

**“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”**

**--Aristotle**

Good morning everyone, it is good to see you all feeling refreshed on the first day of school. I know some of you may wish that the summer holiday had not ended and that you could stay a bit longer in bed while others may be feeling very excited (and perhaps a bit nervous ) because it is your first day in a new school. Whatever that is, I would like to welcome you all back to a new school year at St. Paul’s College.

The Reading that we have just listened to is taken from Paul’s Second letter to the Corinthians which talks about the idea of a new beginning. “Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come”. Of course the Bible refers to the work of redemption. Because of our sin, we have put up a wall between God and ourselves. This separation between God and man cannot be bridged because God being Just and Righteous cannot simply turn a blind eye to sins. The good news is that God loves us so much that he sent his only begotten son to die on the cross as payment for our sins. In this way, we are reconciled with God; we have made peace with God. Therefore, anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. Old desires, attitudes, and thoughts are gone and we are seen in the eye of God as righteous and new.

In a different context, we are here at the beginning of a new academic year. In a similar way, you can start everything afresh and leave your old self behind. You can have a clean start, whether that is in terms of your conduct record or your academic performance.

The HKDSE results were released on July 14, 2014. It was reported that 12 students in Hong Kong obtained 5\*\* in all seven subjects. *Singtao Daily*, a Chinese newspaper, gave a very good coverage of these “star” students who were asked to share their secrets of success. As an educator as well as a parent, I am obviously intrigued by how they could achieve such excellent results. After all, they are not people with superpowers and I am sure their achievements should not be beyond the reach of our students here. In case you have not read the article, allow me to take this opportunity to share some of their study tips that they gave to the reporters:

- stay focused when you revise
- have enough rest and sleep
- keep a book of good sentences for writing
- have a disciplined lifestyle (use half of your lunch time to do revision in the school library)
- stay focused in class
- constantly and repeatedly revise your notes to ensure that knowledge learnt stays in the long term memory
- no pain, no gain - a disciplined lifestyle is needed
- good time-management, do not give yourself too much pressure
- start working hard in Form Four, do not wait until Form 6
- a positive mindset is needed - you need to know that you are in control of your destiny and you will be able to handle pressure.

One thing for sure, these “star” students are all very clear about what they want to do for their university studies including Political Administration, Law, Medicine, English, Chinese, Economics and Global Business. That of course is a very good driving force to motivate them to work hard towards their goals.

However, what strikes me about these tips is their piercing simplicity: staying focused when you work and having a disciplined lifestyle. There is actually no secret recipe for success and they have no tricks to increase their brain power in processing information or to enhance their memory. The secret of success is dead simple. It lies in the formation of good habits: getting enough sleep at night, getting up early in the morning, being punctual to school, being attentive in class, handing in assignments regularly, doing revision repeatedly.

Ye Shengtao (葉聖陶) a famous Chinese writer and educator once said that education is about the cultivation of good habits. We are often called creatures of habit. Habits come from repetition; what we did yesterday, we will do today whether it is a good or bad way of doing things. Habits can actually make or break you. The saying "old habits die hard" means that it is very difficult to get rid of habits that have been done for a long time. If you make it a practice of handing in your homework late, or are not being careful with your work, or not putting in any effort in doing your work, it will become a habit that is hard to change. Conversely, if you make it a habit to strive for excellence in whatever that you do, if you make it a habit that you put in 100% of your effort in all your endeavours and not settle for anything less, then you are preparing yourselves well for your future. That is why the famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle, said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

One of the themes running through Malcolm Gladwell's book "The Outlier" is the 10,000 hours rule, which he thinks is the key to success in any field. By that he means that even geniuses who want to be great require hours and hours of hard work and

tedious practices. In a similar way, Lee Yee (李怡), a famous Hong Kong commentator and columnist, mentioned the 0.1 rule in his book. Let me try to explain it and maybe some of our Mathematicians here can give me the answers very quickly.  $1 \times 1 \times 1$ , if we multiply it 10 times, the answer is 1. What about multiplying 1.1 ten times? The answer is 2.59. What about multiplying 0.9 ten times, the answer is 0.34. The jump from 1 to 2.59 is significant. You see the effectiveness of consistent and regular improvement, even if it is only 0.1. However, if we allow ourselves to succumb to bad habits, the fall is great (from 1 to 0.34). In the long run we will end up much worse off than before.

My advice to you at the beginning of a new academic year is to set clear goals to form good habits and pursue these goals relentlessly. I believe that every one of you is a Harry Potter or a Percy Jackson. Maybe you are not very sure about yourselves now or maybe like them you have unfavourable circumstances in life. Nevertheless, there is always something special in you waiting for you to uncover and to unleash its potential. Strive for excellence in whatever that you do, you will unlock the inner greatness that is in you. I am looking forward to seeing some 'star' students among us.

May I wish you all a successful and fruitful year. Thank you.

Mr. Dennis Yuen

Acting Principal

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