Jon Sapper 5/14

Graduation

It's graduation time - where we celebrate the success of students. I've been puzzled, though, when we hear graduation speakers extol the virtues of individuality and creativity while talking to a sea of graduates dressed in identical caps and black gowns. I thought that a bit humorous.

I remember one speaker years ago. She had a couple of comments that were critical of the school. Nothing alarming, but it made front page news when the administration tried to stop her from speaking. I think there is a lesson here. As Bill Gates said, I've learned the most from my greatest critics.

I remember another graduation where a student walked across stage, was handed the diploma and left the stage leaving behind the gentleman holding a rubber hand. What do you do with it? You could leave it on the podium or table, but that would be a little odd for the others, so as I recall he gave it to an attendant who discreetly took it off stage. That was the perfect "hand off". Sorry.

I attended a graduation recently where the processional music included God Bless America. Refreshing. The only disconcerting part of the graduation was a flock of geese that flew over the crowd 4 times, 15 yards up. Everyone was looking at them. Being an avid waterfowl hunter, I was concerned this may be payback time. It wasn't. My white shirt stayed white. After the ceremony, everybody was thanking everybody. That was nice. If you're a graduate this year, you would be a rare individual if you achieved this all on your own. Chances are there was someone who encouraged or supported you along the way. Thank them.

They have helped you achieve one of the greatest gifts anyone can receive, an education. It can define who you are, what you do and the role you play in our community.

One of the best graduation speeches I have heard was given by Elizabeth Kublar Ross in 1976. She said at this time in your life most people wish you a life of complete happiness. She said, "I don't". Because it is the windstorms in your lives and how you deal with them that will define you. She then relayed a story of an 82 year old woman who was near the end of her life and was asked what she would do if she could live life over again. She replied, " I've had a good life, but if I had it to do over again, I would dare more mistakes next time. I lived too safely and securely. I never went anywhere without a thermometer, hot water bottle or parachute. Next time around I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, eat more ice cream and less prunes. If I did that, I would probably have many more actual difficulties to deal with, but I would have far fewer imaginary ones.

This has been Jon Sapper for community comment.