

BHJS Speech Day speech 2019 by Malcolm Au

School Supervisor, Principal Wong, teachers, parents, graduating students, ladies and gentlemen.
Good Morning!

Firstly, let me congratulate the graduating class; I wish you much success and happiness.

I fondly remember standing on this stage when I was in Form 3. That was a cold winter morning. Our Principal Mrs Helen Wong was addressing the morning assembly. She was not in a very good mood and demanded all of us to be quiet and sit up straight. I don't know what happened, but I had an urge to speak to the classmate next to me. The result was that I had the honour of standing on stage in that corner facing the entire school holding my ears.

I really appreciated the patience and care BHJS gave me despite all of my shortcomings, and I am forever indebted to the school. A big thank you to the school and my teachers.

This opportunity to speak to you permits me to reflect on my life. In one's life one normally makes many decisions, big and small. These decisions very often shape one's life. The most important element in making good decisions is the mind-set when key decisions are being made.

Many of the decisions I made were wrong, but when I counted the decisions I made that were right, I found that there are 3 mind-sets which have helped shape my thinking process that I would like to share with you.

1. All decisions need to be executed. The difficulty in execution frequently discourages one from making the right decision or leads one to pick an easier but less desirable decision.

So what is the solution? What is the right mind-set?

Two years ago, my now 9-year-old granddaughter came to stay overnight at our apartment. In the morning, after a big breakfast, I thought as a grandparent, I need to teach her something new. She had just learnt addition. I suggested teaching her how to add 4 digit numbers.

Immediately she said, "No, no, no, Gong Gong, it is too difficult. I only know how to add one digit numbers."

I took out a big piece of paper and started with $2+2$ and she gladly wrote down 4. I followed with some encouragement, like saying she was a math genius and offered her chocolate. Then I proceeded to get her to do something more difficult e.g. $7+8$ and she was very happy to get the correct answer. Afterwards, I proceeded to let her do $22+33$ and the math genius gladly wrote down 55. By repeating this process, she learned how to do 4 digit plus 4 digit addition. Since all these are written down on paper, I asked her to go home and teach her mom to become a math genius.

I was very proud of myself, not because she learnt 4 digit addition but because she had learnt that all perceived big difficulties can be broken down into smaller difficulties. Now, every time I challenge her to face difficulties that she feels she cannot handle, she will say, “Gong Gong, I will try.”

I find this mind-set very useful and I hope it will be useful to you too.

1. “Many times when we face a decision, we feel like we run out of good options”. The reason why our options are limited is because we only think from our own point of view. In other words, we are bound by our own view. If we can think by putting ourselves into other’s shoes, we may find we have more and sometimes better options.

When I was Managing Director for Campbell’s Soups in Asia, our Campbell’s Soups (金寶湯) was doing very well but another product, Swanson Chicken Broth (史雲生清鷄湯) was not. At that time, we sold only 1500 cases of Swanson Chicken Broth annually and my target was to increase sales tenfold.

The traditional marketing mind-set is to advertise product benefits, do promotions, lower prices etc. However, these are not very good marketing options as they are expensive and are not very effective. I wanted to find better options.

So we decided to put ourselves in the shoes of the housewives to understand them better. Through market research we found that housewives in HK wanted to get praise easily from their husbands. Housewives complained that they did not get enough praise from their husbands. For the housewives, the two key words were “easy” and “get praise”. Opening a can is easy, but to get praise is difficult.

We then interviewed the husbands and found out that husbands considered a tasty meal, especially a tasty soup at dinner time after a hard day’s work, equated to tender loving care from the wife. A husband’s major preference was long boiled 老火湯 soup, but a very tasty short boiled 滾湯 soup with vegetables and pieces of meat was also appreciated.

When we merged the needs of the husbands and the wives, we confirmed that our Swanson Chicken broth could satisfy both the husband’s need for a tasty soup, and also, the housewife’s desire for something very easy to make resulting in praise.

We decided to forsake the expensive traditional product advertising approach and use only TV. As you know, cooking shows are shown in the mid-afternoon with very low advertising costs and the target is housewives. Normal advertising is at prime time and can easily be ten times more costly. This allowed us to launch our product using a very low cost, very effective, more focused

campaign. In two years' time after the launch, we were selling at a pace of 60,000 cases a year and now Swanson Chicken broth has become one of the bestselling food products in Hong Kong.

The mind-set of "putting yourself in other's shoes" will unexpectedly give you many new options.

2. "We normally fall in love with our own decisions. We tend to disagree or ignore advice."

I retired 16 years ago at 53 years old and I didn't know what to do with myself for the rest of my life, and I needed to find a new direction. My inclination was to do something very similar to what I did before, that is, to make more money and buy more stuff.

At that time, my wife, who has always been supportive of me, told me a few times that I have a "Poor Man's Mentality". I was not really happy when she said that. I was also wondering why she would say that.

She was correct in that I was born poor and I grew up with my parents, 2 siblings and my grandmother, 6 people, living in Hung Hum in a 340 sq. ft. government subsidized flat until I was 18 years old. However that didn't mean I had a poor man's mentality.

After two years of pondering on my life, I finally realized that my wife was correct. Since I was born poor, I had a tendency to accumulate things, whether it was monetary or material things, probably due to insecurity. By the time I retired, I had enough to last me a lifetime and there was no need to accumulate more. As a matter of fact, I can share what I have with other people.

By listening to my wife, I began to turn from accumulating to sharing. I began to give free lectures, advise entrepreneurs in their start-ups, start a foundation encouraging students to have dreams etc. It changed my life drastically and, surprisingly, by sharing more, I actually accumulated more. I accumulated a lot more friendships and love from the people I helped and surprisingly accumulated more money as entrepreneurs were willing to pay me for my advice with their company shares. Sharing my resources reminds me of the 校训：非以役人，乃役於人

The mind-set is: don't easily fall in love with your own decisions. Listen and digest advice from the people who love you. The final decision is still yours.

Fellow students, you are entering a very critical part of your life as you will be acquiring more freedom and opportunities to control your life. Controlling your life means you will have to make critical decisions that will have important impacts on the rest of your life. The mind-set I talked about worked for me and I hope it will work for you too.

In summary, when you make decisions please consider the following:

1. Try breaking down big problems into smaller manageable problems.
2. You will find a lot more and better options when you try to put yourself in other people's shoes.
3. Listen to other's opinions before making your final decision. The decision is still yours.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you, I wish you all a healthy and happy life.