

**GRADUATION CEREMONY SPEECH**  
**American Academy Larnaca**  
**Wednesday, 29 June 2016**

*Director of the American Academy, members of the faculty, President and members of the American Academy Alumni Foundation, distinguished guests, proud parents and above all graduates*

It is truly an extraordinary honour for me to have the opportunity to address you tonight in such an important moment of your life. When I was notified that I would be delivering the keynote address in the graduation ceremony for the school year 2015-2016, I was instantly overwhelmed by the responsibility I was undertaking. Nevertheless, I am deeply grateful that I was given the right to share with you my own fond memories from studying in American Academy Larnaca, as well as speak to you about my personal experience from life and explain to you how obliged I am to my teachers in this school, not only for the knowledge and skills I have gained, but also for learning how to conduct myself in the society in a principled manner.

As I was thinking of how to start writing this speech two things came into my mind. First of all, the great pride I feel for being a graduate of a school with such a long history and contribution to the educational affairs in Cyprus. Undoubtedly, American Academy Larnaca stands as an institution with a long tradition for offering a high standard of education to all its students and this is evident in the reputation and prestige that the school has developed through the years and still has nowadays. It is no coincidence that many of its graduates have established themselves in the society as successful and distinguished professionals both in Cyprus and abroad. Myself, when I was studying at the university in the United Kingdom and later on when I came back to Cyprus and began my own professional career, I always held it as a badge of honour to be introduced as a graduate of the American Academy of Larnaca.

The second thing that came into my mind is gratitude for my teachers and everything they had done for my own development, both at an academic and a personal level. They offered me all the necessary knowledge that enabled me to succeed as a university student and at the same time they equipped me with the necessary skills that eventually helped me to overcome any obstacles that I have encountered, both during my studies and in life generally.

However, these are not the only reasons why I am grateful to my teachers. Studying in American Academy Larnaca was an opportunity to benefit from a stimulating, democratic environment where we could discuss with our tutors and exercise our critical thinking, as well as ask for advice and support every time we needed it. At the same we had the chance to participate in other activities as well, like sports and excursions, that helped us to socialize and develop our own inclinations and abilities. Overall, our teachers were always beside us in every possible way and I honestly want to thank them for that.

Saying that, I would like to particularly mention the great respect I have for my teacher Mrs. Andri Antoniou with whom I participated in several drama performances

that were acknowledged and supported greatly, both by the wider school community and the organized parents, for their successful outcome. Moreover, I had the chance to take part in the dancing group of the school for many years. For all these, the teaching staff of the American Academy have given me two honorary awards for doing best work in Greek Drama and Theatre Productions and for showing a spirit of co-operation towards my teachers and classmates. For these awards I am very proud and I seize the opportunity to thank the teachers of the year 1991 and particularly Mrs. Maro Pampou and Mrs. Andri Antoniou for the great honour.

Now, going back in time, I also remember reflecting on the motto of the school: "to grow and to serve". In the beginning I did not give much attention, but gradually I understood very well the meaning of it. In fact, this motto encompasses the whole philosophy of the school. First of all, a relentless and consistent attempt by the staff of the Academy to aid students in their effort to achieve their full potential in all areas of education and life, as well as to develop their own personal qualities in order to become completed personalities and successful professionals. At the same time, as the verb "to serve" indicates, equal emphasis is given to the involvement of the faculty and students of the American Academy in charitable, social, cultural and other activities for the benefit and welfare of the wider community.

All the above are best described as the "American Academy spirit". This, in my opinion, is defined as a humanistic approach to learning, focusing on the formation of completed and caring personalities with the development of voluntary activities and the cultivation of an interest for the fellow-man and everyone who is in need of love and support. Furthermore, the "spirit of the American Academy" promotes the involvement of students in public affairs, their active interest for the protection of the environment and a deep respect and admiration for the history and culture of our beautiful island.

At this point, allow me to speak using my professional stature as the Secretary of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus. I would like to underline that the State and particularly the Ministry of Education and Culture, recognizing the long-standing tradition for quality education that the American Academy of Larnaca offers to students, stands by the school in every possible way. Indeed, the private schools have encountered some difficulties, as a result of the economic crisis and the subsequent loss of income for every Cypriot family. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance, taking into account these circumstances, have taken the decision to lower the tuition fees for private schools for the school year 2016-2017. It is crucial that historic and internationally distinguished schools like the American Academy of Larnaca should continue their praiseworthy contribution to the educational affairs of Cyprus by providing high standard education that is accessible to a large part of the society.

Now turning to you dear graduates

I know that you have worked very hard and dedicated yourselves to your studies. Today, at your Graduation Ceremony, you rightly receive the accolades you deserve. It is also normal to have mixed feelings since you are leaving behind an important chapter of your life. In the future you will remember with nostalgia your school years, here, in the American Academy of Larnaca. Nevertheless, bear in mind that your

future lies ahead and the future is an amazing place. Grasp all the opportunities that you will encounter and enjoy the journey of life to the fullest.

You should believe in yourself and passionately follow your dreams. Always look ahead for what is to come. You will experience the enormous joy of creating your own life and enjoying the benefits of it. Of course there will be challenges and setbacks ahead, but when you are determined to succeed you will handle every obstacle that gets in your way with success. And always remember that the most difficult but honorable thing to do is to get up every time you fall.

Additionally, dear graduates, it is important to adhere to your values and everything you have learned in the American Academy. Live your life with integrity, kindness and respect for the others. Always, have in mind that an individual's duty is to serve the wider community since, as Aristotle the great Greek philosopher said, "humans are social beings". After all this is how a true graduate of the American Academy of Larnaca should behave in life.

Well done to all of you and good luck for the future!

Congratulations to the parents for the success of your children. You should be proud of them and support them in their effort to fulfil their dreams. Addressing the staff and all the personnel of the American Academy, I would like to congratulate you as well for the perfectly organized graduation ceremony. Thank you again for the invitation and the opportunity that you have given me to speak to the graduates. I was really honored to be here today.

I wish to everyone all the best!