

Adm. William McRaven Commencement at Univ. of Texas 2014 (Excerpts)

3:13 min

William Harry McRaven is a retired United States Navy admiral who last served as the ninth commander of the United States Special Operations Command from August 8, 2011, to August 28, 2014. He is now the President of the University of Texas.

The University's slogan is, "*What starts here changes the world.*"

I have to admit—I kinda like it. "What starts here changes the world." Tonight there are almost 8,000 students graduating from UT. I've been told that the average American will meet 10,000 people in their life time.

That's a lot of folks.

But, if every one of you changed the lives of just ten people—and each one of those folks changed the lives of another ten people—just ten—then in five generations—125 years—the class of 2014 will have changed the lives of 800 million people.

800 million people—think of it—over twice the population of the United States. Go one more generation and you can change the entire population of the world—8 billion people.

If you think it's hard to change the lives of ten people—change their lives forever—you're wrong. I saw it happen every day in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A young Army officer makes a decision to go left instead of right down a road in Baghdad and the ten soldiers in his squad are saved from close-in ambush.

...But, if you think about it, not only were these soldiers saved by the decisions of one person, but their children yet unborn—were also saved. And their children's children—were saved.

Generations were saved by one decision—by one person.

But changing the world can happen anywhere and anyone can do it.

So, what starts here can indeed change the world, but the question is...what will the world look like after you change it?

Well, I am confident that it will look much, much better, but if you will humor this old sailor for just a moment, I have a few suggestions that may help you on your way to a better a world.

And while these lessons were learned during my time in the military, I can assure you that it matters not whether you ever served a day in uniform..

I have been a Navy SEAL for 36 years. But it all began when I left for Basic SEAL training in Coronado, California. To me basic SEAL training was a life time of challenges crammed into six months.

Every morning in basic SEAL training, my instructors, who at the time were all Vietnam veterans, would show up in my barracks room and the first thing they would inspect was your bed.

It was a simple task—mundane at best. But every morning we were required to make our bed to perfection. It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, particularly in light of the fact that we were aspiring to be real warriors, tough battle hardened SEALs—but the wisdom of this simple act has been proven to me many times over.

If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another.

By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter.

If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right.

And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made—that you made—and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.

If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.

Other ideas are as simple.

Find someone to help you through life.

Respect everyone.

Know that life is not fair and that you will fail often, but if you take some risks, step up when the times are toughest, face down the bullies, lift up the downtrodden and never, ever give up—if you do these things, then next generation and the generations that follow will live in a world far better than the one we have today and—what started here will indeed have changed the world—for the better.

Thank you very much.