



Courtyard Counseling Center

We're here to help



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Keynote Address

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This is the second time I've been asked to give this keynote address. And I'll confess to you that despite all my years as a college professor, I'm not much of a public speaker. I was nervous and a little surprised the first time around, and I guess I feel much the same this time. As a psychotherapist I'm well aware that when surveyed, most people indicate that their number one fear in life is public speaking. These same people indicate that their number two fear is death.

I guess that means that at a funeral most people would rather be in the coffin than stand up and give the eulogy.

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My job today is to tell you what I do for a living, how I trained to do it and perhaps impart to you some stimulating ideas that will carry you throughout your day and maybe beyond. You're going to hear a lot about different careers today and I hope that it helps you think more about your journey into adulthood with more excitement than fear.

I'm often asked how I chose my profession and if I always knew what I wanted to do for a living. In some ways I was probably always a therapist in life -- except that I didn't know it. Somehow my personality just formed that way. It's much too simple to say that I liked to help people. Most of us enjoy being helpful. Instead, it was others, my friends who found me to be easy to talk to about difficult subjects. Only much later, when I was a junior in college, did I think I was any good at it. I worked at our university telephone helpline. It was that experience that taught me that I had the ability to remain calm and thoughtful during a crisis.

After undergraduate school I worked as a counselor trainee in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. I learned a lot there – mostly that I didn't know very much.

I eventually went on to obtain a Master's degree in Social Work and later a doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to my Social Work education, I've also had years of training and supervision in marriage and family therapy. Now, besides being a psychotherapist, I teach and supervise other therapists as a member and supervisor for the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

Social Work, like medicine, has many specialties. Mine was psychotherapy related to marriages and families. I chose social work because I liked the way the science of social work thinks about people and their problems. Related, but different from the field of psychology, social work tends to look at people through a wide angle lens, taking into consideration all other factors in their life as the reasons and the solutions to their problems. Whereas psychology tends to view the individual through a microscope, looking inside the person for reasons and solutions to their problems.

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I've now been a marriage and family therapist for twenty-five years and it's taken much of that time for me to realize that my job is not to fix other people's problems. Instead, my job is to help people grow themselves up enough so that they can fix their own problems.

So this morning I'm going to talk to you about what I do every day in some form or another. And, I'm going to share with you some of the secrets about growing yourself up.

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It takes so long for us to grow up... in fact; we're lucky if we are 70% grown up by the time we reach our mid-fifties. And if you know any happy and emotionally healthy 70 year olds, pay close attention to them, because they're the ones who know most about what it's like to be a grown up. Growing ourselves up is no small feat.

When I was a kid I couldn't wait until I was grown up so that I could learn all the secrets of life. At age twenty I thought I knew a lot -- but I really didn't know much at all. In fact, I had little or no idea of how much I **didn't** know.

Eventually, somewhere in my mid-to-late twenties, I began to think that I knew some things -- but not quite enough. -- I went to my father (who always seemed to have an opinion about everything), and I asked him about the secret to being a grown man. I somehow thought that he knew something that he wasn't telling me. Boy, was I disappointed when I realized that he didn't have the foggiest idea of what I was talking about -- and worse yet, that he was flying by the seat of his pants like everyone else.

It was then I began to realize that not many grown ups knew how to be a grown up. They just pretended. *They were grown up imposters.*

As I moved into my thirties I thought that I still didn't know much, but in reality I knew more than I thought – I just didn't know it yet. During these years I worked on my career, reared our

children, (spending much of our time in the car going from one child event to another). I was feeling mature much of the time and I hoped that others didn't notice when I really wasn't. At that time I was beginning to really **look and feel** more like a grown up.

Armed with my Doctoral Degree I entered my forties and I began to think that I really **did** know a lot. I was rather enjoying it.

The problem was that my questions became more complex and they didn't have very clear answers. And I wanted clear answers to things. Slowly, I understood that clear answers were often simple, and many times in life, they were simply wrong.

Many of the couples and the families I see in therapy want someone to blame for their troubles and they avoid seeing their own role in how their problems are created and sustained. I realized that saying the words and **really** meaning "**I'm sorry**" and "**I forgive you**" are perhaps the most difficult words ever spoken or understood between people.

Now that I'm at the gate of being fifty (I'll turn 50 in three weeks), I'm becoming grateful for the perspective we develop as we grow older. (Even if I can't jog as fast or as far as I used to.)

I spend my days helping people attempt to be more grown up in their life. Being grown-up helps us make better decisions and to be less afraid to be honest and appreciate our shortcomings or imperfections. Being grown-up allows us to make true friends and be more relaxed in those friendships.

A **grown up** is able to look at their friend or spouse and say, "***I forgive you for what you did and I won't use your bad behavior or my pain to hurt you, or me, anymore.***" And this person will understand that forgiving doesn't let the other person off the hook or mean "*what you did was OK.*" Much to the contrary, it puts them **on** the hook and makes them responsible to be a better friend or partner – **precisely because** they have been forgiven. One of the simple truths about marriage or any long-term committed relationship is that we can and do break each other's hearts and we have our hearts broken in return. It is one of the unavoidable costs to loving deeply. Being grown up is knowing how to recover from this kind of hurt.

Now, what does any of this have to do with intellectual giftedness? A great deal. Because unfortunately, many of us believe that high intelligence almost guarantees success in life. But in reality, people with high IQs can be remarkably poor pilots of their private and emotional lives. Daniel Goleman, in his book Emotional Intelligence, tells us that **IQ contributes to only about 20% of the factors that determine life success. This leaves a whopping 80% to other forces.** Personal characteristics such as

- motivation
- persistence in the face of frustration
- the ability to control one's impulses
- the ability to regulate and tolerate one's anxiety and moods, and
- the ability to delay gratification -- are all extremely important.

If we join these characteristics with the ability to feel and experience empathy for others, that is, understand and respond to other people's feelings and thoughts, and if we have a positive and hopeful outlook on life, -- we have the greatest possibility to be happy and successful regardless

of what we do for a living.

So with this in mind, and with the help of author and colleague, Dr. Frank Pittman, an Atlanta, Georgia Psychiatrist and Marriage and Family Therapist, I offer you some ideas (from his book *Grow-Up*, 1998). **How to be a grown up man and a grown up woman, even when you're around your parents, regardless of your age.**

First, some secrets for how to be a happy grown up man:

- The world is changing rapidly for all of us. We all get scared. You're not alone. Tell other men what it feels like to be you. Don't be afraid to have other men as close friends.
- Understand that no matter what your age, you still need your mother. Make her your friend, your peer and talk things over with her. She knows you well. Avoid the temptation to run from her when she sees the child in you that you keep hidden.
- You can't understand yourself as a man until you understand your father and how **he** learned to be a man. Learn this even if you want to be different from him. He is the most important role model to show you how to be a man. If he's not around, find some other men to understand, an uncle, a grandfather, a teacher, or a neighbor. Someone you respect.
- Do the things your father was afraid to do. The things he might have considered dangerous or too feminine: cry sometimes, hug your male friends, change diapers, read women's books (well, at least one), do the dishes and some other things that are traditionally considered women's work. I guarantee you won't lose one drop of testosterone if you do.
- Overcome your fear of reliance on others. Stop and ask directions sometimes. It doesn't hurt. Really!
- Take care of your body. It's the only one you'll get. What you do with it, what you put into it and the risks you take with it will have a cumulative effect.
- Practice telling people that you may be wrong about the subject matter under discussion. Say, "I don't know" and "What do you think?" to your loved ones and friends. The rewards will amaze you. Understand that money makes us crazy and it costs too much. Anytime you feel that you don't have enough money, give some of what you have to someone who has less. You'll feel absolutely rich!
- Competition is grand, but winning is not everything. Show your friends, children and loved ones that you can still be happy after losing. If you do this, they'll want to continue playing with you.
- Learn about women. In addition to talking to your mother, your girlfriend, your wife, your sister, or your daughter about their experience of being a woman, read some women's magazines. You'll be shocked that women are different than you thought they were. Get to know an old woman. They're the very best -- and they are not afraid of men, so they can be trusted.

- Also, read some hard-core feminist literature. It will make you angry because you'll realize that most of these writers don't have the foggiest idea what men are about. They give us way too much power in making their lives miserable. But as men we need to know why they're angry. They have some very good points.
- Stops fantasizing so much about sex with women; try instead to image their emotional lives. It makes them much more human, sexier, much less scary and much more likely to appreciate you.
- Finally in being a grown-up man, never let your masculinity interfere with your humanity. Practice thinking of yourself not as a man but as human.

Now, some secrets for being a happy grown up woman:

- Love your gender. There is nothing a man can do that you can't except maybe pee off the back porch standing up - - but you can create and sustain life, and he can't. So there!
- Love your body. Keep it clean, healthy, well exercised and well fed, and ***value it on the basis what it can do rather than on how it looks.*** *The pursuit of happiness is not a beauty contest.*
- Honor your mother. All that advice she keeps giving you is what **she** needs to hear, but it is said with love, so accept the love and apply the wisdom in your own way. She's probably wiser than you know.
- Don't idolize your father too much. Instead, identify with him and learn what he knows about the world that can often be hidden from women.
- Make sure that you have something in your life that makes you feel powerful. Have a career, not just a job.
- If and when you have children, love them too much. It won't hurt them. *Although, it will hurt them if you expect them to love you too much in return.*
- Don't take men too seriously. They are useful as friends and partners in raising children, but they can't be expected to make you happy or even entertain you. If men were as entertaining as many women think they should be, no one would have invented cable TV.
- Don't expect men to read your mind: they can't even read their own.
- You may be loved by a man, employed by a man, and befriended by a man, but you must never let yourself be defined by a man.
- We all have bad experiences in life and we get hurt sometimes. When it happens, get up and dust yourself off. Remember what Neitche said, "*What doesn't kill us enriches us and makes us stronger.*"
- You need female elders as mentors in order to learn how to be a grown up woman. Go

out and find some older women who are willing to be your teacher.

- Make sure that you have female friends. *Don't break dates with them for a guy; you'll need them later.* You can be yourself with a female friend; there's not as much danger of scaring her off.
- If you feel compelled to model yourself after men in a man's world, model yourself after nice men. Men who feel compelled to make a show of power do so because they don't think they have it.
- And as we are told on airplanes, when the oxygen pressure falls and the oxygen masks drop down – put on your own mask first, make sure that you're breathing comfortably before worrying about the men and children who haven't learned to breathe without you yet.

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Now, for everyone here, a few words about being a grown-up even around your parents, regardless of your age. This is important because the very best and most successful of us can still feel and act like little children if we think our parents are angry or not satisfied with us.

- Tell your parents about you. Tell them what you like and don't like. **You** be the expert on you.
- When your parents try to tell you more about you and your shortcomings than you really want to hear, ask them about how they were at your age. Ask them to be painfully honest about it.
- Thank them for their criticism and ask them what life experiences led them to their opinions.
- Ask for their advice before they have a chance to give it.
- Tell them that you value their advice and that you will take it into consideration when you make your **own** decisions.
- Don't lie or hide anything from your parents. Secrets and lies will make you ashamed of yourself and you'll look more like a child to your parents and they'll treat you accordingly.
- Ask your parents to do favors for you. This gives them the opportunity to feel useful. But don't ask that they take on your responsibilities.
- Alternately, put them in situations where they are dependent on you rather than the other way around – but don't rub it in. (I remember visiting my son in Japan when he was an 11th grade Rotary scholar. He was our guide and interpreter. I really felt helpless. He really felt proud. ---- And that made me proud.)
- Find things to thank your parents for.

- Tell them at the moment when you need cheerleading or criticism. Remember that they want above all else to feel needed and to be good parents. Help them do so.
- Call them more often than necessary. This is especially important for college students and young adults who live away from home. But try to call during their favorite TV show so they'll be in a hurry to hang up.
- Don't criticize your parents to others. Get into the habit of praising them to your friends. That probably won't change them one bit, but it will help you feel less like an adolescent.
- When it's your turn, do the most magical thing in life. Raise your own children. If you don't have your own children, help raise someone else's children. **That** will grow you up.
- Name your children after your parents. Don't name your pets after them.
- Most importantly, forgive your parents for their mistakes. Understand that they are imperfect and that no one gave them an owner's manual for children. If you do this it will make them want to be better parents. **It will also make you more grown up.**

Finally and above all else, take responsibility for your life. Be responsible for your body, your character, your values and morality and for your relationships. Accepting personal responsibility is a lifelong quest for grown-ups. Doing so leads to real grown-up happiness. It will free you to extract the most fun out of life. Be cheerful, be tender, and be kind. **Knowing that we have the power to increase the level of happiness in the world may be the ultimate secret of happiness no matter what your chosen profession. If you want to feel good, do good things in life.**

Have a great day today and have fun growing up the rest of your life.

Thank you. Tony Butto, DSW, is the director of the Courtyard Counseling Center in Selinsgrove, PA. (www.courtyardcounseling.com) Dr. Butto is also an adjunct professor of sociology at Bucknell