

May you all get what you deserve!

--Kuntal Shah