



NEW PLYMOUTH BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL
TE KURA TAMATĀNE O NGĀMOTU

HEADMASTER'S AWARD DINNER ADDRESS
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Good is the Enemy of Great

There is a disease sweeping through humankind. It is not specific to a continent, race, age group or gender. No community, family or school is immune. There are known cures and antidotes but these cannot be injected, inhaled or swallowed.

There are varying strains of this disease, from the minor cases that come and go - irregular and temporary like a morning frost, to the debilitating and life altering, all-encompassing plague that sets in and swallows everything in its path, destroying everything that it touches. It is inescapable, rapid, rabid, uncontrollable and dangerous.

The disease is Mediocrity. Mediocrity is the disease we are fighting at NPBHS, mediocrity is the silent killer of potential, achievement and greatness. Mediocrity is everything this evening isn't. Mediocrity is bad and our enemy.

Welcome to the evening doing everything it can to combat mediocrity, welcome to the parents and caregivers of students who have raised and nurtured young men who are anything but mediocre.

Welcome to the staff and coaches who are fighting mediocrity with everything they have got. We haven't won all battles with mediocrity but we won't give up.

Welcome to the supportive partners who support others to extinguish mediocrity like the dirty smouldering flame it is.

There was a relatively famous book written in 2001 by a man named Jim Collins called Good to Great. It is a book that talks about not just being good but being great, and how to do this. It is a recipe book almost on how to achieve greatness. It's well worth the read.

In his book he has this famous quote. "Good is the enemy of great".

Good is the enemy of great. It is something I have always remembered. It is very appropriate quote for



this topic, very appropriate for this evening.

If we focus just on being good we will miss the chance, the window of opportunity to be great. We have limited years on this planet, let's make them the best they can possibly be for us and those around us.

To be great Jim Collins says you must be disciplined, disciplined in thought and disciplined in action. You also must be prepared to be brutally honest with others but most importantly brutally honest with yourself.

Now some of you may be sitting here thinking, "I will never be an Olympic champion, World Record holder, Nobel Prize Winner". Correct - not all of you will.

Greatness is not being the world's best but being the best you can be. Making the most of your potential, the potential you have been served. Now that is attainable for everyone in this room.

It is also higher than you actually think it is because the human mind will be what stops you achieving, or alternatively what enables you to achieve. The body just follows along for the ride. You have the choice on which path it takes.

Muhammed Ali said - if your dreams don't scare you, they are probably not big enough. How many here sitting in this room are scared of their dreams - I hope most of you. If you don't have some that are frightening the heck out of you, find them quick!

Some in the community will be saying, look at NPBHS in their tiger jackets, look at them being all proud and holding up students on pedestals. Telling others this is the cream of the crop. Differentiating them from others.

Some might say, how dare NPBHS say they are going to be the example for all boys schools in NZ. How arrogant. Well, it's only arrogant if we are doing it to crush other schools. If that is our motivation - I couldn't care less about the other schools' performance. They are not our sole motivation, they are not our focus.

We are our primary focus and we are going to be the best we can be. The minute we try and be like other schools, we will limit our potential. Because I believe our potential hasn't been attained, or even seen yet.

To the naysayers, the tall poppy cutting minority, it is normal and healthy to celebrate excellence, it is normal and healthy to keep the score. It is normal and healthy to want to win and achieve. It is normal and healthy to acknowledge success and achievement.

Human beings are competitive. It is an instinct. We needed to be competitive to survive. We needed to catch and gather our food. If we weren't competitive, driven, we would starve.



That's not to say we will be arrogant in the process, unsportsmanlike, egocentric, masochistic, maniacal, narcissistic. Or in simplistic terms - we won't be dicks about it.

We will be great men not just good men, we will be honourable and we will be humble. Boy will we fight, but we will fight fair, hard and always with integrity.

I want to share with you a story about an important piece of NZ history that should help illustrate the difference of how to get from good to great.

It is about an ordinary man, whom I respect tremendously, from Dunedin called Danyon Joseph Loader. Danyon was our greatest ever swimmer and arguably one of our greatest Olympians.

Danyon at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta won the Gold Medal in the 200M Freestyle. One of the premier events in the swimming programme. Danyon, during his gold medal ceremony, was dead pan. No expression on his face. He was fidgety, he looked almost distracted and like he didn't want to be there. He certainly wasn't smiling. He wasn't clutching his heart, singing the national anthem. There were no tears or obvious signs of joy.

Can you imagine having won a gold medal and being on the World Stage. Achieving 1st place for being the best of the best in the World? Showing no emotion.

Danyon was criticised heavily in the media. Who is this almost non-New Zealand athlete. Who is this disrespectful creature. We are proud of him, why isn't he proud? Why isn't he jumping up and down. He has let us down. He didn't even cry or wave to the crowd. Some of the public almost disowned him.

A day later he swam in the 200M Fly (an event he had won silver in at the previous Olympics and yet he failed to make the final). Once again the media were critical.

Well, a few days later Danyon stood on the blocks at the Atlanta pool and swam a phenomenal race to win gold in the 400M Freestyle. Two gold's at the same Olympics. Danyon stood on the medal dais, smiled and waved and was even emotional. He was genuinely moved by his achievements.

When he was interviewed, many many years later, he was asked why he was so unemotional after his first gold medal, he said this:

How could I be happy, how could I smile, I had not achieved my goal. I was only part way there. All I could think about was my plan to achieve my goal. The 200M fly was part of that plan. My plan to achieve for me, my greatness. Two gold medals at Atlanta. One gold would have been a failure in my eyes. Sure it was good but not good enough. I couldn't let myself take my eye off that prize for a second. Sometimes it is just as important to put the good experiences behind you as the poor ones.

If there was ever an example of good being the enemy of great this is it. We must not let distractions stop us from achieving our greatness however we have defined that.

What are your distractions, what are the things stopping you from achieving greatness?

Finally I will leave you with this quote, again from Muhammad Ali. It is a good quote because we often put excuses up to achieving greatness. "Excuses equal mediocrity".



Impossible.

Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.

Thank you.

P J Veric Headmaster

