

# WHAT IS SUCCESS?

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## Prizegiving 2011 Twelve Minutes J L Robinson

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Congratulations to all of you who have achieved so much at Fairfield. This evening is a celebration of the results of your hard work and good works and reflects the dedication of the Fairfield staff who-would you agree?-deserve a round of applause for all that **they** have done to ensure that the pupils here reap the rewards of their success?

We have seen numerous awards, presentations, certificates, badges, trophies and prizes presented. From your first, precious sticker in pre-prep to the ultimate prize as a leaver, I hope that you can take a moment to feel proud of all that you have achieved as a pupil or-if you are a parent or a teacher or a friend-feel proud of all that you have**helped** a pupil to achieve. You know, it's important that we do appreciate and remember all of those who encourage us and remember to be grateful that you live in a world where the people around you want to help you to be the best that you can be. Thanks to the hard work and support of special people around us who care about us, we are able to achieve wonderful things.

The stickers, certificates, prizes and trophies are symbols of our success, aren't they, and when we look at them we rightly associate them with hard work and a feeling of achievement. Those awards record your success and remind you that you are able and worthy. I do hope that you (perhaps your parents) have collected together the prizes that have come as a result of achieving many kinds of success throughout your prep school days so that you can have a personal record of achievement that will become your cv, tracking your progress through life.

Just as we like to collect mementos of a special trip; photos of a holiday; souvenirs to remind us of those special times, we can have a few special things that remind us of good times and good feelings about ourselves. It might irritate you that people sometimes say that school days are 'the best days of your life'. For pupils, you can't know whether your days at Fairfield are the best days of your life because you still have lots of life left to live. In a way, you wouldn't want to feel that – as your Fairfield days come to an end - that was it, and the rest of your life will be worse, so it's all downhill from here! However, you can seal in your memory some of the most special times and the most important things that you

have learnt here at Fairfield. As young people, you have been learning, yes, about timetabled subjects, the rules of rugby and netball: coastal erosion and spelling and all the other important aspects of curriculum content that your teachers plan so carefully. Perhaps more importantly than all of those obvious lessons, you have been learning how to live, how to be a good friend, how to communicate with other people... The philosopher Joseph Raz said that a person's happiness in life depends not upon the amount of money or possessions that they have but the quality of their relationships. As humans, we do not live an isolated, lonely life: we are made to live in a community... and Fairfield has provided you with this valuable gift: it has shown you how **you can live in a happy community**, developing effective relationships with others. There isn't a badge for all of you to commemorate that (perhaps it's your uniform and perhaps your school photos will serve that purpose). When you think back to your school days (with apologies to the teachers here), it might not be a lesson about the Fibonacci sequence or learning the declension of the verb avoir that you recall...What you will probably remember forever is how you felt here as a member of this special Fairfield community. You will remember the great teachers: the quirky people: the funny times: the highs and the lows of being here together. You will remember your favourite teachers because of the way they helped, nurtured you and took an interest in you as a person. You will value the way everyone here respects each other and-one day-once you are all grown up and have other experiences to compare your prep school days with, perhaps you will write or say to your parents "thank you".

Life is a journey. It's often described as a winding road. Each of us directs our own way along the road. Each of us has immense promise throughout our lives and when we set a direction for ourselves and aim high and work with dedication towards that target, we experience success. In fact, that's true even if you don't end up being awarded the ultimate prize. The sense of success that you have when you know inside that you have done better this time than you did last time, that's a great feeling. It doesn't always earn you a prize but it's just as worthwhile.

I wonder how many of us in this room have aimed for something and worked hard for something that we really, really wanted yet we did not, in the end, achieve it? It's an important life experience. If we don't fail sometimes then we don't learn how to cope with disappointment. If we don't fail sometimes, perhaps our targets simply aren't high enough.

It's important to aim very, very high, otherwise you won't find out what you can achieve. If you have a special dream for yourself, you **should** follow it because it will excite and motivate you to do well on this journey through life. Now, you just might achieve that ultimate goal... or perhaps you won't, but in the end, it's **the journey towards that goal** that will make you grow and develop as a person. Just imagining success for your life and taking action to achieve positive things will make your life better and worthwhile.

You've had a great start here at Fairfield. Your parents chose you an excellent school and you've had a broad grounding to set you on your way to the next phase. You have achieved

some things and there are other things that you still want to achieve. Use that to drive you forward. Having targets that you believe in for yourself motivates you to really live and not to waste your life slumped in front of the television. What a shame it would be to get to the end of your life and regret all the things that you didn't do. Write yourself a list of ambitions and look at it from time to time: you will be amazed at how much you achieve.

It's true that we all have weaknesses and failures, too. Without those failures and tough times, we can't grow... so when you experience disappointment, just remember that it is through difficulties that we learn about the world and about ourselves. Nietzsche wrote, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger" and it's true that your darkest days and most painful experiences shape you and teach you important life lessons.

Plenty of very successful people have failed. Plenty of millionaires have been bankrupt.... Some TEACHERS even; some of the best teachers I know were very naughty pupils at school: that's how they know what you are planning and how they keep one step ahead of your plotting!

. You just have to look for the signs.

The secret of success in life is that there really isn't a secret. Life really IS what you make it. Studies of successful and happy people who live fulfilling lives suggest that there are certain things that successful people DO have in common.

You might be forgiven for thinking that successful, fulfilled people are especially clever or especially good looking but (happily for most of us) no, that's not the case. People who live great lives are, basically, **hard-working**.

They are **resilient**, which means that they DO experience set backs and they use those experiences to learn how to behave in the future so that they don't make the same mistakes again and they move on; they get on with life, rather than giving up.

Successful people are **determined**. They are focussed on their goals. They really "go for it" and don't allow distractions to get in the way. Then they know that whatever happens, they did their best. What a great way to be: do you know someone who is like that? Are you like that? Can you be like that?

...And if success depends on strength of mind and hard work (and it does), then we can all be successful.

Ten thousand hours of practise of any skill will make you an expert. Think about the amount of time that you have spent on things that you love: on music and sports and study and making friends... It's the dedication and hours of work that pay off.

In the end, your success is up to you. It's your life to do with as you like. I'm sure that you won't waste it. You will want to look back upon your life and feel proud of all that you have

achieved. Yet when you are successful, don't let it go to your head: don't be TOO proud because you might become arrogant. Always remember to be grateful.

Sometimes, our greatest achievements don't earn us trophies and badges. The things that we do won't always be noticed and admired and appreciated but **inside** you will know that you are striving for success and you will judge yourself against your own standards. Living life well is a huge responsibility because you might sometimes do bad things and people might get hurt. Sometimes you might get hurt. You might make bad choices sometimes and things might become difficult. Everyone experiences hard times.

It's how you deal with those difficulties that will shape your character. You need to be able to forgive yourself and others for mistakes; learn from them; focus on becoming stronger; work out how you want to be and who you want to be and move on. Always move forward through your life towards your goals. Be alert to opportunities around you.

And you may well find that those goals and personal aims change over time. Something that you want to achieve this year might not matter to you so much next year. That's alright. It's the striving towards excellence that counts, making you a better and a stronger person with every step of your journey. Enjoy the journey!

So to the leavers we say well done. This end of term seems like the end of something but it is also the beginning of the next chapter for you and that is exciting. You know what you have achieved at Fairfield. You probably know what you want to achieve in the future. It can be a little frightening moving on from prep school. On the one hand you feel ready to move into maturity. On the other hand, you will be sad to leave people behind. Make sure that you thank them while you have the chance and always remember to be grateful for what you have.

So as we applaud all that today's prizewinners have achieved and they bask in our admiration, let's all think of something that we are grateful for; someone whom we want to thank for supporting us and a target that we want to aim for tomorrow. We are all journeying through life and we'll never stop learning. As Napoleon Hill writes: "The only limitations are those that we set up in our own minds."