

Dear students,

I've been asked to write a short summary on what I talked about during my recent visit to Wright State. Since the Internet is slowly killing proper narrative prose, I've decided to follow the *mode du jour* and write this as a list. As I mentioned before, I'm not special, and I haven't done anything that anyone else couldn't do, so please take any advice that I give with the appropriate dosage of salt.

### **Don't be afraid of hard work**

An essential part of the American Dream is predicated upon the idea that success is inevitable for those willing to work hard enough. While time has proven this to be somewhat fallacious, it's not without merit. In having been essentially raised by grandparents who grew up during the Great Depression, the importance of a strong work ethic wasn't lost on me, and it has served me well.

Those who do not work hard will *probably not succeed*, but those who work hard *might succeed*. Be proactive in your success; don't be afraid of working hard for your goals. It will feel so much more gratifying when you succeed.

### **Luck = preparation + opportunity**

I don't believe in fate, destiny, or Divine Intervention. I believe that you can make your own luck by working hard and creating opportunities for yourself. There are plenty of people in this world who work hard, but who fail to recognize opportunity when it comes. Learning to recognize when something might be a good opportunity for you is the key.

Additionally, try to create your own opportunities by being proactive. In the real world, there are two kinds of people; those who look at what happens, and those who make things happen. Do what you can to put yourself in the latter group.

### **Learn to "roll with it"**

My first job in Moscow was at a daycare/preschool where I was supposed to teach 4 year old children to speak English. We had two sections: I was supposed to teach 4A, and a colleague was supposed to teach 4B. My colleague showed up before me on that first day of school, setting up his seating schema and all of his teaching materials in the 4A classroom. Rather than pitch a fit about him having invaded my classroom, we just *rolled with it* and agreed to swap classes.

As it turns out, one of the 4B students was this Finnish girl, and we became pretty close with her parents. This led to that, which ultimately led to us deciding to move to Finland. The past eight years of our lives have hinged on a completely arbitrary decision made in about 10 seconds.

The point of all this is that you never *\*really\** know where life is going to take you, and you'll get a lot more out of it if you keep an open mind and just *roll with it*.

### **Take risks; don't be afraid of failure...**

Whether you're deciding to study abroad, change your major, start a new job...whatever you do, don't be afraid of failure. For the most part, in most cases, you probably only have everything to gain and nothing to lose. When we decided to move to Russia, it was with the firm understanding that, in the

absolute worst case scenario, we could always fly back to Dayton and try to do something else. Thinking about that phase of our lives in those terms was very liberating; nothing cripples the mind like fear.

### **...but always have a plan.**

Having said that, don't be irresponsible with the decisions you make. Buying a one-way ticket to anywhere without a plan is probably not going to end well. Remember Christopher McCandless? Don't be a statistic; there are probably people that care about you.

### **Be great in your own way, and on your own terms**

Too many of us make the mistake of comparing ourselves to someone else, and then feeling inadequate as a result. While it's healthy to look at the accomplishments of others to see what's humanly possible, a big part of growing into a mature adult is learning to recognize your strengths and weaknesses, and then figuring out how to leverage that knowledge into a successful life. There are a lot of software engineers who are far more talented than I am technically, and if I were to spend all my time comparing myself to them I'd never get out of bed. Instead I focus on what I bring to the job that they can't; strong multicultural experience, great communications skills, and the differing perspective of someone who's come to software development after having changed careers once or twice. I try to find ways to be great *in my own way*.

Also, never compromise your personal integrity in the search of greatness. A person's integrity is unique, valuable, and easily lost. If an opportunity ever expects you to compromise your values as a human being, then it's likely not worth pursuing.

### **Read philosophy**

Aside from studying and living abroad, nothing has really affected my life as much as when I started studying philosophy. I recommend it to anyone as a way to open one's mind to viewing life from a variety of perspectives. Wright State actually offers an introductory philosophy course ("Great Books", as part of the core curriculum) which was very good, at least when I took it. Otherwise, the Internet is a great resource.

### **Learn to enjoy life**

"Life isn't always fair; in fact, it is often outright horrible." Resilience and a good attitude will get you further than you might think. When life knocks you down (and it will, time and time again), get up, brush yourself off, and keep pushing forward with a smile on your face. You'll be glad you did when you eventually catch a break.

Also, and I know this is embarrassingly cliché, but learn to enjoy the small things in life. Don't be so goal-oriented to where you stop seeing what's great about a beautiful sunrise, a delicious meal, or interesting art. Life is much more about the journey than the destination.