

pipes | drums

Richard Parkes's response to Ulster University on acceptance of an honorary doctorate – Doctor of Letters (DLitt) for services to pipe band music nationally and internationally

Ulster University, Belfast, July 4, 2019

Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Members of Council and Senate, Graduates and Recipients of Awards, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have played on this stage many times before but today is an altogether different experience.

Thank you for this wonderful honour. It is made even more special by the fact that Ulster University is my alma mater.

May I offer my congratulations to all who are graduating today. Years of hard work and sacrifice got you here today and I wish you much success as you take your next steps on your journey through life.

Today I am being recognised for my accomplishments as a bagpiper and as a leader of a large band, a team of musicians, that has reached the top of our game on the world stage 12 times now.

As such, I thought I would share with you my three rules to live by, for you to consider as you work to achieve your own goals in life, bagpiping or otherwise.

Firstly. Competitions are NEVER won on the day.

They are won in the weeks and months ahead of that day, by practicing, preparing and testing yourself long before you arrive on the competition field or, as perhaps more relevant for many of you, the interview for your first big job or entry into a post-graduate programme.

DISCIPLINE yourself to try new things to build up your professional AND life experience.

PRACTICE a skill set to continually improve it.

Do these two things at times when you least feel like doing them. This is what will give you the edge over your competitors in life, for job interviews, for promotions opportunities, WHEN IT COUNTS.

Remember, there are days or weeks when everybody struggles to practice their bagpipes or push themselves to get better at a less-cool musical instrument. The key is to be one of the

few who do it even when you don't want to, to give yourself that bit of a head start for when it counts.

Secondly. PREPARATION. IS. EVERYTHING.

Whether you are getting ready for the World Pipe Band Championships, a job interview, an internship, post-graduate work or another event in your life that the outcome of which can shape your future, make time to prepare yourself.

Pick out and try on the outfit you are going to wear to an interview or meeting the night before.

Check your bagpipes to make sure that all of the parts are in working order, every time you pull them out of their case.

If at all possible, recreate the stressful situation you will find yourself in – like the skills test portion of a job interview, finding your way to a new job on the first day, or speaking in public – and practice what needs to be done until you feel confident about being able to do it in that high-pressure situation.

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail. It is a mantra I live by and that has served me well.

My third and final rule: You can't do it alone.

As a leader of a world champion pipe band for almost 40 years now, I have always made sure to surround myself with a team of people that have the time, skills and motivation to ensure we are all marching to the same beat.

Just like I depend on certain members of my band to make our pipes play in harmony, you should turn to a trusted friend or family member to help fine tune your CV, to practice your interview skills, or to help decide on the sharpest clothes to wear when meeting a possible future employer.

If you are as lucky as I am, you may even find yourself a terrific partner to duet with.

My wife Ruth has been my biggest fan, supporter and confidante for the past 20 years. Through both the good times and the challenging, sometimes terrifying, times, Ruth has been my steadfast cheerleader, egging me on to achieve the goals I set for myself.

I hope that you will all be as fortunate as I have in finding a partner in crime, who always has your back, like I have.

Practice, preparation and people who want the best for you and themselves. These have been my keys to success.

Congratulations again to all of you, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, through you, may I thank all who have given me this honour today.