

School Captain Evelyn O'Brien's Speech Delivered at the Principal's Leadership Dinner

When I was thinking about what to speak to you all about I was very conscious that I am surrounded by many people who have far more leadership experience than me and to many of you I am just a kid - a kid with her Ps, but still, just a kid. So, I realise that as I speak about what leadership means to me, I lack a lot of credibility.

Credibility, I believe comes with experience, so, when my friends and I are surrounded by so many leaders tonight, leaders who have so much wisdom, I thought it would be important to reflect on what was leadership when our parents and teachers were growing up - who inspired them to become the leaders they are today? What can we learn from leaders in the past? What was leadership like in the "olden days"?

If, like my parents, you were a teenager in the 80s, it is quite probable that you were inspired by a man who encouraged his friends to take chances, to live their dreams and remember to live in the present moment. Clearly, Ferris Buller was an influential leader many of us girls can take practical advice from.

If, like my Dad, you grew up watching movies on a VHS tape...it is quite probable you were inspired by two men who made great sacrifices for the needy, travelling across America to raise money for an orphanage, remaining optimistic - "there's 106 miles to Chicago... we've got a full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes, it's dark outside and we're wearing sunglasses." Jake and Elwood Blues were truly an inspiration for our parents and teachers.

If, like Brett Leaver, you grew up admiring the strength of entrepreneurs, and their sheer determination and grit, people who constantly strove for impeccable customer service, a particular business of inspiration would have been an impressive tourism establishment run by a charming man named Basil Fawty.

In conclusion, when looking to the past to how our parents and teachers formed their leadership, I can't say I get the clearest picture of how they became the leaders they are, nor how we, the Student Council should try to be the best leaders we can over the next year.

Now, despite the concerns many seem to have about our generation, spending far too much time scrolling through Instagram and Snapchatting each other, we do occasionally look up, and take in what's happening around us.

We girls are so grateful to be surrounded by the staff at Normo who care, who make sacrifices and give so much to each of us - putting in the hard work that often nobody notices. Many of you are here tonight and I would like to thank you on behalf of the Student Council and the rest of Year 11 for demonstrating to us true leadership; leadership that nurtures and leadership that inspires, allowing us all to become the formal leaders of our school, but leading our school even though sometimes it feels like we still have our L plates on.

My view of leadership however, has been defined by a person who has an enormous impact on more people than she knows. A person whose integrity, unwavering embodiment and conviction of her values is something that I truly admire. Her gentle nature, approachableness and selflessness inspires me every day. But, above all, what makes her the best leader is her ability and commitment to truly listen and understand - regardless of whether she is being told something completely irrelevant or the biggest issue in the world. There is no one who I fight more with or push the boundaries more with, but there is no one who I look up to more than my Mum.

I know for the girls sitting here tonight, our Mums are as unique as we are. You have one thing in common - your willingness to listen and understand your daughters, but also all the other people in your life.

Mums, you inspire your daughters more than you will ever know and to us, you are the epitome of effective leaders. We know that sometimes we can be too stubborn for our own good, struggle to admit you are right and can drive you up the wall, but you have taught us the most important lessons about leadership without knowing it.

To me, leadership, simply is that demonstrated by our Mums - that of gentle feminism, generosity, authenticity, encouraging people to be the best versions of themselves.

Mums, we all owe you so much. Thank you for everything that you do that we thank you for, but more importantly, thank you for everything that goes unnoticed and we don't thank you for.

May I please ask everyone to stand for a moment and propose a toast to our mums -

To our mums.