

Talk about the circle of life-on one night in the emergency department, within minutes of walking in for my shift, I had to call the code on a cardiac arrest, and then went immediately out to our ambulance bay and delivered a healthy newborn baby. In the past few months, I have had to tell 6 families that their loved one has just passed away unexpectedly. I have had a multiple trauma incident involving trapeze and tightrope walkers from a local circus. I have had to tell people that they have cancer or a brain tumor. Occasionally I have also gotten the chance to bring back patients that were on the brink of death. I got to deliver another healthy baby in our ambulance bay. I have reassured countless patients that they are going to be just fine and helped others get the treatment or further care that they need. I am privileged to be an Emergency Physician and although I didn't know 20 years ago when I graduated from here that this is where I would end up, I am confident that the foundations I received at Topeka Collegiate are part of what have allowed me to succeed this far.

Good morning everyone. Thank you for the kind introduction Mrs. Hoyt. And thank you to Dr. Rantz, all of the teachers, staff, administrators and board members. It is an honor to be here to speak with you all today. Congratulations to our graduating students. I also want to extend the congratulations to all the proud parents, siblings and other loved ones here. I remember my own graduation day surrounded by my dear family, friends, and beloved teachers here. None of us, myself included, would be here without the support, hard work, and guidance of all the

people previously mentioned.

I am so grateful for my time at Topeka Collegiate. I moved to Kansas when I was 11, halfway through my 6th grade year and started at TCS when it was still at the old location. It's always tough to move, and middle school is a particularly difficult time to suddenly be in a new place. The transition couldn't have been easier and I owe most of that to Topeka Collegiate. Immediately I was surrounded by like-minded students and I was thrilled to be in a school where I was intellectually challenged and had the opportunity to experience such unique learning opportunities -such as herpetology trips with Mr. Miller, our science teacher at the time! I made lifelong friends (one of whom I am going to see later today, along with her brand new baby) and I entered high school academically ahead of my peers. Although I do wish Mr. Miller hadn't taken quite so many pictures when I was at my most gawky stage and I apparently believed that baggy T-shirts and wide leg blue jeans were the only way to look cool! This was even memorialized on an official Kansas postcard, unfortunately for me.

While I remember my TCS graduation day, I am going to be perfectly honest-I have no memory whatsoever of who gave the graduation speech or what was said. In addition, I have no idea who the commencement speakers were at my high school, college or even medical school graduations, if there even was one! I will tell you this too-in the last few weeks as I became somewhat anxious about giving

this speech this fact took off some of the pressure I was feeling. I think I can say anything up here and in the long run you won't remember much, so I don't have to worry too much about messing it up! I thought long and hard about what wisdom or information I could impart to you, and in a manner that just might stick, and I listened to several wonderful commencement addresses to help me get there. I would like to share with you eight life lessons that I have learned through my work in the Emergency Department, or the ED as we call it. I apologize if it starts off a little dark, I am afraid it is the nature of my business but I will try to lighten it up as I go along. Unfortunately my best and funniest work stories aren't appropriate for any audience, let alone this one!

"Develop empathy." One of the patients that I will never forget is a 45yo lady that suffered a bad stroke while she was in the Emergency Department under my care. In a most ways her case would be considered a bad outcome. She came in with a headache, and by the time she left the a few hours later she was paralyzed on one side, couldn't speak and was going for urgent brain surgery. Any patient that leaves me in a worse state than when I first saw them feels like a failure to me even if I have done everything right-and yet when I next saw her husband a month or so later he hugged me fiercely. In the moments when his wife went from serious to critical he felt a level of compassion and empathy that superseded the fact that his wife was never going to recover to her previous state. Doctors get so wrapped up in our medical management and the technicalities of what we do, that many times we

forget that while this is vital, the communication, compassion, and empathy that we show to our patients and their family is equally as important. The bottom line is this-you can be the best at what you do, but if you do not learn to feel what others feel, be able to imagine what others are experiencing, and try to have an understanding of the lives of others, you will not fully succeed.

“It could be worse.” Working in an emergency department certainly is good for giving me perspective on my own life. I often find myself starting a shift with various home stresses running through my mind-lately it’s been that my husband is gone traveling a lot for work, my lawn is dying and the neighborhood association is complaining about it, or one of my children is being defiant, “mommy, you bad, I’m going to send you to another house.” Then something happens which makes me realize my current worries are small, they will pass, and I should be grateful that these are the things that I am permitted to stress over in my life. Every day in the place that I work, somebody comes in that woke up that morning, not knowing that it was their last day, or that it was the day they find out they have heart failure, or the day that their child is diagnosed with cancer. That allows for greater perspective on the little things. So when you find yourself agonizing over a high school boyfriend or girlfriend, or devastated that you got a B, or that you didn’t get the lead in the play-try to remember, that even if it feels like your whole world right now is crashing down around you-know that it will pass, new challenges and opportunities will come along, and be

grateful for them.

“Always say thank you.” It may seem like a little thing but it’s amazing how far it can go. I have two little boys that are 2 and 4 and I cannot tell you how many times a day I remind them to say thank you. One of these days it will actually stick! Make it a habit so that it comes automatically-but it’s also important to actually mean it. On a busy day in the ER when a patient or family member genuinely thanks me for the care I have given, even when it is for something very routine, it is remarkable how that little thing can affect me. In the midst of the stress, frustration, complaints and even anger that come from many patients in the ED, a thank you and genuine gratitude can lighten my load, boost my step, and make the rest of my shift more positive. I try to remember that when dealing with others and practice what I preach as well. So start with today-be sure to thank your teachers, your family, and all the folks here at Topeka Collegiate for everything they have done for you. And remember it with the bus driver, the quiet kid who nobody talks to at high school that holds the door for you, and the homeless person who gives you directions when you take a wrong turn.

“Attitude is everything.” Practicing in Sarasota, Florida where there is a significant aging population, gives me a unique perspective on age. While there is definitely something to be said for good genes when it comes to health and longevity, I genuinely believe a good portion of it is about attitude. I frequently have 90 year old patients come in that are so

busy they can't stand to be in the Emergency Department for a few hours to get checked out because they need to get on to their golf game, or bridge or their happy hour. At the same time, I have 50 some patients who seem older than these 90 year olds because they get so bogged down and negative about various ailments. Bad things happen to everyone-many of which you cannot control- what you can control is how you react, your expectations and your attitude, and these are what dictate how you cope with life's challenges. So when you fall short of your desired score on the SAT, or you bungle the piano solo that you have practiced a hundred times, take that frustration and disappointment and channel it into determination to practice 200 hundred times next time, or re-read that SAT prep book, and believe that with hard work, and a positive attitude, you can achieve your goals.

"Don't forget to have fun." There are days that I really enjoy my job and others where I can't wait to leave. There are days where I have so much fun with my kids I can't wait to do it all again the next day, and there are also days where I wish I had to go to work because I am so frustrated with being a parent! The common thread in those best days, both at home and at work, is when I am able to find the joy. Sometimes this is just giving into the situation-whether it is accepting the chaos of the ED and not trying to fight it but instead remembering that this is where I thrive or it's encouraging the silliness of my boys and starting the tickle fight, or the wild game of chase. Sometimes it is remembering to be present. It's actually looking at my son when he says mommy for the

10th time rather than distractedly saying “what” as I continue to wash the dishes. It’s sitting down and chatting with the 92yo patient and hearing him relive his memories from World War II. Sometimes it is joking with my colleagues after a stressful case, or looking at the excitement of the ED through the eyes of a shadowing student who is thrilled by all that they see. It is so very easy to get bogged down by stress and worry. High school can be a hard time. The physical and emotional changes you undergo, combined with the social pressures, and the knowledge that your high school career can dictate your college prospects can be overwhelming to say the least. But know that it can be fun too. Find the things that you enjoy-whether its band, or drama, or sports, or debate, or student government. Take advantage of opportunities such as camps, international trips, and volunteering. Relax, enjoy yourselves, and believe that before you know it you are going to be up here giving a TCS commencement speech and your high school anxieties will only be a distant memory!

“People are what matter.” This is a natural continuation of my previous point. Part of how you find the joy is by surrounding yourself with the right people. Many times as I drive to work I am tired and I have no real desire to face a busy ED shift. When I walk in and see the faces of the people I work with though, something almost always happens. I see a nurse or tech I like and I stop to chat and we ask about each others’ kids, or the vacation we just had. Often, someone says, oh am I glad to see you Dr. Temple or thank goodness it’s you tonight, doc! And even though I

didn't want to be there, now that I am suddenly surrounded by a team of people that I like and respect, that trust and value me and are happy to have me there specifically, leading their team, I have a pep in my step and I am ready to go. The people are what make my job a good one. Now you can't always control whom you work with, but you can choose your friends. This becomes increasingly important as you make the transition to high school. Surround yourself with people that support you and build you up, that you have fun with, and that make you into your best self.

"Strive for excellence not perfection." Except in my job I have to be perfect, because people's lives are literally on the line. Coming from one perfectionist, to all of you grads who I suspect have this same character trait, this is a hard lesson but an important one. Every day that I work I am asked to make potentially life and death decisions based on incomplete and sometimes inaccurate information. I know that I cannot be perfect in this-all I can do is be methodical, rely on my extensive training, knowledge and instincts and in the end do what I believe is best. Every doctor knows at some point in their career they will make the wrong decision and potentially someone will suffer directly from it. That is life though. We all make mistakes. While the constant striving for near perfection is okay & in fact, necessary, you have to learn to give yourself a break too. In high school and beyond you will fall short of your expectations sometimes-whether it is by not maintaining a 4.0, or not making varsity or 1st chair, or even not getting into the college you

want. As crazy as it sounds, sometimes this ends up being the best thing in the world-it takes failure and setbacks to measure a person's grit and determination. Don't be afraid of failure-I have certainly had to learn this-if I was, I would never be able to get through a shift-because I would be constantly paralyzed and unable to survive in the busy ED setting where decisions have to be made constantly and quickly. Let yourself enjoy what you are doing, strive for excellence, enjoy the process and know that it's okay to make mistakes-we all do sometimes. It's how you respond to those mistakes, how you grow and use them as opportunities to improve that helps define you-not the mistakes themselves.

Okay guys, we are nearing the finish line-this last lesson is going to be a little repetitive because I think it is so important to happiness, which should be everyone's first goal in life. "Practice gratitude." What do I mean by this? Take time to stop and reflect on the things that you are grateful for. This idea encompasses all of those that we previously covered. When you are developing your empathy-you become aware that it can always be worse, which makes it easy to find things for which you can be grateful. Part of the practice of gratitude involves sharing it with others-thanking those people around you that contribute to your happiness. Science shows that people who regularly practice gratitude are more positive, sleep better, express more kindness and even have better immune systems. It will naturally allow you to have more fun as well! And while a delicious pie or a brand new car may inspire us to feel

thankful, direct your gratitude toward the people in our life-as they are what matter most. Be grateful for the chance to make mistakes and continue on-employers these days are looking for people who have had to face failure and learn to deal with it-they are not interested in the perfect resume, because those people may not know how to face the inevitable setbacks in life-because nobody is perfect.

Alright guys, almost done I swear! Thank you for your patience, for your attention, and again for having me as your speaker today. I don't pretend to have all of the answers, but I hope that the simple truths that I have discussed here resonate with you in some way. Remember to develop empathy, know that it could always be worse, always say thank you, know that your attitude and expectations matter, don't forget to have fun, remember that people are what matter, strive for excellence, and work on practicing gratitude. Congratulations again to the class of 2017. I have no doubt that you are well prepared for your high school careers-don't forget to enjoy it! I wish you all the best. Now, let's go celebrate and remember "You never really leave the place you love. You take part of it with you and leave part of you there."