

Jamie Hyneman's Commencement Speech (excerpt) Villanova University, 2010 (Excerpt)

3:30 Min.

Context: Jaimie Hyneman is one of the stars of the Discovery Channel's hit show, Mythbusters, which has done more to popularize science than any recent program.

....As your finals are over, and you look toward the future, you should reflect and ask yourselves: How am I different today? How am I different from when I first walked on campus?

That is, after all, an underlying point of getting an education: to change yourselves for the better. I am sure you've all improved in many ways. And yet, no matter how great the books, how clever the professors, and how hard you studied, you can't possibly have learned everything you'll ever need to know, so where exactly does that leave you?

While I wouldn't encourage people to be exactly like me — there's a scary thought — I am nothing if not adventurous, and I have observed some things that I think may be helpful to you, things that have come from my own peculiar path. The first is something that seems to escape a lot of people.

People are often so goal oriented, so focused on the finish line, that it's all too easy to lose track of how we are getting there, and what we are actually doing at any given point.

I'm not just talking about just stopping now and then to smell the roses.

My thought is that the best way to move ahead is to focus on asking the right questions along the way. It sometimes amounts to placing more importance on the question than the answer. Something as simple as asking yourself what you are really looking for is often missed, but it becomes evident how important it is when you realize that once you have a very clear idea about what question is, the answer is often just sitting there waiting for you.

This is where I really get excited; this is where the curiosity, the joy of exploration comes in. This *IS* the big adventure! Regardless of your academic discipline, you should ask yourselves: What's over there, around that corner? What will happen if I do this? What do I really want? Why did that happen?

Just because you are an adult does not mean you should stop playing with things like a child or even like a puppy does. Poke something with a stick, TRY things, experiment. Run around and wave your arms. (Just not right now.)

A lot of people just aren't so persistent about asking such questions — and find themselves someplace they never wanted to be. Others can't wait to see what is around the next corner, on the top of the next hill. Those are the people that are curious, people who are asking questions and who are actually GOING someplace.

And of course there is the word — should — as in *should* I be doing this? Ethical behavior, taking self responsibility — admirable traits that you can only maintain by constantly questioning yourself and your world.

On the other end of the spectrum, you can't just go around asking unanswerable questions and waving your arms — you have to go after those answers, make decisions, roll up those sleeves and

DO something. Realize you may be making the wrong decision, but take your best shot and go full speed ahead.

At this point things change. Now you need to focus. Your odds of success in things you attempt go up radically if you are methodical and diligent. If you want to have a say in how your lives turn out, you need to be practical about it.

...I want to emphasize this because I've tried all sorts of things, and I've learned that I can pretty much do anything I've wanted to as long as I was methodical and diligent about it. It may not sound very exciting really, but it works! ...

Lastly, an important point. Since I hopefully have convinced all of you graduates to run around playfully asking questions, while being diligent and methodical, there still is more to leading a successful life and more to being a worthy graduate of Villanova.

Of all the things you do in life or all the questions you ponder, I would like you to keep kindness at the top of the list. Are you being kind in all you do? In your professional life? In your family life? In your dealings with others? Are you kind? Shouldn't you be? We owe it to our children, to our children's children, and to all the other things in our world to be kind to them and each other.

There is no question you can ask that will show that this isn't so. So ask those questions, be diligent and be methodical — these traits will all help you progress in the grand adventures you will all face. But to make the adventures all worthwhile, to make your successes truly rewarding ... I ask you to be kind in everything you do, without fail and above all.

Thank you.