

Paul Douglas's speech delivered to Mustang District's 100th Anniversary of Scouting

Paul Douglas. Father. Husband. Meteorologist. Businessman. Boy Scout. Dreamer. I should have dreamer printed on my business cards.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

So my question for you – tonight – how big are your dreams? This is a new world, the Age of the Big Idea! Now a kid, sitting in his underwear in the basement, can change the world!

I'm here today, as a meteorologist and a hopeless, serial entrepreneur, because I was blessed with a great Scoutmaster at Troop 129, a guy that encouraged me to take weather merit badge, and later TEACH weather merit badge to younger scouts. I'm also here thanks to a handful of inspired, creative and gifted teachers. An amazing science teacher in 7th grade who turned a weather unit into something fascinating, memorable – unforgettable.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said:
"Men love to wonder, and that is the seed of science."

Well, Mr Richard Batzer back in 7th grade planted that first seed - he was the first teacher to point out the wondrous mysteries of tornadoes, the doubt and uncertainty over how and why they form, why some go on to become monsters while most don't. In 9th grade Mr. Jack Danner, my astronomy teacher, also found time to focus in on hurricanes, wondering out loud if we would ever be able to control these massive, Texas-size storms. My mind was spinning with the possibilities!

But my teachers also stressed the importance of communication skills, to express myself with confidence and flair - the need to be able to tell an effective story, no matter what you hoped to accomplish. I can still remember my 8th grade advanced placement English teacher, Mrs. Eisenhar, implore me to "use action words....**use action words!**" I can't remember what I had for lunch yesterday, but I remember Mrs. Eisenhar!

I was fortunate to hear the collective wisdom of some talented, above-average teachers. That, and a father who recognized my love of weather and constantly cut articles out of magazines and newspapers. He was my part-time clipping service, and he's still at it today, only now he forwards articles via e-mail.

The ability to think rationally, not emotionally, to use the scientific method to test various theories and hypotheses, is critical.

When you come down to it...that's what life really amounts to: an endless parade of problem-solving...how you approach a problem, size it up, think rationally and unemotionally, and then come up with the right solution...

Logic only goes so far when you're a weather guy, it's a very painful learning curve, believe me. There's only so much you can get out of a textbook – you make a forecast based on the best data available, then run to the window every 15 minutes to see if you're "busting" the forecast! (I said it would be rain, why is it snowing out there right now?)

That's why meteorologists over-predict snow: our biggest fear (other than missing a tornado altogether) is predicting partly cloudy, only to wake up to 4-8" of partly cloudy! People have LONG memories... I still get heckled for the Halloween Superstorm. I thought 4-8" was going out on a limb. Right. 30" later I was taught a humbling lesson. Some storms go beyond what we can do as meteorologists. There is – ultimately – only one real weatherman....

It's a painful learning curve, but it's the only way to really understand how the atmosphere works, not in theory, but in reality. Make mistakes, learn from your mistakes, vow never to make the same mistakes again. If you don't make mistakes it means you're not really trying. Many companies only hire people who have made big, glaring, embarrassing mistakes. The reason? You learn – the hard way. You grow as a person when you make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

Yes, sadly, I've made a career out of making mistakes...

Trust me, I'm a weatherman.

We live in a new world, a fast-paced Information Age, **the Age of Information Overload**. The pace of technology and innovation is speeding up – I encourage kids of all ages to try and spend a lot of time soaking up information about what they love. There's so much data, so little wisdom.

Our only real edge, something Americans tend to do VERY well – is innovation, trying new ideas, new ways to connect the dots.

What's the one thing that can't be copied or cloned? CREATIVITY! All of us have God-given gifts and abilities, your parents, your friends, your minister, your teachers AND your Scoutmaster are all keys to unlocking that creativity. What do you love? What do you do best? That's what's so great about scouting and merit badges – it exposes all of you to things you might not try otherwise. It opens up new experiences, new horizons. You just never know when something new will click, and turn a hobby into a successful career.

For me: weather has always been a HOBBY, one that I get paid for! That's one of the big secrets in life: see if you can get someone to PAY YOU to do something you love, something you'd do for free!

Weather has been my #1 hobby since my scouting days. When I was 14 a hurricane hit my home (in Pennsylvania). "Agnes" changed my life forever. I was terrified, fascinated, but above all – curious. I started digging into books about hurricanes, which led to tornadoes and floods.

For me the JOY is taking something I have a true passion for, a genuine curiosity – and dressing it up - finding new ways to make weather more appealing, more colorful, more accessible, more useful and relevant to consumers and weather-sensitive companies. That's what I'm attempting to do with WeatherNation. We have 3 HD studios and 7 meteorologists – we're outsourcing weather to TV stations, web sites, newspapers, and corporate customers – from a weather center in Excelsior. With the Internet the world has shrunk. One of our bilingual meteorologists can now do a daily forecast for a client in San Juan or Mexico City – using high-speed Internet to transmit the video file from Minnesota to anywhere on the planet – instantaneously!

Don't worry about money. If you're doing what you love, chances are you'll be good at it. If you're good at it the money will come. I really do believe the mantra: If you set out to serve others – truly serve others, the money will come....but I tell kids of all ages, if you're only focused on the money, prepare to be miserable much of the time. Focus on a better service or product, concentrate on really helping others, and the profits will come.

Everyone has a gift, an innate capability that needs to be nurtured – encouraged. That's our challenge. To help every young man and woman find out what they really like, what they're passionate about, what they're GOOD at - and how they can turn this interest, this passion, into a business or career - to think logically and make smart life-decisions that get them closer to their goal. The importance of having teachers who are role-models, lifelong mentors and advisors, is something that can't be overstated. In the end it all comes down to confidence, and a body of experience that empowers young men and women to pursue their dreams – to experiment, to take charge of their futures, as leaders, not followers – kids who have that indefinable SPARK that will sustain them to the finish line and empower them to truly change the world.

The next Google, Facebook and Twitter is out there, just waiting to be born. New businesses that will employ millions of dreamers are being launched every day – it's critical that kids have a new and revised Blueprint for Success. That's what scouting is today: a blueprint for success, a roadmap for young men who emerge into the workforce with passion and confidence. What worked in the 1960s and 1970s won't necessarily work today. Advanced problem-solving is non-trivial, but it all comes back to

a sound foundation in science, logic and problem-solving skills that – sadly – aren't always present in every school today. Getting every kid to have their own, personal “aha moment” should be the goal. Immerse them in the sciences, and then stand back as they assimilate the information, internalize it, personalize it – make it theirs! Life isn't a sprint, it's a marathon, and we need to make sure every young man and woman has the underlying skills necessary to take their interests, and turn them into viable, successful careers.

The key, one of the keys: giving kids hands-on experiences. That's what scouting does so well: it opens up a new world to boys, it fans their curiosities, it asks more questions than it answers. The much-maligned field trip can be a revelation, making science come alive – turning print on a page into something 3-D, interactive and potentially life-changing! I remember the first time I saw the man-made tornado over at the Science Museum in St. Paul. I'm on the board of the MN Planetarium Society – not too far from here is their mobile “Exploradome” – a portable, moveable, interactive planetarium that can be set up in a school gymnasium or parking lot – capable of navigating the nighttime sky, exploring quasars, dark matter and black holes, getting kids of all ages to think big – REALLY big!

This is a little unorthodox, but I've always been fascinated by the scientific method, and how science relies on something akin to “faith” to whittle down an infinite number of hypotheses into a handful of verifiable, testable theories. That, along with a valiant, but ultimately futile attempt to define what **quality** is, is documented in one of the most important books I've ever read. Do yourself and pick up a book that may change your life, or at least your perspective on life:

“Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” (written by a Minnesota boy, Robert Pirsig).

Today society is preoccupied with the destination: finding that spouse, making that 6-figure salary, buying that big home, driving the fancy car. We put so much pressure on ourselves buying into these self-imposed milestones.

The most important thing you can do: ENJOY THE JOURNEY, soak up the ride, live for the present – that's always been a challenge for me, enjoying the here and now.

Here is a little cheap advice, a few nuggets that may help you on your life-journey:

Be Curious. Soak up new skills. Learn HTML. Learn to code. Start a blog. Learn to cook. Take up Spanish. Write a book (or at least a pamphlet). Set crazy goals for yourself! Come up with a Top 10 List: stuff you want to do before you turn 20. Challenge yourself daily. Push yourself – not too just do “good enough”, but to exceed expectations. YOUR expectations.

Be Compassionate. We're put on this planet to help those around us....not just friends and family, that's too easy. Challenge yourself to make a difference in the life of strangers put in your path.

Be Humble. The older you get the more you realize the utter depths of your ignorance. We've become a nation of specialists – we know A LOT about A LITTLE.

Be Bold. What's your B.H.A.G? Jim Collins writes about BHAGS in his excellent book, "Good to Great". Big Hairy Audacious Goal. How are you going to change the world? Researchers tell us something counterintuitive: the bigger & crazier the dream, the better the odds of ultimate success. Dream BIG dreams.

With the enabling technology of the Internet there has never been a better time to start a company. Many of you in this room will do just that. ("everyone has at least one book in them".....I believe that "just about everyone has at least one SMALL BUSINESS in them!" Don't depend on someone else for a job. It's never been easier to launch a business. You need an idea, but it has to be something you're passionate about. What would you do for free. (play video games, right?) You do realize you can play video games for a living, and get people to pay you for it. Become a computer programmer, create your own games, on your terms. But to do that you'll need to be very sharp with your math skills. That's why math is so important. Get straight A's in math and you may just get paid to invent PlayStation 5!

People laughed when I set out to invent 3-D weather graphics. After Steven Spielberg used the software for Jurassic Park and Twister the laughter died down...

Friends thought I was nuts when I said I would personalize weather and put Doppler radar on a cell phone. After I sold my company to Garmin for \$45 million (and created 8 new millionaires) the skeptics stopped giving me such a hard time.

I love it when people say "you can't do that" or "Paul, that's impossible, you'll never be able to pull it off." Once at a presentation for venture capitalists I overheard one young, cocky banker whisper, "he's crazy – people will NEVER pay for weather." It was a pleasure proving this guy wrong.

If you're tenacious, determined – if you surround yourself with smart people who share your vision – you can do anything you put your mind to. You don't need wads of cash or contacts...you need a GREAT IDEA.....you need to experiment and refine your idea, just like a musician fine-tuning a melody or lyrics. This is the Age of the Big Idea. The Internet is a threat, yes, but it's also the most amazing opportunity that's ever come along. Now you can write world-changing code, in your underwear, in your basement, and have people half a planet away using your invention the next day. That has NEVER happened before.

I've been accused of being a naïve optimist. Don't listen to the news headlines. Vow to create your own headlines, on your terms. All of us have something to prove – all of us have unique God-given gifts and talents. Don't keep them a secret. You have something to prove....mostly importantly, to yourself.

When people tell me I'm crazy for starting up my 4th 5th and 6th businesses I tell them the truth: I never want to work for another corporate pinhead again, if I can help it. For me the joy is taking an idea (usually weather-related), gathering smart people together, and selling them on my Big Idea. Make friends with smart people.

Be Flexible. Those teachers didn't inoculate me with mindless facts & figures. They showed me how to think logically, rationally, and those lessons came in handy during my years experimenting - tinkering with new business ideas and business models. You set out in a certain direction, knowing full well there's a good chance you'll have to zig & zag, make mid-course corrections – reacting to current events, reacting to changes in the marketplace. If you don't build flexibility into your business plan (or your life) you're dead. Having smart-flexibility baked into your DNA is essential to growing as a person and eventually prospering.

My gift, and I thank God for it every day: soaking up relevant information and trying to connect the dots and dream up new services and products, before they become obvious to everyone. That's the challenge – make a calculated bet on a certain direction, get there early, and then wait for the market to catch up. I could not, I WOULD NOT be able to do this had I not been grounded in scouting, learned to solve problems, learned that there is a RIGHT WAY to get from point A to point B. I do not, for an instant, take my scouting experience for granted.

Sometimes I'm WAY too early and I have to wait it out, sweat it out, until the market comes around to my invention or my vision – that happened with my last company, Digital Cyclone. We created GPS forecasts, alerts and maps on cell phones, but had to wait 3 years before the Sprints, Verizons and AT&T's of the world were ready for our invention. That made for a serious cash drain and some very sleepless, anxious nights.

My wife TRULY wanted to strangle me in my sleep.

But I'd rather be too early than too late. Nobody wants to be in a commodity business. The key, the trick, is ANTICIPATING the future, being there with just the right product or service, at precisely the right time. Innovation is great, but ultimate success relies on intangibles like timing, serendipity, and good 'ol fashioned luck – tough things to put into a business plan. Scouting teaches that there's a right way: sometimes it's faster to take shortcuts, the temptations are there. There's a right way to treat people, a right way to get results, without taking shortcuts that might come back to bit you in the butt.

It's no secret that the business world is evolving, there are fewer W-2 jobs out there, some jobs are going away permanently, I fear. More than ever kids will have to rely on their education, their experiences, internships and mentors to launch their own businesses, forge their own futures, and make their own success. We have to make sure kids have the necessary skills in their job toolkits – if they can't think logically, if they can't problem-solve, if they aren't grounded in science – they're going to have a much tougher time turning their visions into profitable companies.

I look around and I'm scared by some of the things I see: we live in a Lotto World, an American Idol-obsessed, celebrity-drenched, Jersey Shore-plagued world, I can be rich & famous overnight. I don't have to be good, I don't have to be smart, tenacious or innovative. All I have to be is LUCKY! Many of our kids are convinced that the game is rigged, they can't get ahead through achievement & tenacity, so they'll set themselves up to be LUCKY instead.

Kids have to know that there is a way they can take their God-given gifts, their interests – channel that sense of wonder and fascination and **create** their own futures. We have to do a better job, not turning out future employees (people who need to be led, people who need to be managed) but young entrepreneurs who see a challenge, see a need, and can visualize a roadmap to launch new businesses to meet these needs and opportunities. It's all about connecting the dots, taking a theory – a sound business idea – testing a hypothesis, creating a new product or service, not being afraid to fail. Picking yourself back up again when you fall and tweak that original hypothesis – test again – sooner or later the ingredients and timing will converge and you WILL get the results you're trying to achieve.

A reporter once asked Thomas Edison about the thousands of experiments he went through to invent the carbon filament – something along the lines of “how does it feel to have failed ten thousand times to create the electric filament?”

Thomas Edison thought about it for a minute and replied:

“I have not failed, not once. I've discovered ten thousand ways that don't work.”

Where does that kind of drive and tenacity come from? I don't pretend to have the answer. But it's reasonable to assume that a kid who is grounded in scouting has a MUCH better chance of having the attributes, the skills, the tools in their toolbox necessary to be successful over the long haul.

We need to find and encourage future generations of Steven Jobs and Bill Gates, kids who have the confidence and the experiences to make smart, rational decisions, surrounding themselves with other smart, inspired kids and set out to change the world from the inside out.

The world has changed, seemingly overnight. It's no longer about how much money you have, your parents, your family, the neighborhood you grew up in. Today it's all about the power of your idea. The Internet has leveled the playing field like never before

What you're doing, what you're trying to accomplish, is critically important: exposing children to scouting, providing that essential blueprint for not only survival, but ultimate individual success, is essential to keep America innovating and growing in the right direction. Other countries are catching up, in some cases, surpassing the US in science and math skills, some of the trends are genuinely alarming.

Dream big dreams! Don't settle for "good enough". Love what you do and do what you love. The money, the career, everything else....will take care of itself. But to know what you're really good at, where your gifts are, you need the framework of scouting to increase your odds of surviving in this brave new world. Without it you may have trouble keeping up in this crazy new, interactive, personalized, just-in-time business world.

Good luck. God bless. With rare 100% accuracy I am predicting AMAZING THINGS for all of you. That's one forecast I'm determined to get right.

Thank you.