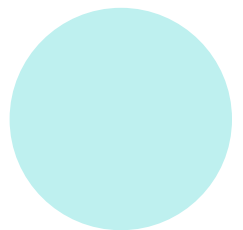
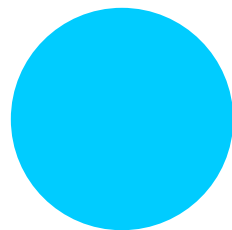
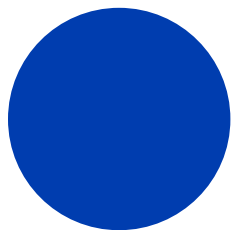




Transcript: Hampden-Sidney College Class of 2010 Commencement Speech

# Make a Difference!

Bob McDonald  
Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer  
The Procter & Gamble Company  
9 May 2010



It is an honor... and it is humbling... to be invited here today. I gladly accepted the opportunity not only because President Howard is a good friend whom I admire greatly, but also because I have deep respect for this institution and for the graduates and your families whose achievements we recognize here today.

Let me begin, First and foremost, by congratulating the graduates. You've labored long and hard. You've done excellent work and we're here to honor you and wish you well on your life's journey.

Congratulations also to faculty, family, and friends who have been with you every step of the way to support and encourage you, to "make a difference" in your lives.

No one accomplishes much alone. Many in the audience today, including my family, have made a difference in my life. My encouragement to you, Graduates, is to think about the people who contributed to you being here, now, and commit yourselves today to making a similar difference in the life of another.

As I said, I have great respect not only for those of you gathered here today but also for this great institution. **I believe that all of us, as human beings, are wired to search for meaning in our lives. We want to contribute. We want to be part of something greater than we are as individuals.**

The power of institutions like Hampden-Sydney and P&G is that they bring together people who share a sense of purpose... of mission... and common values. The actions and choices of these people are shaped by the institutions they join.

I wanted to draw these comparisons because a strong set of core beliefs is becoming ever more important as the world in which we live – and into which you are graduating – grows ever more complex. More than any previous generation, you have been tested and shaped by unrelenting change and as you graduate, you're entering an age in which the institutions and ideas that we have relied on for generations have failed or have been fundamentally altered.

Joshua Cooper Ramo has written a book about this. It's called The Age of the Unthinkable. He begins the book with a stark reminder:

*"We are now at the start of what may become the most dramatic change in the international order in several centuries. We are entering a revolutionary age, and we are doing so with ideas, leaders, and institutions that are better suited for a world now several centuries behind us. On the one hand, this revolution is creating*

*unprecedented disruption and dislocation. But it is also creating new fortunes, new power, fresh hope, and a new global order.*

*"Revolutions, after all, don't produce only losers. They (also) produce a whole new set of historical champions."*

You are those new champions. I have no doubt about it.

The opportunities that you'll create and seize may not yet be evident. They may not yet exist. But you will change the world for the better. Of this I am sure.

The question is: HOW WILL YOU DO IT?

There's no formula. No road map. No sure-fire steps to follow. But there is a North Star to guide your way. And that North Star is your sense of Purpose, your commitment to make a difference with your life in the lives of others.

That's the message I'd like to leave you with today.

I'm sure many of you have heard Loren Eiseley's story of *The Starfish*.

There was a young man walking down a deserted beach just before dawn. In the distance he saw a frail old man. As he approached the old man, he saw him picking up stranded starfish and throwing them back into the sea. The young man gazed in wonder as the old man again and again threw the small starfish from the sand to the water.

He finally asked, "Old man, why do you spend so much energy doing what seems to be a waste of time."

The old man explained that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun.

"But there must be thousands of beaches and millions of starfish!" the young man said, "How can you make any difference?"

The old man looked at the small starfish in his hand and as he threw it to the safety of the sea, he said, "It makes a difference to this one!"

So I would like to charge you, the graduates of Hampden-Sydney College, to commit yourselves today to "make a difference" in the lives of others.

This is our immortality.

Quite frankly, it's easier to slide through life without a Purpose, without a code. But it's not fulfilling. A life lived without Purpose is most usually a life stripped of meaning.

Living your life to make a difference, to make a contribution that is uniquely yours is the aspiration I hope you will embrace as you leave this great institution. And with that in mind, I want to suggest five principles for LIVING A LIFE OF PURPOSE — the five arms of the starfish.

**First, strive to live your life with honor.** It is not an accident that we human beings have the innate ability to tell the difference between right and wrong. It is NO accident that the frail old man felt good inside each time he threw a starfish back into the sea.

When I was a cadet at West Point, we were taught to choose “the harder right rather than the easier wrong.”

If you have difficulty differentiating between the right and wrong course of action, choose the most difficult one, and you will usually be right. These are the choices that define a life of honor.

Taking personal responsibility for your actions is a big part of honor. As a West Point plebe, or freshman, I learned that I was only permitted four answers: yes, no, no excuse, and I do not understand.

These four answers are all about character and taking responsibility. With these answers there is no opportunity for equivocation or excuse. There is no “but.” Searching for an excuse is time consuming and distracting. Taking responsibility for your actions, especially after making a mistake, is the first step to living your life with honor and self-improvement.

**Second, put the needs of others above your own.** As an officer in the Army we were trained to never eat until after every soldier in our unit had eaten. The leader of any organization is actually on the bottom of the organization chart, not the top, and their job is to empower and enable those in their organization to succeed. This is “servant leadership.” The leader serves the organization, rather than the organization serves the leader.

This principle comes from a fundamental faith in the goodness of people. I have never met anyone in my life who wants to fail. In fact, success is contagious. So our task as we serve others is to help them experience a small amount of success, and then to build that success into a virtuous and perpetual cycle of ever larger achievement.

In our starfish story, the frail old man by his actions encouraged the young man to join him in saving starfish because he put the needs of the starfish above his own.

Remember at the beginning of the movie *Ghandi* when the radio announcer covering Ghandi's funeral procession said that here was a man who was without wealth, political position, an army, or even physical stature; but he brought political freedom to the people of one of the largest countries on earth?

There is little more liberating and rewarding than putting the interests of others ahead of your own.

**Third, have a vision for what you would like to achieve and pursue it relentlessly.** Viktor Frankl, who wrote Man's Search for Meaning, demonstrated the important life-giving benefit of creating and seeking a vision.

Frankl learned this during his five years in Auschwitz and other concentration camps. He worked to keep his campmates alive by helping them understand that they had incredible power to create a vision of the future, use it to shape their own attitudes and their responses to the challenges in the concentration camps. This gave meaning to their lives.

It's important to have a personal vision so your daily behaviors lead you to where you want to go long term. I'm sure our frail old man had a vision of a beach without stranded starfish, and that vision kept him focused and motivated.

**Fourth, believe in a God to give your life greater meaning.** As Karen Armstrong wrote in her bestseller A History of God, "Jews, Christians, and Muslims have developed remarkably similar ideas of God. When people try to find an ultimate meaning and value in human life, their minds seem to go in a certain direction."

Belief in a God is indeed natural to humanity. Dr. Herbert Benson, Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, points to multiple studies that reinforce a basic idea: our own mortality makes us "wired for God." These studies indicate that belief in a superior being leads to a longer and fuller life. My faith strengthens and sustains me every day.

**Fifth, continue to improve yourself.** Stephen Covey, in his bestseller The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, tells the story of two men sawing wood. The first man is working furiously, sweating profusely, and piling up his stack of cut wood. The second man seems to be working as diligently, but periodically he stops. Yet his stack of wood rises higher than that of the first man.

Covey was interested to find out why the second man, who stopped periodically, could saw more wood than the first. Covey asked what the man did when he stopped. The man replied that when he stopped he was "sharpening his saw."

We all need to "sharpen our saws" daily. We need to continue to study and learn, so that we improve ourselves to make us more valuable to others. One way that I try to "sharpen my saw" is to read. I always have at least one book I'm reading, and I purposely choose them on disparate topics to broaden my knowledge.

These are the five arms of the starfish:

- Strive to live your life with honor
- Put the needs of others above your own
- Have a vision for what you would like to achieve and pursue it relentlessly
- Believe in a God to give your life greater meaning
- Continue to improve yourself so you are better able to help others

In 1966, Robert Kennedy told the starfish story in a different way. He said, "Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he or she sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. These ripples crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Ghandi did it in India, Martin Luther King did it in the United States, Nelson Mandela did it in South Africa. [We don't need to be a Ghandi or a Martin Luther King or a Nelson Mandela to make a difference in the life of just one person.](#) And today is a great day for all of us to rededicate ourselves to this quest.

I would like to close by describing my favorite play, which expresses this point so powerfully. The play is *The Man of La Mancha*, from the book Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes.

It's a story about an old man who goes mad. He puts on a rusty old suit of armor, thinks he's a knight, and calls himself Don Quixote de La Mancha. Don Quixote saw the world not as it was, but as he wanted it to be. A world of chivalry, caring acts, noble deeds, and impossible dreams.

As the play unfolds, Don Quixote picks a pathetic wretch named Aldonza to be his "dolgenea," his lady. Aldonza is a realist. She protests that she is, in her words, "Born of a dung heap, a strumpet men use and forget."

Yet Don Quixote insists she is Dolcenea. He sees in her far more dignity, more nobility, than she could dare see in herself. Yet Aldonza gives in to the old man's dream of a better world, even to where she performs acts of compassion for her worst enemies, as was the duty of a lady.

At the end of the story, Don Quixote dies. After learning of his death, Aldonza addresses Quixote's squire Sancho. She cries out, "Don Quixote is not dead. Believe, Sancho. Believe." And when Sancho calls her by her name Aldonza, she ends the play with a single statement:

"My name is Dulcenea."

"My name is Dulcenea" says it all. Aldonza was made Dulcenea by the kindness and generosity of Don Quixote, and because of that, her life will never be the same again. Don Quixote picked up his starfish in Aldonza and helped her back into the sea. And Aldonza followed by performing acts of compassion for her worst enemies.

As Cervantes, Don Quixote's creator, said, "Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams—this may be madness. To seek treasure where there is only trash. Too much sanity may be madness. And maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be."

My challenge to the graduates today is to embrace Don Quixote's passion – maybe even a touch of his madness – and ask yourself the question that Joshua Ramo asks in the conclusion of his book: "What does this age demand of me?"

All of us gathered here today to celebrate your achievement look very, very forward to your answer.

Thank you.

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