

Good evening.

What a privilege and honor to be here with you tonight to celebrate your achievements and accomplishments. Your parents have every reason to be proud of you and certainly can claim a little credit for their role in helping you get where you are today.

Several years ago, my mathematician son's graduate school professor told him he could write better than any other math student he had ever had. I asked Austin if he attributed that to Bonnie Gochenour, his English teacher at Central. "Partly," he said, "but mostly it's because you read to us and encouraged us to be avid readers. I learned what good writing sounds like in my head."

So parents, you do make a difference, even when you don't realize it.

Before I go on, I'm going to post this talk to my website along with some resources and publications I think you'll find helpful. The URL is www.Heartspoken.com/success, and you'll find books, magazines, articles, websites, blogs, and quotes.

But I want to focus on you students tonight, because either this year or very soon, you are heading out into the world to seek that elusive goal of success that our culture seems to prize so highly. Should that be your goal too? And if so, what the heck does that mean?

Here are two things I want you to remember:

#1: No one can define Success for you except you—not your parents, not your best friend, not your true love—and certainly not the thousands of self-professed gurus out there who will gladly take your money to show you the way to success.

I know, because I've spent plenty of time over my life trying to please others, and I've shelled out an embarrassing amount of money to learn things someone else convinced me I needed to know. I've compared myself to the amazing women and men in the pages of magazines such as *Success* or *Inc* and felt inferior.

But one of the rewards of living a few decades is becoming comfortable in your own skin and realizing you have your own gifts, skills, and purposes in life and happily, you don't have to wait 'til you're my age to learn that valuable lesson.

#2: Before you can define success for yourself, you must know and understand yourself—your real self, the one underneath any masks you may—or may not be—wearing.

Some of you are wildly ambitious and driven. You'll pursue your idea of success with fierce determination, disciplined planning, and sharp focus.

Some of you are more quietly motivated. You're content to be the best you can be in your own little corner of the world.

Some of you may be adventurers who look for life's challenges and opportunities and deal with each one as they come along.

Each of you can be successful, but your version of success might look very different from the next person's.

And that's just as it should be.

I love this analogy for success from motivational speaker and author Brian Tracy... a smorgasbord is a delectable array of foods spread out on a table, waiting to be tasted

and enjoyed. If 100 people go through the line and pick the foods that, to them, seem the most tasty or nutritious or appealing, there will be 100 different assortments of food on those plates, each perfect for that person. Tracy explains, “Success is composed of a great variety of ingredients, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Each person requires a particular combination of these ingredients to feel the very best about himself, or herself, and life.”

Do you know what makes you happy or what bums you out? What things would you choose to do if you could do anything? If you don't know the answers to these questions, take time to think about them and journal your answers.

Most people are not very self-aware, and can benefit from making it a priority to get to know themselves better. On my website page of Success Resources, I've included links to several free personality quizzes that can help. www.Heartspoken.com/success

I thought it might be fun, in the spirit of helping you come up with your own definition of Success, to bust some of the myths surrounding Success. I've collected ten of the best from leaders I respect.

Now the interesting thing about myths is that they often have a kernel of truth embedded in them, but it's important to distinguish between that kernel of truth and those that can be misleading.

Myth #1: Do what you love and the money will follow

I'm sorry, but this is really simplistic. Of course, you should pursue interests and careers that involve activities you enjoy and employ skills you've acquired or have naturally. But to make money doing something, it must also provide value for others in the form of a product or service. When what you bring to the world intersects with the world's need, you're onto something.

Myth #2: Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.

Oh yes, men and women are different, and it pays to understand that, but deeper than those differences is their humanity. That's why when you treat everyone with kindness, patience, and love, you will unlock a door to success.

Myth #3: Success will make your life perfect.

We've all been guilty of this unfortunate self-talk. I'll be happy or successful when _____ (I'm rich enough, thin enough, etc.) The truth is this: there's

no such thing as the perfect life, so focus on happiness now and be grateful for what you have.

Myth #4: You should go to a 4-year college to be successful.

Okay, parents, don't throw rotten tomatoes at me, but college is just not for everyone – or at least not always right after high school. It's exactly right for others. It might be community college or trade school. It might be an internship or entrepreneurial project. Knowledge today can be gotten affordably online. Think carefully about where you want to go in life and consider the best vehicles to get you there.

Myth #5: You've failed if you don't hit your goals or deadlines.

If you're not willing to fail, you'll never take risks. Setbacks and failures make you strong. Keep trying and keep failing, but try to fail forward.

Myth #6: You must sacrifice everything to achieve your goals and dreams.

We have this notion that if you just work hard enough and sacrifice pleasure and enjoyment, you'll eventually achieve success. You'd better think more about balance and happiness as you go along. Otherwise, you'll get to

the end of your life and regret that you sacrificed your health, your peace of mind, and your relationships on the altar of success.

Myth #7: It's all about you.

Successful people never focus only on themselves (even when they practice self-care). They practice the philosophy of service to others so powerfully expressed by inspirational speaker Zig Ziglar: "You can have everything in life you want, if you'll just help enough other people get what they want."

Myth #8: To achieve success, you have to sacrifice your values

Compromise is a good thing when it comes to meeting someone halfway. But you dare not compromise your integrity, your values, or your core beliefs. The Aaron Tippin song said it perfectly: "You've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything."

Myth #9: Success is a steady progression.

I've never known a successful person who didn't have fits and starts, backtracks and delays, failures and screw-ups. Consistent action, even when you don't feel like it, is going to drive you forward every time.

Myth #10: Success is measured by followers.

In this world of social media, it seems that success and influence are measured by views, likes, and followers. I submit that success is measured by those you've impacted with kindness, generosity, or courage. And more often than not, you'll never know how much difference you make in the lives of others.

Whatever happiness and success I have enjoyed in my own life has resulted from these simple tips, mostly learned from my parents:

- Be yourself
- Be authentic – no hidden agendas
- Show up
- Do your work
- Acknowledge and respect others
- Listen attentively
- Treat everyone with kindness and fairness
- Let love be your shield and your guide

So take a deep breath, trust in yourself, and go forth to be wildly successful.

Thank you.