

Randy Pausch on Oprah

December 1, 2009

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1 So I'm reprising a talk that I gave in
2 September at Carnegie Mellon University. There's
3 an academic tradition called "The Last Lecture."
4 Hypothetically, if you knew you were going to die
5 and you had one last lecture, what would you say
6 to your students?

7 Well, for me, there's an elephant in the room,
8 and the elephant in the room is that for me it
9 wasn't hypothetical. I have been fighting
10 pancreatic cancer. It has now come back after
11 surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, and the
12 doctors tell me there is nothing more to do and I
13 have months to live.

14 These are my most recent CT scans. The
15 pancreatic cancer has spread to my liver. There
16 are approximately a dozen tumors. I don't like
17 this. I have three little kids. Let's be clear.
18 This stinks, but I can't do anything about the
19 fact that I'm going to die. I'm pursuing medical
20 treatments, but I pretty much know how this movie
21 is going to end, and I can't control the cards I'm
22 dealt, just how I play the hands.

23 Now, if I'm not morose enough for you, I'm
24 sorry to disappoint, but I don't choose to be an
25 object of pity. And in fact, although I'm going

1 to die soon, I'm actually physically very strong.
2 In fact, I'm probably physically stronger than
3 most of the people in this audience.

4 So, today's talk is not about death. It's
5 about life and how to live. It's specifically
6 about childhood dreams and about how you can try
7 to achieve them. My childhood dreams. Your
8 childhood dreams.

9 As a child I had an incredibly happy childhood.
10 I went back and raided the photo album, and I
11 couldn't find any places where I wasn't smiling. I
12 just had a great childhood, and I was dreaming,
13 always dreaming. It was an easy time to dream.
14 When you turn on your television set and men are
15 landing on the moon, anything is possible, and we
16 should never lose that spirit.

17 So, what were my childhood dreams? Being in
18 the National Football League. This is one of the
19 childhood dreams that I didn't achieve, and it's
20 very important to know that, if you don't achieve
21 your dreams, you can still get a lot by trying for
22 it. There's an expression I love: Experience is
23 what you get when you don't get what you want.

24 Now, I played little league football for a long
25 time, and I had a phenomenal coach, Coach Jim

1 Graham, and he was old school. When I was in a
2 practice, he rode me all practice. You know,
3 "You're doing it wrong. Go back. Do it again.
4 You're sloughing off. You owe me push-ups." Just
5 for two hours, it was relentless. And after
6 practice one of the assistant coaches came up to
7 me and he said, "You know, Coach Graham rode you
8 pretty hard." I said yeah. He said, "That's a
9 good thing, because it means he cares."

10 When you're doing a bad job and nobody points
11 it out to you, that's when they've given up on
12 you. That's something that really stuck with me
13 is when somebody is going to ride you for two
14 hours, they are doing that because they care to
15 make you better.

16 So, next dream: Walt Disney Imagineering.
17 When I was eight, my family took the pilgrimage to
18 Disneyland in California, and it was this
19 incredible experience, the rides and the shows and
20 the attractions and everything, and I said, gosh,
21 I'd like to make stuff like that when I get older.

22 So I graduated from college and I tried to
23 become an Imagineer -- these are the people who
24 make the magic -- and I got a lovely rejection
25 letter. And then I tried again after graduate

1 school, and I kept all of these rejection letters
2 over the years. They are very inspirational. But
3 then the darndest thing happened. You know, I
4 worked hard and worked hard, and I became a junior
5 faculty member and I specialized in doing certain
6 kinds of research -- that's me -- and I developed
7 a skill that was valuable to Disney, and I got a
8 chance to go there, and I was part of an
9 Imagineering team and we worked on something
10 called Aladdin's Magic Carpet Ride, and it was
11 incredibly cool.

12 However, it took me over 15 years to do it and
13 lots and lots of tries, and what I learned from
14 that is that the brick walls that are in our way
15 are there for a reason. They are not there to
16 keep us out. They are there to give us a way to
17 show how much we want it.

18 If you're going to have childhood dreams, I
19 recommend you have good parents. I lucked out. I
20 have great parents. This is my mother on her 70th
21 birthday. I am the blur in the back. I have just
22 been lapped. This is my father on his 80th
23 birthday. There is this notion of have fun all
24 the time. Have a sense of fun and wonder. That
25 should never go away.

1 My dad, what an incredible guy. He fought in
2 World War II. He was clearly part of the greatest
3 generation. Sadly my dad passed away a little
4 over a year ago, and when my mother was going
5 through his things, that was when she discovered
6 that in World War II he was awarded the Bronze
7 Star for Valor. In 50 years of marriage, it had
8 just never come up. There's a real lesson in
9 humility that I could learn from my father.

10 Now, my mother. Mothers are people who love
11 you even when you pull their hair. And this was
12 the kind of relationship I had with my mother, and
13 my mother, speaking of humility, was always there
14 to keep me in check. When I was going through
15 graduate school and I was taking really hard
16 examinations, I was home pretty much complaining
17 and whining about how hard these Ph.D. tests were,
18 and she just patted my arm and said, "We know how
19 you feel. Just remember, when your father was
20 your age, he was fighting the Germans in World War
21 II."

22 And then the day came when I got my Ph.D. and I
23 was so proud and my mother introduced me to
24 everyone as, "This is my son. He's a doctor, but
25 not the kind that helps people."

1 Probably the most wonderful thing my parents
2 did was they let me paint my bedroom. I said one
3 day, "I want to paint stuff on the walls," and
4 they said okay. So I had a rocket ship. And we
5 lived in a ranch, so I wanted an elevator. I
6 wasn't sure where it would go. And yeah, you can
7 tell the nerds early, so that's the quadratic
8 equation. But the great thing is that they let me
9 do it, and they felt that letting me express my
10 creativity was more important than the pristine
11 nature of the walls, and I was really blessed to
12 have parents who saw it that way.

13 My parents taught me about the importance of
14 people versus things, so when I got older and I
15 bought my first car and I was so excited I had
16 this shiny new convertible -- this is my niece and
17 nephew, Christopher and Laura, and every month I'd
18 take them for a weekend so my sister and her
19 husband would get a little break and we would go
20 off on adventures. And I just showed up with my
21 new car and my sister was explaining to Chris and
22 Laura, "It's Uncle Randy's new car. You can't get
23 it dirty," da-da-da-da, and they're just cracking
24 up laughing because over her shoulder I'm casually
25 opening a can of soda and just emptying it on the

1 back seat. And they come running over and my
2 sister says, "What are you doing?" I said, "It's
3 a thing. It's just a thing." And I'm really glad
4 I did that because at the end of the weekend, as I
5 was driving them home, little Chris, who was about
6 eight at the time, had had the flu and he threw up
7 all over the back seat of my car. And I don't
8 care how much value you get out of owning a nice
9 shiny pristine thing, it's not as good as I felt
10 knowing that I made an eight-year-old boy not feel
11 guilty just because he had the flu.

12 Next thing: You better decide early on if
13 you're a Tigger or an Eeyore. Tiggers are
14 energetic, they're optimistic, they're curious,
15 they're enthusiastic, and they have fun. And
16 never, never underestimate the importance of
17 having fun. I am dying soon, and I am choosing to
18 have fun today, tomorrow and every other day I
19 have left.

20 If you want to achieve your dreams, you better
21 work and play well with others, and that means you
22 better live with integrity. Simple advice that
23 you will find hard to follow. Just tell the
24 truth.

25 Second thing: When you screw up, apologize.

1 There are a lot of bad apologies in America. A
2 good apology has three parts: I'm sorry; it was
3 my fault; how do I make it right? Most people
4 skip that third part. That's how you can tell
5 sincerity.

6 The last thing is that we all have people that
7 we don't like, that have done things we don't
8 like, and what I have found is no one is pure
9 evil. If you wait long enough, they will show you
10 their good side. You can't make them do it in a
11 hurry, but you can be patient.

12 Show gratitude. When I got tenure as a young
13 faculty member, there were about 15 young kids who
14 had been working in my research lab. I took them
15 all down to Disney World for a week on my nickel,
16 and one of my colleagues said, "This must have
17 cost you an arm and a leg. How could you do it?"
18 I said, "These kids just worked day and night for
19 years so that I could get the best job in the
20 world for life. How could I not do it?" I mean,
21 gratitude is a very simple thing, and it's a very
22 powerful thing.

23 And lastly, I don't think complaining and
24 whining really solves the problem. This is Jackie
25 Robinson, the first black major leaguer, had it in

1 his contract not to complain if people spit on
2 him.

3 Now, I don't care if you're Jackie Robinson or
4 if you're a guy like me who has only got a couple
5 months to live, you can choose to take your finite
6 time and energy and effort and you can spend it
7 complaining or you can spend it playing the game
8 hard, which is probably going to be more helpful
9 to you in the long run.

10 Now, I told you this was part of a lecture
11 series at Carnegie Mellon University, and it's
12 important for you to know why I gave the talk.
13 The talk isn't just about how to achieve your
14 childhood dreams. It's much broader than that.
15 It's about how to live your life, because if you
16 lead your life the right way, the karma will take
17 care of itself. The dreams will come to you. If
18 you live properly, the dreams will come to you.

19 I think it's great that so many people have
20 benefited from this lecture, but the truth of the
21 matter is that I didn't even really give it to the
22 400 people at Carnegie Mellon who came. I only
23 wrote this lecture for three people, and when
24 they're older, they'll watch it. Thank you.

25

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