

The last lecture really
achieving my own
dreams



Often, people use hypothetical contexts to assist their mind in considering abstract ideas, such as ??? if your time came to die tomorrow, would you be content with your life??? However for Randy Pausch, who passed away in 2008, the question of how to find fulfillment, and whether had done so in his own life was far from theoretical. Before beginning that fall semester, Pausch had learned that he was terminally ill.

With this in the back of his mind, he began to write a talk for Carnegie Mellon University??™s series of lectures, rather ironically billed as the ??? The Last Lecture.??? He chose to give his advice to students, faculty, and family gathered in the hall on how to remember their childhood dreams and inspiration, as well as the importance of pursuing those dreams. This may seem excessively obvious, but one must have a dream to pursue it. Pausch was quick to remind people that we were once full of conviction in our dreams; I know that when I was younger I wanted to be a firefighter more than I wanted life.

Unfortunately, though, we cannot all become presidents, astronauts, or superheroes. The point that the professor makes is not really about our dreams as a child, but our ability to visualize what we want to achieve as adults. School requires a great deal of dedication if you wish to go far, and dedication denotes inspiration. I have known for a long time now that I wanted to get into a good college. Thus I committed myself to studying hard for the SAT, and each time I took the test, I improved. The Bell Policy Center, the non-profit I currently intern at, works to create educational, economic, and healthcare opportunities for disadvantaged Coloradans. My time there has inspired me to grasp that sentiment I loved about being a firefighter ??“

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helping those in need ??” with other interests I have (such as politics) and perhaps a safer work environment. Youth are often pigeonholed for being apathetic in the way they approach everything.

To an extent, this is true. However I would argue that many of the adults who toil away in cubicles have relinquished some of what Pausch calls mankind’s natural childlike wonder as well. This refers to the same force that moves countless kids to try to dig to China through the Earth, or try hopelessly to capture a snowflake. Our curiosity is what gives life interest, Pausch tells the audience, and to forgo curiosity is to ignore our natural inclinations. It is important to understand that our predispositions, while not mandates of what we must do with our lives, should at least act as guidance. As a junior and senior at East, I have been amazed at the broad selection of courses I get to choose from. In the last two years I have been able to take AP and honors classes in subjects that I really enjoy, while ramping down the level of math and science, areas I tend to like considerably less. Though challenging, these upper-level courses really have allowed me to expand my knowledge of how our government works and the ways in which a myriad number of global economies, conflicts, and environmental challenges intertwine to create incredibly complex issues demanding united action on the behalf of the world community.

My work at the Bell Policy Center has been in the same vein. I have been able to explore the real-world applications of the fruits of my curiosity as I attend discussions with state congressmen, create social media content for the Center, and many other arenas. Throughout the lecture Pausch continues to address communication and collaboration, both in one’s personal life

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and in work. Above all, the professor implores the audience to not only value the criticism and feedback that they receive from their peers, but to actively seek out friends who are honest with them. These individuals, Pausch asserts, will be the one to put you back on track when you lose your way in life. I have always brought my most confidential problems and personal problems to my brother, Jesse. He can be honest to the point of scathing, but he never lies.

Pausch's creed to always listen really reinforces my thinking that this is an important aspect of my life: having someone brutally honest in your life that cares about you. My boss, Wade Buchanan, is an incredibly smart man and his dedication is inspiring. I take any guidance he gives me very seriously, and that is possibly the closest thing to this kind of relationship you can find in a workplace. It is beyond my power of imagination to conceive how demoralizing it must be to live with a terminal illness. Randy Pausch's physical and emotional vitality was amazing given his situation, and it really does put things in perspective. He claims that he is able to avoid feeling down because he has learned that wallowing in self-pity accomplishes nothing. Instead one must find another opportunity. Unlike Pausch, I have not seen a great amount of hardship (yet) in my life.

I wouldn't characterize myself as a whiner, though I have certainly claimed to be starving once or twice in my life. In my academics and at work I certainly bring good work ethic. Not to complain, but I often copy, bind, and box reports for hours at a time, and I don't get paid either. The same applies to school, and all committed students; we work extremely hard with the sole objective of getting into an institution where we can work even

harder. The menial tasks at work and the long nights of studying are means to a common end, however: expanding my knowledge and experiences so I can thrive in life. Looking back through childhood photos, Pausch notes that he is smiling in almost all of the photos. He sees this as a clear indication of how happy he was a kid.

It also serves as a reminder that, no matter how hard we work, much of our ability to succeed comes from those who foster our hearts and minds as kids. My family is solidly middle-class, but I owe gratitude to much more than our financial status. My parents (especially my mom) have always encouraged me to push myself and to work hard. Without them, I doubt that I would have developed much of drive that I rely on when the deadline for a paper is looming or Wade wants me to complete a summary of a new report. I'm also incredibly grateful to some of educators in my life that have inspired me and challenged me in the classroom to reach higher than I thought I ever could. I couldn't have even made it to this early point in my life if these wonderful people had not been with me. Among some of these more challenging concepts that Randy Pausch puts forth is wisdom that seems rather mundane on the surface: prepare yourself for the challenges in life and when you meet them, work hard. I think the preparations aspect refers to incorporating Pausch's lessons into your life.

It remains important to constantly learn, listen, and evaluate the balance in your lifestyle. It's also important, however, to show tenacity. After closing doors to some colleges after receiving the sub-par SAT scores I mentioned earlier, I was faced with a choice: work hard and maybe fail again, or just accept the cards I had been dealt.

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I chose the former mindset, and it paid off. In pursuing this internship, I had to prepare myself to be an asset rather than a hindrance to the organization. As Pausch assures the audience in his lecture, the work pays off every time. Randy Pausch was clearly an intelligent man. But he would tell you himself that, without these tools he developed so well, he would hardly be the same.