

COLLEGE BOUND

View graduation as rite of passage



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Many high school seniors have managed to juggle multiple responsibilities to earn the achievement of graduating from high school. However, graduation means more than getting to wear caps and gowns, sharing the moments with friends and family members, and ultimately going to the parties; it is a symbol of achievement, a rite of passage into seniors' new lives, new responsibilities and new adventures. However, just because they have the dates for graduation doesn't automatically mean the events will be successful. Like anything else, planning for graduation takes both mental and logistical planning; the more preparation, the better the results.

The following tips may be used for planning this once-in-a-lifetime event:

It takes the right attitude

It's important that seniors embrace graduation as something that is their own. In my line of work, too many students transfer the event as something that belongs to their parents or other persons. If they don't feel that they own the moment, then they are more likely to feel distant from the entire rite of passage, one that should be theirs from the very beginning. A week before graduation, they should give themselves some time to reflect on what graduation really means to them. They should find a quiet place for 30 minutes and ask themselves the questions "How have I earned this moment? What have I done to accomplish this milestone? What does this milestone really mean to me?"

It takes support

Believe it or not, many students are so humble that they tell themselves that graduation is "not a big deal" and either participate because they have to or do not participate at all. It takes a community to support this success. To be without community is to be without encouragement, motivation and the need to strive for the best. After all, those diplomas will create access to opportunities that society — not just schools — recognize. It's important to share the achievement of graduation with relatives, friends, and other people who have helped the students get to this stage. To share their achievement is to make the moments objective ones. People in the seniors' support systems will remind them that they have earned their achievements and that society values those achievements as much as they do.

It takes time

To make sure students do graduate, they can create checklists well before the graduation dates, including items such as:

- Courses or units to complete.
- Graduation paperwork to complete.
- Scheduled appointments with high school counselors, coaches, teachers and others. Students may want to take this opportunity to thank these people for all that they have done to help get the seniors to graduation.
- Dates to rent or purchase graduation gowns, caps and academic sashes.
- Double check locations and times of ceremonies and parties.
- Send graduation invitations to relatives and friends well in advance so people can save the dates.

It takes a celebration

Everyone is looking to party at graduation time complete with food, beverages and music. However, most of that will likely be forgotten as the year goes by. Seniors can make graduation celebrations more meaningful by making them personal. They can add some fun activities that highlight their accomplishments. One example is creating quizzes or crossword puzzles that define who they are (e.g. career goals, hardest subjects, favorite places to eat lunch, etc.). They can make it fun by creating a little competition on who knows them best. Another example would be to make slide shows of the years in high school and show them at the celebrations.

What next?

Students should have plans for what they will do after completing high school.

Those heading to college should register for the orientation programs at new campuses, find out when the tuition has to be paid and when they have to submit paperwork to ensure housing.

Those attending community colleges should check in with the college counselors and start outlining course plans that will lead to achieving goals. For the others who have decided to travel or begin careers, it's important they feel confident about those decisions and embrace these steps as never-ending learning experiences. With all steps taken forward, opportunities will fill graduates with challenges, and if they have embraced their previous learning experiences, they will face these challenges with all that they've got.

This column is dedicated to all the seniors who have worked so hard to accomplish their educational and career goals. Whether they are going to college, taking advantage of great careers, or traveling abroad, I wish them all the best!

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