

Not only am I asked to give an acceptance speech on behalf of someone who was brilliant, funny and knew how to work a crowd.. but I'm supposed to do it about 60 hours after one of the best acceptance speeches of all time?? Sure, no problem.

So, what would Alan say if he was here? Well, he'd tell you what a huge honor this is and how grateful he is for this award. He'd tell you how much he loved Lower Moreland and what a uniquely special community this is. He'd also probably give a shout-out to his amazing parents, family, teachers and friends - that's you guys.. yea you.. first 6 rows of people who are all ditching school and work to be here right now.. he'd thank you for your eternal love and support.

But mostly, he'd want to share some thoughts on what it truly takes to be successful and happy. So here are what I think would be his top 5:

1. Be curious. About different topics, different parts of the world, different people. Don't assume you know. Don't stop asking questions. Don't stop trying to learn.
2. Be genuine. Don't try to fit somebody else's mold. The world is a wonderfully rich, diverse and interesting place because of our differences, not because of our similarities. So go ahead and be different. Go ahead and find room in your life to express the full rainbow of your colors. Alan would tell you that it's cool to be a star scholar and or a successful executive (which he was) and still watch Saturday morning cartoons (which he did). He'd tell you that it's fine to subscribe to the Wall Street Journal, the New Yorker, the Economist.. and also People magazine and GQ. He'd tell you that sometimes CNN junkies like him need to flip the channel and get lost in a bad reality show or a Chris Rock special. He'd tell you to listen to music that moved you - whether it was Mozart or Coldplay or 2Pac. He'd tell you not to worry about what others thought of your tastes or interests, and trust in the fact that you'll find yourself surrounded by the greatest people if you just be your true self.
3. Remember who loves you, and remember to call, write, e-mail, text and visit. It's not easy to find the time. Life will get in the way. But just do it. You'll be glad you did.
4. Step outside of your comfort zone and reach for things that seem impossible. There's nothing like dreaming big, working hard toward a goal, and arriving at the destination of "Yes, I can!"
5. And finally - play out your "shoulds." You know what they are. We all wake up every day, sensing what we should do... help a friend in need, volunteer for a worthy cause, send a thank you note, research a political issue and write your representative, try out for that thing you're dying to be a part of. He'd tell you that the magic of the journey of life is in playing out your shoulds.

A couple days ago, my father-in-law called me and said, "I read that article you sent from Alan's website, where he wrote about the importance of voting. It was so good! He was so bright, so talented. He should have..."

and then there was that familiar emotional pause that's often there when people talk about Alan.. so I jumped in and said "But he did. He did."

See, Alan was one of those rare people who did exactly what he knew he should - in big ways and small. He read, he wrote, he traveled the globe, he took on challenges, he helped people whenever and wherever he could. He laughed hard, and he loved even harder. He played out his shoulds. And if he was standing here right now, he'd urge you to do the same.

Thank you so much for honoring him in this special way!