

Where will I be and what will I be doing in 20 years? Little did I know that I was about to embark on a long journey that would bring me to the very place where first I asked myself that question, however, from a different perspective. Twenty years ago, almost to the date, I sat in Schaeffer Auditorium here at Kutztown University with about 700 of my fellow first year students as we anxiously awaited the beginning of our new lives, away from home, and on our own. I remember being excited about new classes, advanced learning and meeting new people. Then I remember being completely deflated when one of the speakers shared with us that it was likely that the person sitting to either side of us would not make it to graduation day. This idea of a 50% failure rate was to say the least, ominous and worrisome. My excitement turned to anxiety and I began to be worried that I, an average high school student, would never rise to the challenge of this new world. Well, I gladly report to you that I did however; it was not always without difficulty. In fact, there were times I almost succumbed to the effects of self doubt, lack of motivation, and stubbornness and simply gave up. So what kept me going? Well, it was that simple question, where will I be in twenty years? I knew there was one thing that I could do well and wanted to do it more than anything else, that was to be a musician and to work with talented students on the university level and after many years of not giving up, I now have the wonderful opportunity to work with some of the most talented students I have ever met. When I was asked to address you today, I was very excited and I immediately began to think of the many things I could share with you today. So, I began to look at my academic career and analyzed what enabled me to persevere and to never throw in the towel. This is what I would like to share with you.

There will be many experiences that will change your perspective on life. Many of these you will experience here at KU. You may have heard the expression of “comfort zone” used to describe one’s familiarity with circumstances or events and one’s willingness to move or not move beyond the borders of that familiarity. I will tell you now to be prepared for the expansion of your comfort zone. This may require blasting in some cases, but I assure you, it will be expanded. One of the most difficult things for students to keep in balance is how they should react to information that is contrary to the information which they already understand as truth. As a music teacher, every year I encounter students who have learned techniques from a former teacher who they hold in

high esteem. If I suggest a technique that is contrary to what the student is already accustomed, my request is often defensively met with resistance. I have learned to precede the first lesson with a disclaimer that I am not discrediting what they have learned, but challenging them to embrace something new. Consequently, instead of knowing one way, the student now knows two and the expansion can begin. This is not to say you cannot ask questions but you should also trust that your instructors are sharing with you the information you need to fully understand the subject matter. This brings me to my second point, which is trust.

As students, sometimes what we are learning might not immediately make sense to us but we must trust that the information we are receiving is valid and necessary. Again, drawing on my personal subject, music, there are some things that are very difficult for students to understand why we follow certain procedures. As a young student, I myself resisted learning a particular technique claiming that I could perform better doing it “my way”. Looking back, I was obnoxious in my questioning the value of what was in my opinion, “such a waste of time.” After reluctantly following my professor’s instruction it finally came to me, man, this really does help. I remember realizing the importance of trust in the teacher student relationship and although I was very knowledgeable in my subject for my age, I did not know everything. Once this barrier was down, my advancement was much quicker and the learning process was more enjoyable. It is important to achieve a balance between doubt and trust. Doubt can lead us to ask very important questions but by trusting the answers we build strong foundations that enable you to forge ahead as leaders in your own fields.

I would like to refer back to the earlier story, the story about the persons sitting next to you now; however, I would like to change the message as it reflects more accurately what I feel is one of the most important points of this speech, and that is community. Community is probably the single most powerful influence in my success as a student and as a professional. There were many days I thought about not going to the practice room or studying for a test but I did not want my peers to think I was not pulling my weight. I knew that my classmates were preparing and I did not want to lose their respect and I knew that if needed, I was there to help motivate them in the same way. We helped each other grow, advance, and now those friends I had in college are my

professional colleagues. My professors were superior role models and they served as a conduit of information but it was my friends, my colleagues who provided support, motivation, and inspiration. Watching them advance and seeing the profound impact that had on their development, motivated and inspired me to want the same experience. Look around, the people who are in this room, the class of 2011, they are here for you and you should be here for them. I remember the conversations I had with my friends over lunch or coffee. They often began with “when I am finished with school....” or “when I am a pro...” or.....you get the idea. The dreaming of that day when we have made it, the idea of “when I am”.....can have a profound effect....it is almost magical in its power. Dream, learn, and plan your future together then get to work.

This year, I have had the unbelievable opportunity to travel with a group of KU students to France, Argentina and Thailand where they earned invitations to perform on what generally are recognized as professional events. These students are members of the KU Percussion Ensemble and as individuals, they are good, solid performers but when they join together as an ensemble, they perform better than most professional groups I know. It is in them that I find inspiration and motivation.

On a personal note, as a graduate of Kutztown University, when I look back, I see that there is not one part of what I do today as a professional that I cannot trace back to something connected to KU, my choices for graduate school, job opportunities, my network, etc. You might think that I am exaggerating but truly, I am not. Coming to KU was the single best decision I ever made. As I stood in the Incheon airport in Seoul Korea with our KU students, I said to them, “ I love airports because you can go anywhere from here.” I would like you to see KU as your academic airport and I will tell you with great certainty, you can go anywhere from here. So, this brings me back to the original question.....where will you be in twenty years? The answer is up to you. Let us know how we can help.