

Faculty Address

I'm going to begin my speech today by letting all of you in on a closely guarded secret... teachers are hypocrites. Now, for the distinguished Class of 2019, this is likely no surprise. Those who joined us in Kindergarten have just completed a thirteen-year study of teachers at Saint George's and are well aware of our faults. Charlie is on the 18th year of his field research. For myself, I wasn't aware of how blatantly this hypocrisy extended until I attended my first conference as a teacher. There I witnessed teachers showing up late, not paying attention, talking while others were speaking, constantly on their cell phones, all behavior we would rail against in our own classes. My fellow teachers... most of us are the worst of hypocrites.

I make this admission because I only have one piece of advice for this year's graduates, but if I'm being honest, I haven't always obeyed it myself. In fact, I know that some of the students sitting here today have witnessed me break it. But, to again be honest, it's also clear to me that when I HAVE followed this advice, I have been a better colleague or friend, a better husband or father, basically, I've been a better person. So, despite my hypocrisy, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Class of 2019, here is my advice to you. In all aspects of your life "Always punch up. Never punch down."

This advice is difficult to follow. Partially because it runs counter to some elements of rationality. Punching down means going after those who are weaker or more vulnerable than ourselves. And let's face it, they make easier targets. And we unfortunately have examples in the public eye of plenty of prominent figures, whether in media or business or sports, or even some of the highest political offices in the country, who regularly punch downwards. But, graduates, I firmly believe you will be more likely to find success, whether in your professional or personal lives if you strive to never do so.

Professionally, while stories abound about cutthroat executives rising through toxic ranks (and those people do exist), for the most part this isn't the case. The majority of successful leaders are those who team-build and make those around them better. Whether in business or academics, don't punch down and to the best of your ability, avoid those who do. You will rise higher. That recommendation for the internship or grad school, or that fabled thing called a desirable job or a promotion, all are more likely.

If I may be so bold, this advice works for personal relationships as well. I'm not claiming to be some relationship guru, but those who have met my wife pretty much universally agree on one thing: I married well above my station. So I must be on to something. While we all will slip up from time to time, if you find yourself in a relationship with someone who regularly punches down, even if it's never directed at you, you need to leave. Honestly, you can do better. And sadly, one day it will be directed at you.

I make all of this advice not out of some purely compassionate concern for others. As the seniors who have been my students know, that's not exactly my style. Rather, I would argue that you should endeavor to only punch upwards purely out of selfishness, because in doing so, you will see more success in life. Now in keeping with one of Adam Smith's central arguments, if all of us pursuing this idea out of self-interest also results in the common good, so much the better.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our world needs more who would speak truth to power, who will defend the vulnerable, who will walk the harder path. As you go out into the world, I wish you the best of luck. And please, punch up.

— Josh Hayes,

Upper School History/Econ Teacher



**Josh Hayes
addresses the
Class of 2019**