

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, parents and most important of all, our high achieving learners.

Thank you for the generous introduction. It's almost 20 years to the day since I attended my Final Assembly and rang the Bell. It's a great honor to be back here this evening, to celebrate your accomplishments on this evening of all round excellence.

This evening, I want to talk to you about Time.

Time is the great equalizer. No matter who you are, the richest person in the world or the poorest, Bill Gates or a casual laborer, you have exactly the same 60 seconds in 1 minutes, 60 minutes in 1 hour, 24 hours in a day, 365 days in year. Give or take a few, each of us have about 80 years on this earth.

I am a neurosurgeon, and a lot of what I do intersects with Time. In my world, the saying goes, time is brain and we make split second decisions and take actions that is the difference between life and death, and probably more importantly, the difference between severe mental disability or a return to meaningful, functional life. When a patient is delayed getting to me, or I take too long to relieve the pressure on the brain, the price is exorbitant. I feel Time very acutely everyday.

Be generous about Time for the important stuff

A feature of my profession is that I meet people on the worst day of their lives and I have the privilege to observe how people choose to spend their most precious Time. At these times, people are not concerned about work, politics or money – paradoxically, the usual things that preoccupy much of our time. Instead, my patients defy stupefying odds to attend a child's graduation; fly across the world to see the Sistine Chapel; or perhaps the most heartfelt, a dying man eliciting his doctors' help to organize a wedding within the confines of his isolation hospital room. The common themes are: amending relationships, reaffirming one's identify and connecting with those who knows who we really are.

This is not to say that work stops and we should simply enjoy life with careless abandon, however. The message is to remember your reason for doing what you do and how you spend your life. For our learners sitting here this evening, you have just over 20000 days on this earth. So, what are you going to do with your Time? I wish it was as simple as platitudes like follow your passion or do what makes you happy. Unfortunately, it may not be so simple. Life is a contact sport. It's hard. Sometimes, just getting through it "head bloodied but unbowed" is glory in itself. But if you are able, I would like to challenge you, in the word of Cecil Rhodes, to "fight the world's fight" and do what you can to make the world a little bit better than you found it.

How to maximize the impact of your Time?

If you find a passion or a cause that you decide to make your life's work, congratulations. Let's talk a little about how to maximize limited time. I never seem to have enough time. One unsuccessful strategy, which I have probably pushed as far as I can, is to sleep less. In short, don't do that, it's not a solution. But perhaps, in keeping with prioritizing that which is important, if you always start each day with the most important items, at least at

the end of the day, what's left undone are hopefully of lesser importance to you. As you become busier, I have learnt to protect my time, and only agree to spend time on things that are consistent with my central goals and values. Another strategy is the power of the team and teamwork, or in other words, getting other people to do what you would otherwise need to do. Surround yourself by like-minded individuals, but remain open to new people and novel ideas. Remember, to go far, go together. If you have doubts about the power of the team or the sense of collective purpose, you should have a chat to the English rugby team.

By now, you probably get that I take Time pretty seriously. I also think about scale and impact frequently. Surgery is a uniquely personal endeavor, for both the surgeon and patient. The degree of immersion and focus on the 1 patient in front of me during surgery brings me enormous joy and satisfaction. Nevertheless, I have aspirations of improving health at a large scale. But as a surgeon, over a 30 year career, I can treat maybe 5000 patients. In order to scale my purpose, I am also a teacher and scientist. If I can train a surgeon every year, I can impart my skills to the next generation of surgeons, and they in turn train still more surgeons. As a scientist, I am involved in developing new treatment for stroke. Perhaps it won't amount to much, but if it does, that single solution can be scaled globally with public health impact, much more than what I can ever hope to achieve with a single pair of hands. These are some of the steps that have helped me, I encourage you to find strategies that fit what you do.

The Gift of Time

Much has been said about change and uncertainty. I am sure you have heard many speeches about adapting to change by individual far more eloquent than I am. However, many things don't change. I look at the staff members sitting here this evening and I am certain many of our learners have experienced the same mentorship to which I am indebted. I am sure, there is a learner standing outside Mr Alan Miller's room because he made an existential decision not to do the reading that was required. Mr Paul Litchkus, I bet, continues to challenge young artists about the bigger meaning of symbolism and the ever fine line between rubbish and brilliance. Or Mr Hall's discourse on corporate responsibility, the essence of which I used on my junior residents only a few days ago. I recall fondly and with the greatest respect Mr Nestor Perides who shaped the worldview of so many. These are gifts bestowed upon you by our legendary teachers who have gifted their Time, their lives' work, to your Education. Over the years, and in different countries, I remember lessons I learnt in classrooms, in school activities and on sports fields here at Westville Boys' which continues to be relevant to this day. These are not lessons on facts and equations, but these are lessons about independent thinking, common decency, moral justice and social responsibility – universal truths which do not change. These are the qualities for which you are being awarded tonight. This is the gift you receive during your Time at Westville Boys' High School – I hope you cherish it and hopefully pass it onto others in the bright future you have ahead.