

**To my swag 2014-15 freshman dudes and dudettes,**

**June 1, 2015**

Figure out what's really important and give 100 percent to it—but remember that you can't give 100 percent to everything, so you WILL have to make choices in everything from a school assignment to the big life decisions. Then... don't spend your time thinking, "What if I had...?" or "If only I could go back and do it differently!" This sucks the life out of everything, so keep moving forward from wherever you are... every day. It will be hard some days, but I promise you that you'll be glad you did.

Be who you are; you're wired/created that way for a reason! You may have to fight some battles, but if you do, you'll get there. No, wait—you WILL have to fight some battles. This is one of those things that doesn't come easily but is worth the cost. Put on your armor, folks! This is one battle that is indeed glorious.

Find where your abilities intersect with your passions; whatever it is, if you can do it as your job, career, or even pastime, you'll have it made.

Look honestly and openly for truth—in the little things and the big ones. If you do, you'll eventually find it. I thank God just about every day that I finally had courage and sense enough to do it (and that he gave me a push). Don't wait until you're in your 30s like I did to say, "Whether I like what I find or not, I need to know what's REAL." (To my great surprise, I liked what I found.)

Don't automatically believe what you read or hear; check things out for yourself. However, do listen carefully to the people who care about you; and in the end, make your own decision based on good, accurate information.

(So many "but," "and," or "however" comments here. Does that mean life is an oxymoron? That's actually a good description.)

Love people with determination and loyalty; but remember that this doesn't mean you have to agree with everything they do or say. People are more important than anything—and never forget that you're one of them. You'll always be important and valuable to me, and I'm proud (no, really—PROUD!) to know you. You've let me know YOU through the open creativity and even genius I saw in your book trailers, Socratic seminar comments, essays, and those jaw-droppingly good poetry anthologies—along with our everyday conversations and crazy-stupid-funny moments.

Thanks for a totally amazing year, everyone; I've had a blast! I leave because my family is important; I stayed because you guys are so hard to leave ☺. I love you guys.

"Live long and prosper." "May the force be with you, always." "For Frodo!"