

Midyear Commencement faculty keynote speaker: "Break the rules..."

by Contributor - Saturday, December 15, 2012

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/23928/midyear-commencement-faculty-keynote-speaker-break-the-rules/>

[Emmanuel Jean Francois](#), *PhD, assistant professor, Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, offered his remarks in his keynote address to the Midyear Commencement class of 2012 on Dec. 15, 2012...*

"Chancellor Wells, distinguished colleagues, graduates, families and friends of graduates...

"Before I speak I have something important to say: I was asked to be brief and go back to my seat. I promise I will be brief no matter how long it takes. By the way, if you fall asleep while I am speaking, please enjoy your nap!

"I have a kind thank you regard for my wife and my children who are with me today! I have special congratulations for my best students in the Human Service Leadership Program who are graduating today! Guys, I have no power point today, and there is nothing to submit on D2L after today class!

"I am very grateful for that opportunity to be today's commencement keynote speaker. I have only three things to tell you in this occasion:

- (1) First, break all the rules!
- (2) Take ownership over the rules that you have broken!
- (3) Create alternative rules!

"First break all the rules!

"Our societies create rules that set expectations regarding "who can succeed," "who may not succeed," and "what path leads to success!" This is conventional wisdom! This is the first rule that I want you to break: The rule that sets limitations on your abilities, your skills, your talent and your potential to succeed based on conventional wisdom!

"A newspaper editor fired Walt Disney, because "he lacked imagination and had no good ideas." Today, World Disney that Walt Disney created is a place that lacks everything, but imagination.

"There was another young boy who wanted to become an actor: After his first audition, the casting director told him, "Why don't you stop wasting people's time and go out and become a dishwasher or something?" You probably know who I am talking about. His name: Sidney Poitier. He became a successful actor, one of the well-regarded actors in his time, and won an Oscar.

"Oprah Winfrey, a TV icon. She was fired, because she was not found "fit to be on screen". She was not supposed to be anywhere near a TV camera. Think about that! Oprah has become one of the most successful and influential women in the United States. She owns her own TV network!

"Walt Disney, Sidney Poitier and Oprah Winfrey did not let conventional wisdom determine their success. They broke the rules of conventional wisdom.

"Another rule that I want you to break is the rule of your mindset! Laurence Gonzales did an excellent work through his publication *Deep Survival*. He explains that intelligent people missed obvious signs that could prevent them from accidents and failed to see obvious escape routes to find food and shelter. The reality is that our mind filters things that we are not expecting to see. As a result we fail to see them. The ability of our mind to prevent what will happen depends on the accuracy of the information we have and the patterns stored in our memory. This is why, breaking the rules of our expectations based on expectations in our mindset is so critical. The rules that we believe in can help us succeed, but also can hold us back, prevent us from trying new things or taking initiatives.

"Obviously, the rule of law is indispensable to any civilized society. However, the rules of unfair assumptions, stereotypes, and discriminations that hinder you from reaching your full potential must be broken. The rules that are stepping on your dignity must be broken all the times! There are many rules in society that worked for some, but will never work for some of you. I want you to go out there, find them, and break them!

"The second thing that I want to tell you today is: Take ownership over the rules you have broken!

"There will be challenges starting tonight or tomorrow! The people that I cited earlier could have accepted the verdict of those who looked down on them, who thought they were not good enough, or they were failures. I can guarantee you that they did not. They believed that "Failure is not permanent, but temporary". They broke the rules of conventional wisdom. They continued to try, try, try, and try again and again, until they proved their detractors wrong. They took ownership over the rules they have broken, until they were vindicated by their boldness. They fought against every single assumption that people had about them. Do not let assumptions set your decisions in life: Break all the rules of assumptions that are contrary to your greater purpose in life!

"Be persistent and resilient! This is what I meant when I said, "Take ownership over the rules you have broken!" There will be set back! There will be doubt! Some people will be laughing at you, and waiting for the moment when you are going to fail... Be persistent! Be resilient! Bounce back! Surprise them! Take ownership over the rules you have broken!

"The third and last thing that I will say is: Create alternative rules!

"College dropout Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak broke the rules of Conventional wisdom when they built the first Apple computer. They persisted! They were successful! Today, Apple products have redefined the way we live our lives. They created new rules of technology consumption that most of us are prisoners of!

"When Google started in 1996 as a project by some graduate students (Lary Page and Sergey Brin) from

Stanford University, conventional wisdom did not bet on GOOGLE! However, these students broke the rules, took ownership over the rules they have broken, and created alternative rules of information and communication technology. I don't think anyone can record how many times you hear: Did you check on Google?

"In March 2006, the board members of a podcasting company called "ODEO" organized a brainstorming session about their business. An undergraduate student from New York University named Jack Dorsey suggested the idea of a micro blogging service that can send text-based messages of up to 140 characters known as "tweets". In July 2006, Dorsey sent the first tweet, and launched twitter. In 2007, Twitter became a corporation. Again, unconventional! An undergraduate student like some of you! Today, Twitter is a big company with over 500 million active users. Twitter has influenced politics, economy, sports, popular culture, and the society at large. Dorsey and his partners broke the rules, they took ownership over the rules they have broken, and they created alternative rules of mass communication.

"Starbucks started in 1971 as a local coffee store in Seattle, Washington, through a partnership between an English teacher, a history teacher, and a writer. Very unconventional! They were not business graduates or MBAs. Today, Starbucks is the largest coffeehouse company in the world, with over 20,000 stores in 61 countries. Starbucks changed the way we meet up with friends. Starbucks' funders broke the rules, took ownership over the rules they have broken, and created alternative rules of networking.

"A student at Princeton University named Wendy Kopp wrote an undergraduate thesis in 1989, and used that thesis to start a nonprofit organization called "Teach for America", which recruits college graduates and professionals to teach in urban and rural areas of the U.S. Today, TEACH FOR AMERICA is active in 46 regions of the U.S, has reached more than 500, 000 students, with 7000 members. This year, they received 48,000 applicants. Wendy created alternative rules of community service.

"I could have told the same story about Facebook, eBay, square, the creation of credit card, and the list goes on! I want one of you, two of you, three of you, several of you to be the next Wendy Kopp, the next Jack Dorsey, to create alternative rules.... Sometimes next week, go back and consider your final class project, this assignment that your professor or your classmates were so complimentary of, and use it to break the rules. Whether you decide to take a job or start your own entity, (a) find a problem that bothers a lot of people, solve it! (b) Find something that is not working properly for some people, fix it! (c) Find something that is working well, do it in a different, creative, and innovative way! This is what I mean by breaking the rules! Once you have broken the rules, don't stop, keep going until it pays off! Keep going until there is evidence that you have created alternative rules for individuals, communities, societies, and the world!

"If you forget anything, at least remember the three things that I said: First, break all the rules! Take ownership over the rules you have broken! Create alternative rules!

"Congratulations class of fall 2012! Thank you!"

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