Dear Students of Mission San Jose High School,

My favorite place on campus is the roof of the C-Wing. On a clear night, I can see the entire campus. It's nostalgic. The first time I climbed onto the roof was the night after graduation. As I walked around the roof with my friends, I spotted C-2: the classroom of Mr. Karmali's notorious Pre-Calculus class. I looked at my friends and had a good laugh. Before long, I found myself looking down over the Bell Tower Quad. Four years of memories flashed across my mind. We all looked up at one another. We were reliving all of our memories. All together. And all at once. That moment was incredible for one reason: I was able to see MSJ from a new perspective.

Perspective. I used to believe that having perspective was to "imagine what it's like to be in someone else's shoes." That definition implies that it's enough to consider every person's viewpoint. That's not enough. Viewpoints aren't limited to individuals. To have perspective is to be mindful of the *context* around you. The context is more than the people around you. It encompasses viewpoints such as time, uncertainty, and community.

Seek to develop a sense of perspective with respect to time. Emotions change with time. Your emotional state at any given moment is not reflective of your average emotional state in the future. When you are stressed, you obsess over the present moment. You spend all of your energy trying to fix the one issue that is the source of your stress. You are convinced that fixing that one issue is the only way to ever feel happy in the future.

Imagine receiving your next semester report card. You look at your semester GPA and are sorely disappointed. Your mind becomes consumed by the thought of underperforming in your classes. After a couple of hours, worry gives way to anxiety as you fixate on the fear of being barred from attending your dream college.

All of you can relate to this scenario. From experience, you know that your emotional state after receiving your report card is not at all reflective of your emotional state a week after receiving your report card. Yet, many of you toil in sadness for days, neglecting the rest of your life. The key to emotional resilience is putting your emotions in perspective.

Just like emotions, circumstances change with time. Most of you will work toward a degree in an area that you have never encountered before. Your social network will include at most a handful of the people you consider your friends right now. The future will look unimaginably different.

The most pressing decision for most of you is to choose what to study in college. Be aware that your interests will evolve over time. Give classes you didn't enjoy in high school another shot in college. Be aware that your social environment will be different. What's popular among your friends at MSJHS will be vastly different than what's popular among your friends at college. Finally, be aware that the set of resources available to you at a university will dwarf the set of resources available to you at MSJHS. Don't dismiss an interest just because you don't have the resources to support your interest right now.

Broaden the set of choices you consider before making a decision. Be flexible and open to new possibilities. Life is not static. It will change in expected and unexpected ways. Developing a sense of perspective with respect to time will enable you to make better decisions about the future.

As with time, seek to develop a sense of perspective with respect to uncertainty. Very little will go according to plan. You are constantly planning your life. You plan your day. As you interact with people throughout the day, you plan the next couple of months. Every so often, you retreat into your mind, and plan the rest of your life. Although these plans change all of the time, you build more plans on top of plans, absolutely certain that the original plans are set in stone. As soon as something goes astray, you scramble to come up with a new set of plans, wondering, "How could I have been so unprepared?". You were unprepared because your plans were arranged as a house of cards, and it just took one card to take down your grand plan.

When I was a student at MSJ, I ran an organization called Project Mission Education. The goal of the organization was to raise money and distribute that money back to school in the form of grants. When I first started the organization, I had a lot of success. Cash was coming in quickly. Extrapolating the rate of growth well into the future, I decided to tell the homecoming committee that I would cover most of their philanthropic contribution to MSJ. A few weeks later, a competitor entered the market, and my cash flow suddenly decreased. I had to reduce my commitment to the homecoming committee, which in turn damaged my credibility. All of this happened because I didn't take risk and uncertainty into account.

Think of all of the outcomes of an action as a range of possible outcomes rather than a single point. This will make your plans robust.

Finally, seek to develop sense of perspective with respect to your community. We are surrounded by people. We are surrounded by the familiar, family and friends, and the unfamiliar, faces, each with great potential. Unfortunately, we tend to view everything from a first-person point of view. When we are given opportunity, we ask ourselves, "What can I do to capitalize on this opportunity?" When we are given work, we ask ourselves, "What can I do to finish this work?" And finally, when we need help, we ask ourselves, "What can I do to help myself?"

As individuals, our ability to accomplish things on our own is incredible. However, it hardly compares to our ability to accomplish things together. When doing anything, think about how you can include the people around you. When given opportunity, ask yourself, "How can I leverage this opportunity to empower my friends and family?". When given work, ask yourself, "Who are the people around me with experience and expertise in this area?" And finally, when needing help, ask yourself, "How can I use the people and resources around me for help?"

You are all talented individuals that contribute to your community. Keeping perspective with respect to the people around you will enable you to go from being an adder to being a multiplier.

I wish you all the best of luck.

Sincerely,

Pulak Goyal

MSJHS Class of 2011