Presentation Night Speech 2012

You don’t have to be the best, you just have to be your best.

This year we were reviewed by an objective outsider.

In her words,

- **Kew HS exudes a quality learning culture.**
- **The efforts and achievements are substantial across all areas of the school.**
- **Students, staff and parents are all in agreement that they attend a highly effective school.**

- **There is**
  - a solid sense of purpose and vision for learning
  - enthusiastic and engaged students, and a highly talented staff.
  - a strong focus on high expectations.
  - a strong picture of student wellbeing, learning and relationships
  - high rates of university enrolments.
  - A highly effective and successful international program that ensures a high success rate for students.
- **The school can look forward to an exciting and successful future.**

There is much for which we can be proud. We earned the right to hold our heads high, applaud our successes and celebrate all the innovative occurrences at Kew.

We are aspiring and striving to move from good to great. We believe that we give you our best and each year provide the best education and the best preparation for life.

We constantly receive feedback.

The community is alert. People take the trouble to phone or write to commend our students for their behaviour, the respect they show members of the public. We expect them to be their best and they noticeably are. They are positive ambassadors, living by our values. Thankyou.

The comment by a parent after parent teacher interviews- they knew my child well is glowing praise and reflects on our teachers’ professionalism.

We appreciate all the work of our staff. They take seriously their responsibility for all aspects of the students’ growth and learning. On your behalf I thank them for their unparalleled commitment.

Kew High School can be the best because of the support from our parents who are actively involved in a range of ways. They have been there behind you, encouraging you, interested in your progress. I thank them all for their amazing efforts and the part they play in our cycle of improvement.

**2012** has been a fulfilling year personally. I have given my best yet I realise there is still room to improve, by further learning, by deeper listening, extended consultation, developing those signature strengths at the bottom of my list and recognising my weaknesses. I firmly believe my best is yet to come as I consciously raise the bar. Recently I visited Vietnam and met the parents of some of our overseas students. I understand the sacrifice people make to send their children abroad because they want them to have more than they had, to be able to live better lives and seize their opportunities. We formed a sister school relationship with the Number One school In Ho Chi Minh.
City. There was agreement that this partnership between two excellent schools would be mutually beneficial.

At the beginning of the year, Melbourne came to a stand still as we mourned the death of Jim Stynes. Why did he have such an impact? Why did we feel poorer for his early demise?

Jim Stynes left for Australia from Ireland in 1984, leaving behind a strong group of friends and a close family. That took grit and a willingness to shift outside his comfort zone. It is reminiscent of the overseas students we have at Kew, who take a similar path.

In the early days of Jim’s foundation, Reach, Jim was looking for a venue and we provided one at Kew HS. At that stage the current computer room on the second floor was an open space for Drama and Music. Jim packed in a group of teenagers and I was privileged to watch him from the side as he wove his magic. He encouraged wounded teens to tell their story, to rise from their helplessness, to divest themselves of all the issues that prevented them from going forward, to face a future being in control. They were energised, they newly believed in themselves and they were brimming with hope and confidence that despite what life had dealt, they could actually expect more of themselves and not be satisfied with failure.

Martin Flanagan stated that Jim’s mission was about helping young people to be their best, to be as good as they can be. He gave them a code for living (Sydney Herald March 2012).

After Playing in the All Ireland final, Jim commented that It helped me to dare to dream I could make something of myself, and, later, when he had been dropped from the Melbourne football team for a game he vowed never to put himself in a position where poor preparation affected his performance.

Jim Stynes book “Heroes” highlighted ordinary people, unsung heroes, on extraordinary journeys doing their utmost. Giving of your best requires a dream, intrinsic motivation, overcoming disappointments, a belief in yourself and sometimes endeavour and plain hard work. If you let go of fear you can do anything and you can choose the things you really want to do and live the life you want to live, Jim noted:

The summation inside of his book “My Journey” reads, Jim Stynes never took the easy road on or off the field. He loved a challenge. He pushed himself and worked hard to help others to reach their potential- to be their best. This is one lesson we can adopt - be your best and enable others to also reach their peak.

I consider it a shame that the results of events by Australians in the London Olympics were couched in terms of Australia’s apparent poor showing in the world arena. Surely this diminishes the extraordinary feats of mere mortals. They have all trained to within an inch of their lives, accepted personal sacrifices for the right to represent their country in the very best field. How can this be spoken of in any terms but praise? They surely have tested their limits, pushed themselves. Some have not been judged the best or been awarded the gold medal but we should not live under the misconception that they have not seized their opportunity to be their best. They deserve our accolades.

Bubba Watson. Is a left handed golfer who learned how to play in the back garden, hitting Wiffle balls – the light, hollowed-out plastic ball used to teach children how to play baseball. He was persistent and determined. He has never had a golf lesson in his life yet he won the US Masters. He
Anna Meares became a household name when she won gold and bronze medals in Athens in 2004. In 2008 she survived a horrific crash when she broke the second vertebrae in her neck. Through a lengthy recuperation process and sheer dogged effort, she built up the muscles in her neck because she wanted to represent Australia at the Beijing Olympics and in her words, to be the best I could be in track cycling. It was a matter of how I was going to get there. She had drive and determination. She won silver in Beijing and gold in 2012 in London. Being her best took years of personal sacrifice, overcoming hardship and pain.

Bryce Courtney when receiving a doctorate from the University of Canberra in recognition of his outstanding success as an author, told of his battle with stomach cancer and urged young Australians: You have to dare your genius to walk your wild unknown way. It is up to you to make sure everyman and every woman has a chance to rise from nowhere to have the opportunity to be their best.

Kate Sanderson and Turia Pitt were 2 people burnt as they competed in the Racing the Planet’s ultra marathon through the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia. Turia, as a result, is now completely dependent on care. Her partner Michael Hoskin says- Don’t call her a survivor as she is doing more than surviving. Turia came through because of her incredible will to live. Each day she strives to make each moment count. She could have summoned a million reasons to justify a passive acceptance of her lot but she knows this would not have been living life at her best.

The headlines- War orphan’s journey to the world stage, was one of many heralding personal achievements in the Paralympics. Ahmed Kelly finished fourth in his 50 metre breast stroke. He was a lifetime away from his birth world. Ahmed was born with a severe growth disability that stunted his limbs leaving him without forearms and hands, lower legs or feet. It was the result of exposure to chemicals in Iraq where he was abandoned on the doorstep of a Baghdad orphanage. (Herald Sun 5/12)

Another athlete, Kelly Cartwright, a medal winner, had made the decision to have her leg amputated when cancer struck. Matthew Coudrey with only one arm, is Australia’s greatest paralympian.

The Paralympics provided so many examples of people who had a right to make excuses but rather they decided to actually have a go, test themselves and see challenges as opportunities.

We have said farewell this year to Cathie Volpe who, during her time at Kew did give her best. She was a passionate advocate of public education and expended so much energy in a range of capacities and roles for the students and staff. Even as she struggled with her illness there was not a day when she did not strive to do well, to perform against the odds.

At the end of the year we say a fond farewell to Bernie Lloyd. Bernie has been at Kew for 13 years. She has enabled the team to perform at their best because of her indomitable spirit, her integrity, her passion and her willingness to take on something new and run with it. Bernie has not been constrained by doubts but has been driven by her vision of what might be. She has developed strong relationships with students and staff. Those fortunate enough to have been in her classes will attest to her passion, her knowledge, her determination to give her best and allow others to demonstrate theirs, her gift of the gab, her flair with words, her fluency of language. She captivates and engages.
She has been central to the development of the Q9@Melb program, she has successfully applied for Year 9 students to attend the Alpine school, assisted with student selection for World challenge and raised the profile of student leaders. Whenever she was involved, the process was fair and rigorous. Bernie always expected applicants to display their best.

Each year she has overseen the Presentation evening and demanded a high standard for this event where we applaud the efforts of our students who have achieved at their best.

Her love of fun has placed her on stage in Productions, seeing the humour in situations and often diffusing a tricky scenario by stepping back and asking others to put things in perspective.

We will miss her as an integral part of our team. She has questioned our actions, helped forge our vision, prodded me to analyse decisions, been an advocate for students, and role modelled our values. At all times she has undeniably given her best. I know this will continue in her world outside of Kew HS. We wish her well.

I am sure we all had a school report with the damning summary *Could do better!* From this day forward do not accept this. Ensure in your own eyes you can honestly say- I have truly given it my utmost. Be positive you have committed 100% and there was nothing left in reserve. You cannot know your capabilities until you have challenged yourself. So don’t sell yourselves short. Be prepared to put in the hard yards, accept advice, learn from others and build on your strengths. When your results are out, do not judge yourself by your final marks, your ATAR, but reflect on your endeavour and persistence. No one else can assess if it was your best, but you. It is not about society’s expectations but rather the ones you are prepared to put on yourself. You are destined for personal greatness. The scene is set for you to be amazing and unique individuals who have a lasting impact. Decide what sacrifices and learning will be necessary for you to reach your optimum, to be your best.

Moira Kelly, an amazing humanitarian, said recently, “Don’t under estimate the impact you have on someone’s life”. You get one chance, one time on centre stage, one life to live, so live your life to the fullest.

In Jim Stynes words, “Some are born with greater talent but in the end it is rarely the talent alone that will bring you through. It is more the ability to be inspired by a dream, to get out and have a go and follow your heart and keep moving forward when you doubt yourself”. It is in simple terms being your best.

The final declaration comes from Einstein, you have the moral obligation to fulfil your potential, to not be second rate or mediocre.

Clare Entwisle
Principal
Kew High School