



**Do Little Things Right, Leap, and Listen
Recognition Day
Doctor Franklin Perkins School
June 21, 2014**

A little over a month ago Admiral William H. McRaven, ninth commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, gave the commencement address at the University of Texas at Austin. His ten suggestions to the graduates received wide acclaim. He stressed the importance of perseverance, overcoming obstacles, and working in partnership with others. One thing he said struck me more than all his other recommendations. He zeroed in on doing little things right.

He told the graduates to make their beds every morning. The Admiral has been a Navy SEAL for thirty-six years and this was the *first* of the ten recommendations he made. He recounted how important the daily ritual of bed-making was for SEAL's training, but he emphasized its importance went beyond doing it just because someone said you had to.

He said: "If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed." He went on: "Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right."

The Admiral finished up by saying that even if you have a "miserable day," you'll come home to a made bed and that provides the hope that, even if today didn't go so well, "tomorrow will be better." He concluded: "if you want to change the world, start off by making your bed."

I have a second thought for today. We've all heard the old adage: Look before you leap. It counsels us to be cautious and it makes perfect sense. Caution is important. Being impulsive or thoughtless is universally understood to be unwise. However, we can be saddled by too much caution if we spend all our time "looking" but never "leaping." W.H. Auden's famous poem is titled, "Leap Before You Look," and it starts out:

"The sense of danger must not disappear:
The way is certainly both short and steep,
However gradual it looks from here;
Look if you like, but you will have to leap."

Now, I'm not counseling you to throw caution to the wind and to never think about your actions. That would be indefensible and, frankly, a bit stupid. No, what I'm saying is that, when you have given your actions the proper amount of thought and consideration, the time comes when you have to move, take the risk, and act. You have to leap. I'm all for analysis, examination, and caution before action and I'm not a proponent of "Ready, Fire, Aim." The aim part is as important as the ready part, but at some point you have to fire. Looking is important, but so is leaping.

My final suggestion is to become a good listener. Listen carefully. You all know how I find such inspiration and wisdom in our beloved Boston Red Sox.

Well, even if that's not true, there are times when we can learn *something* from them. A few weeks ago Don Zimmer passed away. Don played for, coached, and managed a number of teams including the Red Sox in a long career in major league baseball. Bob Ryan, the Boston Globe sportswriter, recalled a situation that we can all profit from. Its lesson is my last suggestion to you today: learn to listen and listen carefully.

Don Zimmer was the Red Sox third base coach who "shouted 'No! No! No!' before Denny Doyle was cut down trying to score from third in Game 6 of the 1975 World Series." Why is that important? Well, Denny Doyle didn't hear "No! No! No!" He swore that he heard "Go! Go! Go!" Regardless of our baseball loyalties, I think we can all agree that there's a big difference between "No! No! No!" and "Go! Go! Go!" It points up the importance of listening. Listening can be a game-changer or a game saver.

So - there you have it. Unlike the Admiral, I didn't have ten suggestions – just three – and one of them I stole from him: make your bed every morning. Do it because it's one of the little things that make you ready to do the big things in life.

But the other two suggestions are important too. At some point you have to take a risk – you have to leap. Hopefully that will happen after some looking, but, make no mistake about it, the time will come. Life is about looking but it's also about leaping. And, finally, listen - always listen and do it carefully. Sometimes we make mistakes when we don't listen.

Welcome to everyone on this wonderful day when we celebrate the accomplishments of our students and their families and our Perkins staff and faculty who have supported them for all the time they have been here.

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