

James Mallal – College Dux 2012

Good afternoon Mrs Fry, distinguished guests, staff and students. Thank you for inviting me to come here today to (accept this award and) speak to the assembly. I feel so fortunate to have been able to complete my high school studies here and I hope that all of you will enjoy yourselves just as much as I did. I don't really feel qualified to give advice – a lot was given to me and most of it didn't stick. Some of it was really spot on but I've only realised that in hindsight.

Firstly I want to ask you, the students, a question. What motivates you to succeed in school? Why do you get up in the morning and study for almost 6 hours instead of sleeping in and going to the beach? I know many of you will never have even considered this question, but I think awareness of your own answer is key to being an exceptional student. We all have an answer to the question, personally I enjoy learning. I don't think your answer can be "because my parents told me to", or "my teachers made me", or "all my friends are doing it". It's not that easy, your answer has to come from you. During difficult periods of school, clearly knowing your motivation to excel in school is paramount in giving you the mental strength to overcome challenges and continue to put in your best effort.

Once you have realised your motivation to succeed, you have to commit yourself to continuous improvement. Create goals, aim high. Celebrate achieving your goals and then set an even higher standard for yourself. Never be content with staying the same. Especially, address your weaknesses and turn them into strengths. For example, about a year ago I was one of the most nervous public speakers you would have ever seen. If you put 20 people in front of me and asked me to talk my hands would do the Harlem Shake. But, I have worked away at it, and seen results. But don't be fooled, none of us always succeed. Treat failures as a chance to improve, and don't lose faith in your ability.

Now, this part's mainly for year 11s and 12s. Try not to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of work. There is an end in sight, and the only way to get there is to get stuck in to your studies. A good analogy for this is the mouse that has to eat a block of cheese about 50 times its size. The task might seem impossible, gargantuan, unrealistic, but it has to be done and the only way it'll ever succeed is to start nibbling somewhere. You're all that mouse at the start of year 11. You all have the capability to finish year 12 a very intelligent, very fat mouse. So start nibbling.

Something that many people lose sight of during high school and especially in year 11 and 12 is that life is a journey, not a destination. In these years, you are on the journey, and you do have to do some living. You shouldn't have to make yourself unhappy in order to succeed in your own schooling goals. So do something meaningful with your spare time, whatever is meaningful to you. Maintain your friendships, continue with your hobbies. Most importantly in my mind, embrace college life and live for others. This may seem unimportant to you in such a full on time of schooling but it is, in my own opinion, the most rewarding part of being in the John XXIII College community. (And) As I'm sure Ms Hammond has told you, you're more than your ATAR.

So in summary: get motivated, commit yourself to continuous improvement, don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed and enjoy your own journey of life. In all facets of school life, you'll get out what you put in. So work hard, break everyone's expectations and be exceptional in your own way. Live John XXIII College life fully while you're here, because you'll miss it as soon as you leave, trust me. Ultimately, deciding your own journey in high school and indeed in all of life is up to you. To paraphrase William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus*: "You are the master of your fate. You are the captain of your soul."