

Dear Graduate

Written by Julie Desmond
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Dear Graduate,

Congratulations. You have found ways to get up every morning and show up in a classroom or online; you have talked to people, listened, followed instructions, met requirements, overcome obstacles, learned a few things and crossed the finish line. Graduating, whether from grade school, high school, college or medical school, is an accomplishment no one can take away from you. It sets you apart from all those who never got there. You are a graduate. You have much to be proud of.

You do have much to be proud of. And, as a graduate, you have more to be responsible for than you did as a student. Now that you've finished your race, take a look behind you at the other runners on the track. Who is struggling? Who has fallen? Who is hurt? Did you know that every 26 seconds, someone drops out of high school? You know it's true because you know what it took to get where you are. You know it was not always easy. What can you do to help one person who might see their 26 seconds coming up, someone who thinks it might be easier to quit than to keep moving forward toward graduation?

What would you say to someone who asks, "Is it even worth it?"

It was worth it to you, wasn't it? For whatever reason, you decided to keep trying, to keep showing up. Maybe you thought about crossing the stage to get your diploma. Maybe you saw a better job opportunity ahead if you just got that piece of paper in your hands. Maybe you did it to prove that you could, to your parents, to your pals or to yourself. Now it is time to share that motivation with someone following in your footsteps. Now is the time to find someone who could use a little encouragement and give them some of yours. Now that you've experienced success, it's your turn to look back and tell someone else, you can, too.

You are exceptional. You have found your way through the maze that is school and come out shining on the other end. You have reached a goal. You have worked hard, persevered and found success. It won't be the last time you prove your worth to the world. But it is a moment to

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celebrate.

And when the party is over, when the celebrating subsides, as you head toward other goals, take a minute to reach back and bring someone else along with you, because you can, and because you should.

Congratulations!

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