



# Prefects' Assembly – Prefect Address

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Good morning

When asked to deliver a speech for today's Prefects' Assembly, I cast my mind back to see what had influenced me and my Year 13 classmates most since the start of our final year of school.

Some had experienced success, and some disappointment.

Some were feeling the pressure of what is to come next year, after leaving school – the expectations, perceived or real, from parents and teachers – about the decisions that will influence their transition into their next stage of life.

It got me thinking how some people choose to approach their life – some plan the first phases of what they hope will be a long career, while others opt to pursue their passion. Some will take a break from study, maybe travel, and some will go straight into earning money until something else comes their way.

It made me recall a book by theologian James Carse, who spoke about life being a series of games, and how people play these games in everyday life. Of course, some are conscious of the game-play and some are not.

Carse calls them **Finite** and **Infinite Games**.

He explained that finite games are the familiar contests we participate in as part of our everyday life – university, school and sports are some examples. They usually include people we know, with agreed rules and common objectives.

Then you have an infinite game, with known and unknown players, variable rules, and an objective to perpetuate the game (or to keep the game in play). Business is an example of this, as is politics.

But the biggest infinite game we know of, is life itself.

It is the ultimate variable, of which the rules vary constantly, people come and go, and everyone has their own objectives.

Problems arise, however, when we play with a finite mindset in an infinite game.

This is the interesting part of Carse's theory, because a finite player is playing to win at all costs, whereas an infinite player is playing for playing's sake, which means they make very different strategic choices.



When a finite player exhausts themselves of resources, they become frustrated, eventually losing the will required to stay in the game, causing them to opt out. The infinite player, however, knows that the game is set to continue indefinitely, so will be less affected by the challenges – seeing it all part of the journey.

This is key for us to understand because how you approach the next stages of your life, and every other stage thereafter, will determine whether you are a finite or infinite player.

Being determined to win at all costs, against any competition, will only provide you energy to go a certain distance. Being motivated by the game itself, however, will provide you greater endurance to ride the waves. Winning, therefore, becomes more broadly defined in terms of quality of life experiences.

Because, ultimately, you cannot 'win' at business; you cannot 'win' at University, and you cannot 'win' at life.

But you can experience small wins, which make your life a great experience. The only downside is that with the wins, sometimes comes the losses.

In sport, I have played in teams where we have won a game against a fierce competitor, only to lose to them the following week. A win is only a snapshot with a fixed timeframe. If you play the long-game, having wins is important, but not at the expense of your resources, your energy or your identity.

This is because life is a series of ebbs and flows, and it will always throw things at you to test you – injury, failure, divorce, bankruptcy, death. To live the long game, and be successful at it, you have to strap yourself in, and be ready to experience both the good and the bad.

When I tore my ACL just prior to going on an international basketball trip, I knew it would be a tough year. But I focused on other elements of my fitness and rehab, seeing these as equally vital steps in me gaining the strength to return to play. In essence, I saw it as an infinite game – the injury was merely a small setback in my long term basketball journey.

Fast-forward to today, where I was asked to deliver the morning comment, and my initial response was no way! Speaking in front of the whole school for more than 10 seconds was way outside my comfort zone. I started thinking of all the reasons why I shouldn't; I might embarrass myself, forget my words, fall down the stairs even. But how can I stand here today, convincing you to practice what I preach if I can't even follow my own advice?

Instead of thinking about all the negative outcomes that could occur, I started asking myself one small question. Why not?

Why not take this as an opportunity to grow and develop myself instead of seeing it as a potential failure. I am here to play the infinite game – so I can't lose, I can only learn.

I was so caught up on the perceived definition of success that I did not want admit my own vulnerability, expose my flaws, or present a version of me that was anything but perfect.



But Life is a game in which the only way to enjoy yourself is to take risks. What's the fun in playing life inside your comfort zone? At some point you are going to have to deviate from the well worn path of the mundane and confront the challenges life throws at you.

To succeed in an infinite game, you need to have an infinite mindset. This means not living in a constant state of fear of failure – failure to impress, failure to meet expectations, failure to win. Because the infinite player understands that sometimes they will have the upper hand, and at other times, they won't.

Sometimes the decisions of others will support their desires, and sometimes, they won't. Sometimes, they may feel on top of the world, and other times, they won't. Most importantly, the infinite players understand that the goal is not to win. The goal is to outlast. And that the only true competitor in the infinite game is ourselves.

Every day, we aim to make our habits, behaviours and choices better than they were the day before. To make improvements, however small, so in the end, we outdo ourselves.

When it comes your time to leave secondary school, and make the big decisions that will set you on your life course, remember that **your** life is an infinite game – **you** are the main player, and **you** decide your next moves.

So, launch yourself into opportunities the only way you know how. Take risks. Be true to yourself. Embrace the failures, and challenge yourself consistently by asking **why not?**

It is inevitable that you will fail at some point in your life. You will lose, embarrass yourself and suck at some things. Life is far from perfect, it's a continuous rollercoaster of wins and losses. The trick is to accept it for what it is. The trick is to treat it like an infinite game, where there is no such thing as failing.

Everyone here in this room has the potential to succeed.

But ask yourself this....do you have the guts to fail to play the infinite game?