



HUDSON VALLEY *PARAMEDIC ASSOCIATION*

RCC Paramedic Commencement Speech

August 23, 2011

1800hrs.

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Hudson Valley Paramedic Association

President

Every New Paramedic

I would like to thank Peter for inviting me to speak to you all tonight, I'm honored to have the opportunity to speak to a group of enthusiastic new Paramedics ready to take on the world and make a difference. I'm honored to speak on behalf of our newly established Hudson Valley Paramedic Association, a not-for-profit organization established in May of 2011 to enhance and further the cause of Paramedics in the Hudson Valley. Today is a good day to become part of a grass roots effort to expand the scope of Paramedicine, gain licensure, develop lateral career opportunities and increase pay and job security for the next generation of Paramedics. This cannot be accomplished without your assistance, therefore get involved, stay involved and a make difference.

Over the next two hours, I get to tell you how it really is; from real experience with real people and real blood. I get to tell you what I know to be true about being a paramedic.

When I say that I believe being a "Paramedic" is the single most significant job there is, I'm not just blowing smoke up your you know what just because this is a paramedic school graduation; and I'm not saying it because I spent most of my adult life working as a paramedic; and I'm not saying it because defending Paramedics and EMS providers is the cornerstone of Joel Hirshfield legal defense practice and some of you look like Joel's future potential clients.

I say that being a "Paramedic" is the most significant job there is because I know it's true. Think about this: Unlike even other EMS providers, it is the paramedic who willingly puts himself or herself smack in the middle of tragedy. It is the paramedic who willingly seeks out life's worst moments and brings hope and comfort. It is the paramedic who willingly faces the absolute worst that human kind has to offer and takes control with a level head, a firm voice, and gentle hands.

But, more than **all** that, it is the paramedic - and nobody else - who goes to work every morning, takes out their certificate to practice, slams it on the table and says: "I dare you, world; I dare you to take this away from me today. I dare you to take my livelihood, my possessions, and even my life. I dare you." Because, unlike any other profession, in EMS a simple twist of fate, a simple mistake, a simple misjudgment, can cost you everything. I've tried, but I cannot think of any other profession where that is true. There are jobs that are singularly more difficult. There are jobs that are singularly more dangerous. But there is no other profession that is more significant for those reasons and many more.

To add a little perspective, I remember lying awake some nights in quarters thinking to myself: "Wow, if I called 911 right now, I would get...me. That's it. I'm it." For all intents and purposes, that was true. There is no 911 for 911 to call: You are it. For that reason alone, most people cannot do this job. Most people are not willing to take the kind of risks that you will take every minute that you hold a paramedic certificate.

Notice, I did not say "every minute that you are working," I said every minute that you hold a paramedic certificate. Because your status as a paramedic, what is expected of you, is not limited to who you are and what you do on duty.

As the Hudson Valley Paramedic Association President, I am here to tell you, New York State cares very much who you are and what you do all the time. As far as NYS is concerned, who you are and what you do away from the job can have just as detrimental an impact on your certificate -- and your career -- as when you are working. Therefore, "Please don't "Drink and Drive", "Text and Drive" or partake in questionable activities that potentially could affect your status as a NYS Paramedic.

Again, most normal people are simply not willing to be held to those kind of standards... but you are -- and you'd better be.

Experience has shown me that there are only three kinds of paramedics. There are the naturals; the ones for whom it is effortless... guys like John Scanlon, Greg Berger, Bob Visconti and Joel Hirshfield...these guys have it flowing through their veins. Then there are the ones who work very hard to be the best they can be; they read everything they can, they do twice the amount of CME they need to; the ones who bust their butts to make it look easy because being good is that important. There are the ones who slipped through the cracks or the ones who view being a paramedic as just another part of the job, the ones who reach limply for the bare minimum.

Which one are you? Each of you knows the answer already and I hope my words here today will solidify what you need to do with that answer.

Standing here now...as a Hospital Administrator...it seems surreal that it has been 18 years since the Spring of 1992 when I did my internship at St. Mary's Hospital in Troy, NY.

I clearly remember that my preceptor, Greg Chapman, spent a lot of time making sure I knew my policies and procedures...and my drug dosages. He carried with him a toy squeaky hammer for a good reason. When we would meet up with other crews he would show off what I knew by asking me difficult questions; if I answered correctly, I got a pad on the back. If I was wrong, he would hit me in the head with the squeaky hammer. Needless to say, I got more wrong answers than right answers, since I certainly was not born looking like this.

Greg Chapman showed me that as serious as this job is, it can also be fun; that, more than anything, the job is about people...people who depend on and deserve the best we have to offer...every time, no matter what.

That was two decades ago. I was 22-years-old and ready to save the world. And back then, I believed I could. And I believed I would.

Now, looking back, on those two decades, I believe I did. If only for one family, though I know it was many, many more, I did change the world. And now it's your turn.

The question now is... "How will you change the world?"

Who will you be?

Will your commitment and your effort allow an elderly couple to enjoy just one more anniversary? Or will your complacency and disinterest cause a grieving widow to wake up alone for the first time in 50 years?

Will your knowledge and skill remind you that a stomach ache is not always a stomach ache? Or will a culture of burn-out and malaise allow you to believe that a drunk is always a drunk.

Will your passion lead you to find or create innovative solutions to problems old and new? Or will just enough, be enough?

Today is the day, now is the moment to ask yourself, not only what kind of Paramedic you want to be or will be... but how will you change the world. Because, for Paramedics, changing the world is not some unearthly or mysterious notion, it is what you will do every single day.

In fact, right now, someone somewhere is going about their regular daily life. They are not thinking of you any more than you are thinking about them. But they are out there; sitting in traffic, buying groceries, having a late lunch with an old friend, planning a wedding, making a baby, walking between classes, or just lounging by a pool somewhere having a drink.

Wherever they are, they are just doing their thing.

They are happy and relaxed because they don't know that one day next week, next month, or maybe next year their entire existence is going to be hanging by a thread; their breath may be short, their heart may be fibrillating, their limbs may be convulsing... or they may be staring helpless at the bloody, lifeless body of their child and the twisted metal that moments before was a bicycle... and there will be you. Your senses, your hands, and your decisions in that moment will be the difference between hope and hurt, life and longing, another birthday party or a child's funeral. What you do in that moment will change the world for them and for you and that change cannot and will not be undone.

So, I ask you: Who will you be in that moment? Will you be prepared or preoccupied? Will your passion for perfection carry the day? Or will being mediocre be too little, too late?

As you sit there, the slate is clean; the choice is yours and I offer you this:

Being a Paramedic is the single most significant job there is; it is rich with reward and possibly the most fun you can have with shoes on... but there are no second chances; not for you and not for those who depend on you. Who will you be? How will you change the world?

Part of speech was written by: David J. Givot esq. EMT-P