

Speech Day — June 24, 2022

Address by Head of School, David Robertson

Most of us these days have been on the receiving end, from time to time, of a link that is doing the rounds or a YouTube that has 'gone viral'. About ten years ago, someone sent me one and yet I still get moved every time I talk about it. It's called 'The Power of Words' and it's about a blind man sitting in a city square with a sign and a tin for donations. It's set in Glasgow, Scotland, so needless to say, there's not much money going into the tin! A young woman comes along and you hear the click of her heels stop (you see her green patent leather shoes too) She stops, picks up his cardboard sign, turns it over, pulls out a Sharpie and writes another sign for him. Fairly quickly and for the next few hours as the film is speeded up, money starts to flow freely into the tin. When she comes back and stops in front of the man, he touches her shoes to recognize her then he asks her what she did.

"I just changed your words" is her reply and, of course, she had changed the message from, "I am blind - please help" to "It's a beautiful day and I can't see it."

It's a simple but powerful idea- the right words can move us all to feel and respond- and, of course, the bigger message is—if you change your words you can change your world.

The right words can stir something in our souls, can inspire us and, ultimately, can cause us to behave differently. That's the key – behaving differently It's not just about pretty or impressive words in and of themselves, it's about the actions and behaviours that occur as a result of them. Here at QMS, we want to walk our talk, we want to do what we say we do and be who we say we are. Otherwise, we commit that unwelcome mistake of behaving inauthentically. Authenticity is always at the heart of meaningful relationships and great communities because it creates the conditions where trust can thrive. And without trust, everything is diminished and diluted.



You've heard our 'values in action' statements, but, to be clear, when we say, "Be kind", that's a call to action, a way of being—all day every day. When we say, "Be curious" we're looking for a whole approach to every aspect of your school experience. When we say, "Be brave" we want that to colour how you handle all the challenges that life lays before you and when we say, "Be you", we mean it. We want you to avoid spending your time pretending to be someone that you're not and instead celebrate what makes you different from everybody else. If we as a school community commit to those calls to action then not only will we indeed be the special place that we want to be, but we'll be it for everyone.

You will be relieved to hear, I hope, that I don't need to scroll through all the highlights and achievements that create the intricate mosaic of a school year as that has already been covered at our other recent ceremonies. It has though been a marvellous year for the School.

With the encouragement and commitment of our very supportive Board of Governors, we embraced the aspiration over two years ago to emerge from the challenges of the pandemic stronger than ever. I hope that you all agree that we are well on track to achieving that lofty goal. It has taken real commitment from so many people and I cannot possibly single them all out. However, one thing is for sure and that is that it does not happen if we do not have excellent people on our staff - the right people. We are blessed here at QMS and I would ask you as a school community to join with me in thanking all of the many members of our various staff teams for their superb work again this year (applause). Back in the country where I'm originally from, Scotland of course, the person in my role is often called the Headteacher as a constant reminder of why you came into this business and that's why I know that you'll forgive me if I take this opportunity to single out our teachers for a moment. The way that their work makes such an impact is captured beautifully in a quote from a book called, *The Essence of Teaching*. "What nobler profession than to touch the next generation – to see children hold your understanding in their eyes, your hope in their lives, and your world in their hands. In their success you find your own and so to them you give your all." Please acknowledge with me these men



and women in front of me who have gone the extra mile time after time and given their all – our QMS faculty!

The way I look at it, among the many metaphors that can sum up a life of relevance, I am drawn to the one of *dance*. Ironically, I was admiring the performance of our group of dancers who performed for the School on Pride Day a week ago and I said to Mr. Dickens who was next to me, “I just love coordinated dance” and, quick as a flash, he said, “Is that because you can’t do it?” I digress, but I do want to develop the dance as a metaphor for life. The dance is a chance for you to communicate in a different way, to be in sync with someone perhaps, to be responsive to them, to overcome your fears and inhibitions, to be attuned to the prevailing music of the moment, to express yourself, to be considerate of those around you, to let your hair down perhaps knowing that it’s only for the duration of the dance, to be a participant not a bystander, to be alive to your senses, to laugh and to love, to be a part of something larger and more powerful than you and to rejoice in that notion, and, above all, to stay on your toes. Of course, I realize that I’m thinking about Scottish Highland Dancing and you’re all thinking something completely different! Never mind, it all still applies! All those components amount to a life of purpose. Show up, step up and get involved – that’s what any successful group or team needs. As songwriter Jackson Brown said, “Opportunity dances with those who are already on the dance floor.”

I hope that QMS has put you squarely on the “dance floor” and that you will make the most of the opportunities that are ahead of all of you.

With a bit of luck, the notion of graceful movement went through your heads in all that consideration of dance and that brings up another extremely important and powerful word – the word “grace.” Sadly, lacking in too many human encounters nowadays and often completely lacking in some of our electronic communications, grace can be defined as, “easy elegance, courteous goodwill or sensitivity to another person’s needs or feelings.”





If we talk about the power of words and the actions that lie behind them then we should always be considering grace. The world needs more grace. Filter everything you say through that notion. Embrace grace, practice grace and spread grace.

As I close, I want you to remember that “the pen” has always been “mightier than the sword” and that the spoken word, well chosen, has often rallied millions in adversity. Martin Luther King was someone renowned for choosing his words to great effect, as I hope that you remember.

What if he had said at that famous Washington rally in 1963, “I have a list of measurable objectives!” instead of the epic, “I have a dream...?” In choosing his words carefully, he created an anthem for the ages and an idea that inspired generations then and still does today. So, again, change your words and change your world. Never doubt the power of your words and always use them as a force for good. I hope that you’ve followed my theme today because, can you imagine a QMS where everybody treats each other with kindness and grace, where we draw inspiration from each other? I can! We’re already well along that path and I thank you all warmly for all of your efforts, but we can always do better, we can always be better. To quote Victor Hugo, “There’s nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come!” I put it to you that the Second Century QMS idea has come, it’s here. It’s our time so let’s grab it with both hands and see where we can take it! Thank you all for a marvelous school year – I’m proud of you! Thank you.

