



Transcript: Morgan State University 2019 PowerLIVE Awards Ceremony

I am so honored to be standing here tonight, not only because of my history with Morgan, but because I get to celebrate and recognize some of Morgan's best and brightest students. You know, I've watched this PowerLIVE program evolve from its inception into what it is today, and it makes me happy to see just how much it's accomplished its objective of bridging the gap between academics and on-campus life.

I'm also really happy that Dr. Gwynn finally—FINALLY—let me serve as the keynote speaker for this event. You know, he's told me that he's very protective over his students and will not put just anybody in front of them. I mean, I don't know if he thought I was going to eat you all, I mean, you're NOT French fries. But in all seriousness, it means a lot that he trusts me with this awesome responsibility, and I don't take it for granted.

So let me start by congratulating all of you on your academic accomplishments. With all of the decisions you have to make every day, with all the temptations of being young and cute and in college, you obviously are making right choices, you're doing something right. So, congrats!

So, the theme of this year's awards ceremony is Vision, and I've been asked to share some thoughts about what Vision means to me. And I'm sure some of you are thinking, "Ok, here's a grownup talking to me about Vision at an academic ceremony; I'm probably going to hear the usual clichés. Study hard, make a plan, do what you love, get a good job."

But I think if I were to do that, you'd be bored. Your parents and loved ones here tonight would be bored. The faculty here tonight would be bored. I'd be bored. Because over your lifetime, you will hear these same clichés, over and over and over. But as you heard in my bio, I'm a truth teller. I tell the truth, all the time. Sometimes too much but I have a firm conviction that knowing the truth is what helps you to make sense of this world.

Some of you will be graduating soon and may—for the very first time—enter Corporate America (or what I call The Land of Stranger Things). For some of you, you'll be surrounded for the first time by people who are different from you, who don't look like you, who have different values than you. And you have to succeed, thrive in this environment. Wouldn't you want to know the truth about what's *really* out there? Yes?

So instead, what I thought I'd do tonight is take a closer look at three of these clichés (just three because I don't have all night) and examine them to determine how true—or not true—they are, based on my personal experience. And I'm going to need your help. You'll see the cliché up on the screen, and when you do, I want you to tell me whether you've heard it before, and whether you think it's completely true, completely false, or otherwise. Sounds good?

So, let's look at the first cliché: Find a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life. Have you heard this one before? What do you think? True, false?

Well, in my experience, it is not true. At all. Now, I've been fortunate to have discovered something that I really love to do, and it took me a long while to get there. When I graduated from high school, I really had no idea what

I wanted to do with my life. I honestly did not have a vision for my life. But it wasn't uncommon in my culture to leave high school and start working right away, so that's what I did. And through several really crappy jobs, I learned what it is I didn't like until I finally found something I liked doing. So by the time I started college, it was 6 years after I had graduated from high school, but by that time, I was really sure that I had found something I loved to do.

And since graduating from Morgan, I've had some great jobs and to this day, I really enjoy what I do. But I work hard. Not all the time, but my job sometimes feels like a job. Furthermore, I never feel like that woman in this picture while I'm at work. Apart from the obvious reasons (like I don't work at the beach and swimsuits are not allowed in the office), there's a few other reasons for that.

First, because I love what I do, I want to do it the best. I want to provide the best quality of work, you know, push myself to be better, to be an expert. And I'm sure if you think about something you like doing, you want to do it often. But becoming good or great at something takes work. It takes long hours, practice, patience. And sometimes it involves doing tasks that are not interesting but are necessary to get the job done. And that feels like work.

Second reason why what I love to do sometimes feels like work: because I don't work in a vacuum, and I have to rely on other people and resources (whether it's money, tools, technology) to get my part of the job done, and when those resources fail, I fail or have to work harder to accomplish what I need to do.

And the third reason why what I love to do sometimes feels like work: because I work with stupid people, I work with people who are incompetent, and I work with people who are difficult. And those stupid, incompetent, difficult people might be thinking the same thing about me, but we have to work together, and most of the time, it's not fun. It feels like work.

You know, I remember when I was in college and we would get assigned to group projects, I used to hate that so much. How many of you have ever been assigned to a group, especially in a course that has nothing to do with your major, and there is guaranteed to be at least one person who isn't pulling their weight, at least one person who doesn't seem to understand the assignment, and then you just end up hating group meetings, but your grade depends on this group, so if you don't want anyone to screw your GPA, you sometimes end up having to do all the work in the group. And you think, I can't wait until I get a real job, because I'll never have to deal with this again. Well, I'm here to tell you that you will have to deal with this again. It's the price of doing what you love.

Don't get me wrong, doing what you love is important. It's rewarding, it's enjoyable most of the time and it's fulfilling. But if I were to rewrite this cliché, it would be "Find a job that you love, be the best at it, and work hard." And then, take your vacations at the beach.

So, let's look at the second cliché: If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail. How many have heard this one? True or false? I think I see some parents giving me the side-eye right now. "Lady, don't tell my child that they shouldn't be prepared." But hear me out on this one.

I'll say that it's partially true. Should you be prepared? Yes. Should you make a plan? Yes, of course. But there have been many times that I've planned **AND** failed. I'm sure you've heard of this before, "Man plans, and God laughs." It's actually a Yiddish saying that implies that despite our most careful planning, life is unpredictable. Like when you see those cartoons of someone walking and slipping on a banana peel. It's like life is saying, "So you have plan? We'll see."

I'm going to tell you about two times when I planned *and* failed. The first time is a very silly story, a kind of a slipping-on-a-banana-peel moment. About two years ago, I moved homes to be closer to my job. And it was the first time that I was moving into a brand-new apartment. I mean, so new that when I signed the lease, the apartment hadn't even been built yet. And I was so excited because it meant that for the first time ever, I was going to be THE FIRST AND ONLY person to have ever used the toilet. That first flush was mine. And I know it sounds ridiculous, but when you spend your life with your parents always renting, living in crappy dorm rooms (sorry Dr. Gwynn), and then having low-paying jobs where you couldn't afford a nicer home, being able to use my own toilet for the very first time was a big deal for me.

So, moving day came, and I had hired some movers to help me. So, we drove to the new place, and I was first to enter the apartment. And I immediately went into the bathroom area to check everything out. But remember I was in the middle of moving, so I didn't want to like, say to the movers, "Hey, so there's this dream I need to fulfill right now, if you'll just excuse me for a few moments." While I sat on the toilet and cried with joy. Couldn't do that.

So, I went back out to help the movers, and just as they were done, one of the movers says to me, "Ok ma'am, we're about done here but before we head out, I just need to use your toilet real quick." I mean, what could I say, "Sir, I know it's the middle of winter and you just lifted my sofa on your back, but you cannot use my bathroom because I had a plan."

Another time that I planned and failed was a little more serious and life altering. When I left graduate school, I was an international student, and I got a job with a company that not only provided me with a work permit, but the opportunity to get sponsored for a green card. But the catch was that I would have to remain with the company for 3 years after I got the green card, and if I left before then, I'd have to pay the company back the thousands of dollars they spent on applying for the green card.

Now the green card process by itself takes at least 2 to 3 years, then add to that another 3 years to serve the company, so we're looking at 5 to 6 years of staying with one company, whether I enjoyed working there or not. Why? Because I had always planned to move permanently to the States.

Well two years in, my job was eliminated, and I was looking at the possibility of returning to my home country. My plans had failed. But through that experience, and through many similar experiences, I've learned that what we call failure is really a mistake you haven't learned from. You know, especially in American society, failure, mistakes, are seen as bad things. People are afraid to make mistakes, especially in a social media world where you're ripped apart for one minor infraction. People are judgy, unforgiving, quick to blame. I get it, there is pressure to be perfect.

But truth be told, some of my biggest achievements have come from my biggest mistakes. And I wish I had more time to tell you about some of those amazing stories, but my purpose here tonight is really to make you hate clichés, so onward we go.

So, if I were to rewrite this cliché, it would be: Fail to prepare, and you prepare for your **First Attempt In Learning**. Ahh, see what I did there? You like that?

Ok, third and final cliché: Money can't buy happiness. I know you've heard this one before, right? So, what do you think? True or false? I mean, what is this trying to tell me, that I shouldn't pursue wealth? That if I find a job that I love and it doesn't pay anything, that I'm happy for the rest of my life? Have you ever seen an unhappy person on a jet ski?

So again, in my experience, the answer is both. As I read recently somewhere, it's true that money can't buy happiness, but somehow, it's much more comfortable crying in a BMW than on a bicycle. Think about it.

Of course, there's dozens of studies that demonstrate you can't buy happiness, saying for example happiness is tied to respect more than wealth. Then there are studies suggesting that money can buy happiness if you spend it on other people. But what the research also showed is that happiness rises right along with income, but only up to \$75,000 a year. After that, it's just more stuff with no increase in happiness. I mean, if you think about it, if you're living without the ability to pay for basic things like food, clothing, heat, shelter, your happiness will probably be impacted. On the other hand, a certain level of luxury spending is probably going to positively impact your happiness.

So, here's my take on this cliché. Money can buy happiness (sometimes). So kids, boys and girls, get paid, make bank, get that paper, or whatever it is you young people say nowadays. It's important to be able to enjoy the quality of life you envision for yourself but know this—money should never be a goal. Just like fame, money is a result of what you do—it is not a goal.

So, you'll notice that at no point tonight did I tell you about the steps you need to define your vision for your life. And I'm really sorry if you were disappointed, but the truth is, there is no wrong or right way to determine what your vision is. Some people, from a very young age, know what they want for their lives and set out to achieve that vision. Others, like me, embark on this kind of meandering journey, where each step is taken without even knowing what the step after that is going to be.

But whether you know what you want to do with your life or not, here's what's true. Life is hard. And sometimes, it isn't fair. There are no promises, no guarantees, no matter how much we plan. Sometimes you don't get what you want, even if you deserve it.

What I do believe is this—if you always seek to know and live your truth (as long as it is not at the expense of others), the best vision for your life will unfold. To me, vision isn't foresight. It's being able to see what's needed in the moment, what's the best choice you make in the moment, because all you have is this moment, now. Vision is about making a plan but also planning to adapt should circumstances change. Vision is seeing the

lesson that you need to learn when you make a mistake. It's knowing that the only thing you can control, the only thing that is certain, is your attitude and the choices that you make.

In closing, I'd like to leave you with a quote by Anais Nin, a French-Cuban American writer: We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are, meaning that the perception we have of our life might not be based on what it actually is, but on what we say it is. It's how **you** see it. Which means that you can also change the way you see it.