

# Freshman Orientation as a Reality Check



June and July is freshman orientation season at many colleges. Time to visit campus, get updates on move-in details, and prepare for the emotional, early-August, drop-off at the dorm. As a dean, I use my few minutes with parents during summer orientation to prepare them for the inevitable, panicked phone call early in the fall term after the first exams have been returned.

## To the Parents

The straight-A student who has always been the smartest kid in the class is now struggling with his or her first C -- in anything!

What to do!

During that summer meeting I encourage parents to practice some tough love in the phone call so their child will not waste tuition and fall behind their finish-in-four goal by dropping the course.

The reality is that their "brilliant" kid is simply about average when compared to all the other really bright kids who are in the freshman class.



Their kid may need to develop some better study skills, more diligent work habits, and just plain resilience if they are to be successful in their first semester in college. The student may even need to visit a faculty member during office hours! OMG!!!

## To the Freshmen

I meet briefly with incoming freshmen during one of their welcome-to-campus events in early August. I tell them:

- Set yourself a goal now to graduate in four years. Begin with the end in mind.
- Visualize who you could become personally and where you could be professionally after graduation. Make growth a first-things-first activity.
- Take advantage of opportunities on and off campus to build a marketable resume. It's your responsibility to be proactive about your own life outcomes.

*“You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself.” Jim Rohn*

If you are thinking “7 Habits” right now you’re correct. Its relevant advice and a simple mental model freshman can grasp. They are responsible for where they’re going and how they get there.



I also remind the freshmen about the ancient proverb that says the race doesn't go to the fastest, or the battle to the strongest, or riches to the most insightful because too many factors in life are uncontrollable.

The point is that what's always worked for them academically and personally in high school will not necessarily work for them now. Coasting along isn't going to build the personal insight or professional demeanor that's needed for them to successfully prepare for a first job and the career moves afterward.

*“What got you here won't get you there!”  
Marshall Goldsmith*

## The Take Away

Simply put – what got them here to freshman orientation will not get them there to the point of initial employability or to progressive responsibility as they move through the early years of their career. Hence, freshman orientation is, at least partially, a reality check for both parents and freshmen.

What do you think? What else should we be telling first-time college students about career goals?

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