

Chapel Talk  
Whiz Hutchinson  
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I have been thinking about this talk for a while. Somehow, I have successfully avoided giving a Chapel Talk since we arrived at St. Andrew's 20 years ago. I must have an in with the chaplain. One of the reasons I have avoided doing this is because I am an introvert. Large gatherings of humans are really not my comfort thing. But, I think talking about introversion and extroversion is going to have to be a different chapel talk. More than anything, I have always asked, what is important enough to say that I would say it in front the entire school? So, for tonight, I decided on a short list of the most important things I think we can say to each other.

The cool thing is they are not long complicated statements; they are easy to work in to your regular vocabulary and probably none of them are new to you. But I have come to realize that sometimes we don't learn, or we don't remember to say the important stuff – the stuff that really matters.

I am fortunate enough to have a lot of roles and relationships in my life. I am a daughter, a sister, a friend, a counselor, a teacher, a wife, and a mother. I think that these statements are valuable in each of my roles and I hope in each of yours. So let's jump in.

The first two terms may seem obvious but we should never take them for granted: Please and thank you. Let's start with please. Please is a request not a demand and it makes a big difference. I worked as a waitress a lot when I was in high school and college. I worked at Friendly's in my home town, an upscale restaurant called "Gates" in New Canaan, CT, and a massive clam bar on Cape Cod. When you are a waiter or waitress it is your job to bring people their food and drinks and yes, you are getting paid to do it. But the difference between someone saying, "Bring me a steak" and "can I please have a steak" is night and day. One respects the fact that you are serving but you are not a servant. The other treats you like a subordinate; someone at your command. Think about this next time you are in a restaurant. I have found that once you have been a waitress, you treat servers differently; you acknowledge their humanity and appreciate their efforts on your behalf – you definitely tip better. So say please – to your parents, your teachers, your friends, the people who work in the dining hall and restaurants. Use it every time you are asking something of someone else.

Now, thank you. I have to say that a lot of you are already really good with this one. When I first started teaching at St. Andrew's, I was blown away when students said "thank you" to me at the end of class. I still notice and appreciate it. To be honest, I don't think it ever occurred to me to say thank you to any of my

teachers at any point in my education. And, what's worse is, that it is probably because I wasn't grateful. I didn't really begin to appreciate my education until I was in college. I'm not proud and I'm not making excuses. I have always been a late bloomer. But that's what "thank you" means; it is an expression of gratitude and appreciation. Again, you are acknowledging that someone else has made an effort on your behalf. They have said something kind to you, or done something for you, or helped you do something, or given something to you. All kind acts worthy of your gratitude and appreciation, so express it – please.

After chapel, when students take the time to say thank you to Mr. Hutchinson, it means the world to him. Whether you realize it or not, you are acknowledging the hours that he put into writing a sermon, arranging the service, getting the flowers, baking the bread for communion which he does every Saturday night – both with and without gluten. He does all of this for you, because he believes it is valuable and meaningful. You may not be crazy about chapel, and you don't have to share all of the same beliefs to appreciate the effort and the care that goes into it.

At St. Andrew's there is so much we each have to be grateful for on a daily basis – other people make our food for us 3 times a day, other people clean our spaces for us, rake leaves, plow snow, line the fields, guard our safety, keep our boilers running, take care of us when we are sick or injured, the list is unending. I am so grateful for and to all of the people who make this community a safe and healthy place to live and work. I am particularly grateful to the people I work with on a daily basis who make life an adventure: Mrs. Brownlee and Ms. Roznowski. If you don't know these two wonderful women who serve this community as counselors, then get to know them. They are funny and smart and caring.

The next important thing to learn to ask is, "can I help you?"

As I've just said, we depend on other people on a daily basis, which also means other people depend on us. So be dependable – be responsible. I've always liked the word: response able. It means we are able to respond when people need us to. Are you response-able? The surest way to know if someone can benefit from your help, is to ask, "can I help you?" Again, I think of the myriad times that people in this community have offered me help. Whether it is when my arms are full and I am approaching one of the sets of big, heavy doors in the front of Founders and someone runs up to hold them open for me or when I need a class covered because I need to go see my son in college, we all need other people's help on a regular basis. So, offer it up. If someone says, "no thanks, I'm good." Great, you've made sure. And you've let them know that there is someone available to help them if they need it.

Equally important and for many far more difficult is, “Can you help me?” I want to be clear; I believe that asking for help when you need it is a strength, not a weakness. Accurately assessing your situation and realizing that you would benefit from, or do better, with someone else’s assistance takes intelligence. How many of you have sought out one of your teachers for “extra help”? If you haven’t, I urge you to do this. It is one of the reasons we, the faculty, choose to work at a boarding school. We value being available to students beyond just our class time together. If we tell you to come see us for help, we mean it.

Remember, we are social animals. There is little that we do or that we can do without each other. We do not live, work, or thrive in isolation. We thrive in community where we can ask each other for assistance. Do not suffer or struggle in isolation if you don’t need to. Go to a friend, an advisor, a teacher, a parent, a counselor, and ask for help.

Another important thing to be able to say is, “I made a mistake”. No one is perfect, we are all human and we make mistakes – all the time. It is important to acknowledge our fallibility, our humanity, our lack of perfection with each other, don’t you think? When we are feeling low, we often tend to think that everyone else seems to be successful in every way, academically, athletically, socially, while we are struggling along. If we acknowledge our mistakes, our failures with one another, maybe we will all feel a little bit better about our own struggles. We might realize that everyone has a game face that they wear when they are walking around campus, but it doesn’t mean that there aren’t struggles going on under the surface.

Once we acknowledge our mistakes, it is important to see if our mistakes, our words or actions, have negatively affected someone else. If they have, then we should address our wrongs with an apology. “I’m sorry.” It’s amazing how powerful those words can be. When we recognize that our actions have offended or hurt another person and we say we are sorry, we are letting them know that we care about them and we regret that we have caused them pain. Sometimes it’s a small offense, like turning the light on when your roommate is sleeping. Sometimes, we do not intend to do wrong but nonetheless, our actions adversely affect someone else. Even if it wasn’t intentional, you should still say you are sorry. Then, of course, there are the times that we knowingly do something that will cause another person distress.

When I am upset because someone has done something to me that I consider an offense, a wrong, it is amazing how quickly my emotions dissipate when I receive an apology. Seriously, it takes all of the wind out of my “I’ve been wronged” sails! Okay, this person is human just like me. He or she made a mistake and now they are owning it, taking responsibility for it, saying they are sorry. I can live with that!

And, of course, what follows I'm sorry? I forgive you. So important. Letting someone know that you accept their apology and you are ready to move on is a gift to both of you. There is a saying that not forgiving someone is like drinking poison yourself and expecting the other person to get sick. If we hold onto wrongs, hold them against other people, we are holding ourselves back. I think the same is true of forgiving oneself. As I've said, we all make mistakes. It is important not to hang on to our own mistakes either. Learn what you can from your mistakes, forgive yourself, and move on.

The last and most important thing to say to others is, "I love you." While I think I have made a lot of mistakes as a parent, one thing I think Jay and I have done well is taught our kid to be loving. He never says good-bye to us in person or on the phone without saying "I love you". Even if I have just succeeded in being the most embarrassing parent in the world. Something I am exceedingly good at by the way - I sing and dance in public, I talk to strangers all the time and, well, I'm just my embarrassing self, and Jack still says I love you. When I picked him up at the end of his second year of college last year, I witnessed him saying good-bye to a bunch of his close friends on the lacrosse team. As he hugged each brawny guy good-bye, they each said, I love you to each other. It was awesome.

I know I am fortunate. In addition to my wonderful son and husband, there are so many people, and well, non-people that I have loved and do love in my life. My parents, my brother, his wife and two daughters, Jay's mother and step-father (not an easy man to love but I do love him), his sister, who is one of my best friends, his brother and his wife and two sons. My friends; Betty, Carrie, Pam, Anne, Dave, Allison, Lindsay, John . . . at this point in my life it is a long list. Some are old, some are new, some are near, some are far, some are dead and I still love them. I also love a lot of other animals besides human beings. In fact, I may someday give another chapel talk about the importance of other species in our lives. For now, let me just say that I have shared my life and home with many wonderful dogs and cats - lots of cats - over the years. Right now, we live with: Ajax, a large newfoundland with enough energy and personality to bowl you over – a definite extrovert; Pooka, my sweet old boy who goes everywhere he possibly can with me - like me, he is an introvert; our two cats Widget - a male tuxedo cat - and Fig - a longhaired female who does parkour, meaning she runs part way up the wall, does a flip, and usually lands on top of Pooka. I also love a lot of other species, such as hedgehogs, pigs, parrots, eagles, horses, gorillas, chimpanzees, tigers, lions . . . you get the idea, but I have decided that these animals are better off not living with me, or me with them. So, don't ever ask me if I am a dog or a cat person, because I will explain to you that this is a false dichotomy and that I love not only both cats and dogs but many other animals as well, but again, that is another Chapel Talk altogether.

I also love my students. Yes, I realize that this is a potentially iffy thing to say in today's careful climate, but I do – I love my students. I love the kids that I teach, my advisees, and the kids that I see in counseling, which

also means I love my work. How lucky am I? Obviously, there are many different kinds of love – platonic, romantic, parental, -- and I encourage you to experience and express as many of them as you can in your life. As, Lin Manuel Miranda said, “love is love is love is love is love.” Love as many people as you can, as many animals as you can, and let them know how you feel. Say, I love you. I think that has a lot to do with why we are all here in the first place – I mean on this earth, living with each other. To love and to be loved.

I hope you all read the email that Mrs. Roach sent out this week with a quote from Richard Blanco about why his time at St. Andrew’s was so memorable. He said that “we demonstrated a mutual love among students, faculty members, and staff, a love that teaches beyond what is teachable and transforms us into our brightest, truest, and most selfless selves.” Wow! That’s us, you guys! We’ve got this!

So that’s it – my big 8: please, thank you, can I help you, can you help me, I made a mistake, I’m sorry, I forgive you, and I love you. And remember, it is not just that you say these things it is also important how you say them. It needs to be sincere and heartfelt. So, let me end by saying, thank you for listening to me tonight. And I love you for being the spectacular, mistake-making human beings that you all are.