

2015 Cornell College Commencement Address

Ben Rosen '15

President Brand, Dean Levine, distinguished faculty, fabulous families, and my fellow smart, beautiful, and passionate peers good morning! My name is Ben Rosen, I represent just one of many spectacular voices in the class of 2015. My voice today though is one of compassion and love in the face of adversity and how we can become change through hugs, love, and patience.

The most compelling thing I will share with you today is not my own. However, it is a principal I use more than anything else. It reads, "Compassion is a muscle that gets stronger with use" Mahatma Gandhi. There are two things here I want us to take from this. One, compassion is a muscle that can be trained and developed, meaning it is not genetic and can be fostered. Two, it must be used, meaning action is necessary for change.

I ask that we have a moment for reflection. Please take a deep breath, close your eyes, and think of the obstacles you have faced, keeping in mind that compassion is a muscle. Let's go even further and think of the obstacles we have had here at Cornell. Academics: the 100 page readings, 15 page papers, and long sleepless nights in the library. Athletics: the 6am weights, the burning muscles and aches to the day-in-day-out focus towards nationals. All others: From finding your brotherhood, sisterhood and friends, realizing and accepting your gender or sexual orientation that you and not society has given exploring your relationship with yourself, God, or your spirituality, to organizing and illustrating that racism, sexism and many isms still exist.

I ask did these come naturally? Did you know how to read 100 pages when you first got here? Could you make it to the national tournament, immediately? NO! We are human. We struggled. But we trained. We worked through our obstacles. As a result of the various challenges we have faced, we all have become stronger, more refined, and more intelligent versions of ourselves. Today, as we gather with family, friends, and faculty to commemorate the past four years, I ask that we reflect on who we have become and who we can become.

Now I ask that we must acknowledge those who helped make our college experience possible. Today, as we prepare to move toward the future, it is pertinent that we hold fast to our support networks—those who have encouraged and grounded us throughout the years. Parents, families, friends, and mentors, I take this moment to thank you! Your love and compassion guiding has allowed us to rise when we have fallen. We ask that you continue to support us as we embark on our future endeavors.

These things we have done, we have not chosen because they were easy. We have done these things because we care and are passionate about our dreams. Why then should we look for a life of comfort and ease after receiving our diplomas to just plunge into the "real world"?

Now more than ever, our nation and world need us to work towards healing. With the recent economic disasters, ongoing racial healing, and more tragic events like those in Nepal, our world needs leaders to rise up and to begin helping resolve these issues among many issues. Not all of us need to be like that of Bill Gates and have billions of dollars to give these causes, but I ask that you give yourselves to issues that move you.

Most of my life I have either lived in foster homes or with people other than my biological parents. To my Mom's best and loving efforts, she was not able to give me the care I needed. For many others in similar situations to mine, standing in front of 100s of people at a college graduation is unheard of. However, I am blessed because I have had ordinary humans begins plugged in and carry me to heights I could never have thought of before. I am not saying it was easier or that they loved every moment of it. They struggled but they decided to change one piece of the world and it made my world possible. Their action made me a reality.

So, today is our last day as undergraduates, and as we prepare for our future, as we move into tomorrow, let us hold fast to the words of Gandhi, in remembering that Compassion is a muscle that gets stronger with use and that progress in our own communities, in our world, can only happen when brilliant minds like us decide to become engaged and act.

Thank you,

Ben