Gryphon Prize Giving Ceremony at Sherborne Abbey | 17 September

Speech by Christian Guy

(Former Special Adviser to PM David Cameron and Director of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), and Gryphon alumnus)

It's an honour to be here to recognise your achievements and celebrate with you today.

And it's a pleasure to be supporting the Gryphon, where I had two fantastic years in the sixth form and gained an enormous amount.

I remember how big a moment this is in life. One of those rare periods when you have time to reflect, to plan and to dream.

Many of you begin university in a few weeks. For others it's a new job, training course or a 'year out' to travel or volunteer.

Whatever you're planning you'll probably be feeling a range of emotions - excited, nervous, uncertain, confident…

I know that's how I felt was when I sat there, and it's often still how I feel at times now.

Just a few weeks ago I was working in 10 Downing Street, for David Cameron.

My office was above that famous black front door, and walking through it every morning was a remarkable privilege.

I was one of the Prime Minister's special advisers - focused on policy and parliament - and my job was to work with Cabinet Ministers and senior civil servants to tackle UK poverty, and to create more opportunity in some of the country’s most challenging places.

Attending Cabinet meetings and working closely with the PM, it was a relentless, fascinating and remarkable place to work.

But then the EU referendum happened - you may have noticed. In the space of a few hours, democracy had done it’s remarkable but brutal best…

At 6am the next morning we were in No.10 - I walked past the PM’s office and all was very sombre. I was told by my boss what was about to happen and at 9am we watched the Prime Minister resign on the Street, through our office net curtains in front of the world’s media.

And it was over, just like that.
All the plans, hopes and ideas we’d been working on had to be put down, and we left the building only a few weeks later with the Prime Minister while Theresa and team waited to go in.

So the first thing I want to say to you is that I too am in this place of wondering what the future holds. Actually even David Cameron is wondering what the future holds - so we’re all in good company.

Failure happens in careers, things go wrong, disappointment hits all of us. But it’s how we respond that counts.

And linked to this I wanted to use my time with you today to speak about something I’ve become passionate about over the years, and something I’ve learnt as I led organisations, managed people and known life in the highest political office.

And that is this: how you do things often matters more to your success than the specific job you do.

Or as someone else once said:

“How one plays, and what one plays for, that alone reveals the man”

This is all about character and attitude.

Your approach and outlook will define how well you do, what people think of you and what success looks like in your career - far more than you might expect, and perhaps more than specific results in any one job.

This is a theme drawn out by a recent book The Road to Character. It’s written by New York Times journalist David Brooks and its central argument is that too many people worry about what’s on their CV and not enough about what’ll be in their eulogy.

It’s a brilliant challenge. He says people should think more about how they want to be remembered…what they would want people to say about them at their funeral.

Their gifts, talents…their kindness, courage and compassion…

…more than their second quarter results, management style or responsibilities held between 2005-2008.

I don’t mean to belittle these things because CVs really matter.

But we can leave a bigger mark on planet earth when we think more about who we’re becoming and how we live, rather than what we do or how much we earn.

So if this is something you’re interested in thinking more about then I thought I would
share four observations for doing the *how* in your career well…

These ideas are characteristics I've seen at work in a variety of places - from the Cabinet room in 10 Downing Street to the slums of Brazil...from Parliament to the homeless hostel just a few miles from it.

These are points I wish someone had told me when I was sat where you are…

So tip number one as we think about the future…

**Work for something bigger than yourself**

- give yourself to a cause, be passionate about issues, become well-read in an area
- you'll find it more rewarding when you work for the betterment of something beyond your own life, and it'll take you further in your career
- for me it's tackling UK poverty and social injustice...whether it's homelessness, human trafficking, domestic violence
- I could never have imagined it would take me to Downing Street or onto Newsnight, but the point is that wasn't my goal...my goal was to make a difference rather than get a dream job or put myself in the limelight

Second…

**Be the most hopeful person in the room**

- I'm not talking about wishful thinking or naivety ...I'm talking more about your posture as a person
- the person with the most hope in the room is the person with the most influence...
- I remember meetings with the PM or other political leaders in No.10...we were facing big challenges and it was easy to be overwhelmed at times and tough to see a way through...but the person who finds a way through or solves the problem makes the difference is usually the one who believes it can be done.
- hope brings creativity, optimism...it’s what the best people convey all the time, especially under pressure
- It's an obvious point but hard to stick to in life, especially for us Brits who tend to be glass half-empty / 'not bad' people

Third…
Do the small things really well

- I always used to say to people joining my team at the Centre for Social Justice that if I could trust them with the smallest, seemingly least important things - like answering the phone when it rings or carrying boxes, turning up on time, to events - I could trust them with the bigger things like briefing Cabinet ministers or appearing on the BBC.

- people notice your attitude and demeanour when it comes to these things

- they watch to see how you treat people who can do nothing for you…or junior colleagues you don’t need to impress

- Don’t be slack with the little things.

And fourth…

Embrace responsibility, don’t duck it

- this is a really difficult one

- sometimes it’s hard to say yes when you’re asked to step up…you have doubts, you focus on the reasons why others are better placed or qualified…you just prefer your comfort zone…all completely understandable

- but it’s really important to resist that and to try and say yes…this is how people make the difference, take risks and win big

- And when I was called in to see David Cameron for an interview, the same applied.

- For you it may be a job, a promotion, a meeting or a trip.

- But I can’t emphasis enough the importance of stepping up …say yes…push yourself when these things come your way.

- And I tell you now, even if you fail or it doesn't go to plan, you’ll find it easier to live with yourself knowing you tried rather than wishing you tried.

There are many others but these are powerful principles to apply as you begin this new chapter.
1. Work for something bigger than yourself

2. Be the most hopeful person in the room

3. Do the small things really well

4. Embrace responsibility, don’t duck it

And…if you remember none of these … the most important seed I wanted to plant in your brains today is that how you go about things in the workplace matters so much to your impact and prospects.

When you look at our world and the problems we face, it’s clear we need a new generation of leaders rising up in our country.

And if you’re someone who sees opportunities to make a difference in the midst of all those problems around us, the chances are you can be of those leaders.

If we’re honest we know the world has plenty of smarter people than me and you. What it lacks is enough good people. To fight for the right things in the right way.

To live and work with passion, commitment, integrity and humility.

Whether that’s in law, local government, children’s work, social care, retail, education or business. We need good people, not just smart people.

Whether it’s making a difference in your household, community, in this region, across the nation or perhaps even around the world. We need good people, not just smart people.

Being one of those - in whatever career or contribution you choose - is the greatest success you could enjoy.

Hold on to some of these principles and you’ll thrive.

I wish you the very best with whatever you go on to do. And I look forward to seeing the difference you’ll make.