

PRESIDENT ADVISES FRESHMEN ON JOURNEY THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME

Peter Likins

Peter Likins became the eighteenth President of the University of Arizona in 1997. He is also a professor of engineering. This address was delivered at the Freshman Convocation in Centennial Hall on August 23, 1998. Other addresses are available on President Likins's website: <http://ali.opi.arizona.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Likins>

Friday night at the rally on the Mall we gave you a raucous welcome to The University of Arizona. That was a night for fun.

But tonight is a solemn occasion, a reminder that college is serious business as well as good healthy fun. Probably you will play harder at The University of Arizona than you have ever played before, but you will work harder too, or you'll regret it. Friday night was for play. Tonight we begin to work. Make sure you know the difference, and learn to find room in your life for both.

Your job tonight is to listen attentively. That won't be easy, because this sermon can be really boring. But my job requires that I deliver a message to you tonight. Your job is to listen carefully and try to remember the message for at least six months. If you survive the first six months in good shape, you'll probably be okay.

We have already begun together a journey that will last a lifetime. Understand this: You may go to school here for only four years, but you will be altered by the Wildcat experience in ways that will change your life, and the lives of your children.

Among the most important lessons you'll learn together here is how to deal with freedom, and how to handle responsibility. Probably your biggest challenge in the next six months is learning to develop self-control and self-discipline, which will gradually replace parental discipline. Sometimes these lessons can be hard. You will discover, perhaps painfully, that there are consequences if you fail to meet the responsibilities that come with freedom.

I want to encourage you to develop on this campus a community spirit, but at the same time I advise you to think your own thoughts before you plunge ahead, blindly following the gang wherever it may go. The years of peer pressure are properly the adolescent years, and young men and women in college are expected to make independent judgments and follow their own counsel individually. You will surely find that the independent spirit is valued here, and sheep get no respect.

I'd like to apply this lesson particularly to the use of alcohol and other drugs. Remember that the laws of our land apply to you, on campus or off. Think for yourself, and think smart. And believe me: losing control is never smart.

Sometimes students die from the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. More often they find themselves in court facing felony charges of rape or aggravated assault, and discover that they are legally responsible for their actions, drunk or sober. The result can be tragic.



I know that you've heard all this before, and if you're like most young people you probably don't really believe in your own mortality. I wish that I could make you understand with mere words that your life and your future career are too precious to risk losing "just for fun."

We take seriously at this University our responsibility to help you learn how to control yourself, but we can't take the place of your parents. In compensation for the absent parents of this freshman class, I ask you to accept a sacred obligation. I want you to assume responsibility, not only for yourselves, but for each other.

Despite the fact that you begin as strangers, I want you to treat your roommate like a brother or sister, and treat all of us here as your extended family. We are a family of many cultures, races and creeds, but we share a common bond at this University. We may belong to different clubs or different teams, different races or different residence halls, but we all belong to The University of Arizona, and we belong to each other.

As a simple first step, as you walk this campus you should make eye contact and acknowledge the humanity of the people you meet. You might even smile a little. Oh, what the hell . . . go for it . . . say "Hi." Take the initiative . . . that's the Arizona way.

And if your roommate or lab partner needs help, don't hang back. It is no longer acceptable to "do your own thing" without thinking about other people. Step in and offer a helping hand, or a sympathetic ear. You'll be amazed at how much good you can do and how deeply your kindness will be appreciated. The biggest benefit, however, will return to you, in the strength and confidence you feel when you carry your friends' burdens on your shoulders.

And you will need that strength and confidence, both at The University of Arizona and in the world that lies beyond the university experience. Our job is to develop your potential in all of its dimensions. We will test your strength in every way we can. Strength of intellect and of character are developed in the classrooms and the living groups on campus, and even your emotional health and physical strength will be challenged by the rigors of our recreational athletic programs, if not in the arena or on the playing fields of intercollegiate competition.

And if today you feel a little scared, then be assured that your reaction is a healthy one. You should reflect a moment if you're not excited by the significance of this day, by the magic of this moment. Something terribly important is about to begin.

You may be wondering if you can make it at The University of Arizona—if you can meet the Arizona challenge. And you should be sure of the answer: Of course you can! You have the intellectual capacity to succeed at this University. But one thing more is needed: you must believe in your own internal quality. Don't do anything to compromise it. Don't miss any opportunity to enhance it. And don't allow yourself to be destroyed by disappointments, setbacks, and small failures. These things will come to you, just as they came to every one of the successful people now arrayed before you in full academic splendor. We have all been college freshmen, and we know the terrors of that experience as well as the joys.

Just like all of you, I earned admission to a very competitive university, and discovered when I got there that all the successes of my high school years were pretty well matched by my classmates. I soon realized that success in college would have to be hard earned, with no guarantees. That lesson really came home to me one day in the first semester of my freshman year.

In my first quiz in calculus, I squeaked out an "A," although I was uncomfortable with the material. I got a "B" on my second quiz, still feeling uneasy. And then in the third and



last quiz before finals I got a big "F." It was a new experience, and it scared the hell out of me. That same week I had a fight with my girl, and got beat up in practice in the wrestling room by a kid from Pennsylvania. My whole world fell apart, and it was not easy to put it together again. But I did. I got a "B" in the course, I married the girl, and I made the team. I did, and so can you.

So remember, you must expect the sky to fall, at least once, before the year is over. Your problem might be an English test, or a quarrel with a special friend, a bad pass in a basketball game or a missed goal in soccer. But the sky will fall, one way or the other. It always does.

Remember please, when you see that sky falling, that it's not really falling on you; don't take adversity too personally. We all drop the ball or miss the goal occasionally. The test of quality is the capacity to rise above defeat, to come back against the odds, and to pass this test you must learn that disappointments are a normal part of a successful life, and not a sign of personal failure. When your time comes, please remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength! It takes wisdom and courage to ask for help when you need it. People feel good when you trust them enough to ask for help, and you should never hesitate.

And when the sky falls on you, try to keep a healthy sense of humor, and learn to laugh at your own mistakes. Work hard, but don't take yourself so seriously that you lose your perspective. Find time in your busy lives to relax together, young men and women as friends enduring together the pressures of the exam room and the boredom of the presidential oration. Enjoy yourselves and enjoy each other. Memories of the good life on campus will linger when every lecture is forgotten, including this one.

Thank you for your kind attention. Have a good year.

THE GOOD DRUDGE HABIT

Francis Cummins Lockwood

Francis Cummins Lockwood was Professor of Language and Literature in the English Department at the University of Arizona in 1913, when he published these two addresses in an anthology aimed at introducing first-year students to college life and philosophies of higher education. This textbook, The Freshman and His College, A College Manual, was published by D.C. Heath. Professor Lockwood went on to become a dean and then Acting President of the University in 1922.

The habits that a Freshman forms are likely to go with him all through life to help him or to hinder him. Already he is an organized bundle of habits, for better or for worse; and in many respects he will never change his ways. But he *may* readily do so; for he is at an age when habits are extremely easy to take on or to lay off. His sense-impressions are so vivid and his nerve-tissue so plastic that he can remake himself into what he will, as easily as a workman can mold putty into this shape or that. Most of his personal habits are fixed and will never be reshaped. If he gives scrupulous attention to the care of his person now—in matters of the toilet and affairs of dress—he will be tidy and orderly and cleanly when he is threescore and ten. If he is indifferent to these things now, he will be still more indifferent to them when he grows old. And so with table and drawing-room manners, with habits of articulation, pronunciation, spelling, and handwriting; the youth who has been correctly trained in all these things may let his will go on a vacation or set it to work at some higher employment, for the good drudge Habit will demand no holiday, but will stay right by his task. It is not too late for the college student to remedy any defects of dress or behavior that he may grow conscious of as he meets his more fortunate fellows. He is at college for the purpose of remedying such defects. Let him mark closely the dress, the bearing, the speech of such acquaintances—students as well as instructors—as have won his approval; and, while not imitating them in any slavish way, let him note and emulate whatever in them he may find worthy of emulation in taste, ease, grace, or high-breeding.

And particularly, it is during the Freshman year that a youth must catch the secret of study. Few high school pupils have learned how to study. But it is now of the highest importance that the art of study be mastered. This is the appropriate time to establish correct mental habits. Mental discipline is quite as large an element in education as the storing away of facts—the gaining of knowledge. So if the student would avoid waste of time and frequent failure, he ought to learn to study at once. He must learn how to lay hold of a given lesson and how to lay it out. He must define to himself what the subject of the lesson is that he has been set to learn—what lies at the heart of it. He must set about the mastery of the lesson systematically. It will not do merely to define the main purpose of the lesson; he must analyze it, so that he may come to a clear knowledge of what is most important and what is least important. Let him concentrate the whole power of his mind upon the task that he has before him at any given time. He will thus save untold waste. If the subject is not naturally



interesting to him, he may be able to bring to the problem some interest from outside—the desire to outstrip a rival, or to give pleasure to his parents by getting good marks, or to convince an instructor of his real power. A young student must often take himself sternly in hand, and by a sheer act of will-power compel himself to march up to a difficult task and do it. And one must learn thoroughness as well as concentration. There must be no slackness or vagueness. Every inch of the ground must be covered; and the student must see clearly the logical connection of one part with another.

Study hours should be carefully planned. The hardest problems should be attacked when the mind is freshest, and odd bits of time should be utilized. It is well to remember that the mind sometimes gets so fagged that it is unable to do its work well, and that at such times it is better to give over mental effort for a season. Later it may be resumed with added zest and reinforced energies. Sometimes it will be best for the student to throw aside his books entirely for a good walk or a lively game in the open air. It would be a safe and innocent thing once in a while to go to bed at ten or eleven o'clock for a good night's sleep. The student should learn how to sprout a thought and then go away and let it develop in its own way—how to let the mind lie passive as well as how to spur it actively to its goal. The thoroughly trained mind may be trusted to carry on much of its work without conscious supervision. It is sometimes a merit to cram, but never except as a practice in discipline, or in case of an honest exigency. And examinations are not without their solid benefits to the serious student. They give training in analysis and proportion; they compel one to discriminate; they demand that the mind grasp and hold a vast quantity of information for instant use; and they train the mind to sustained effort. An examination tests one's bottom, and gives evidence of one's staying powers.

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