



# The Daily Gleaner

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## Inspiration for the 'Now' Generation

Last month, renowned environmentalist, entrepreneur, journalist and author, Paul Hawken delivered the Commencement Address to the Class of 2009 at the University of Portland, Oregon. He opened the address by saying that he was asked to give a simple, short talk that was “direct, naked, taut, honest, passionate, lean, shivering, startling, and graceful.” No pressure there!

As you will see, his words are a work of modern literary and oratory wonder. And during this time of endings and new beginnings, for both university and high school graduates, it seemed appropriate to share some of Mr. Hawken’s inspirational message.

Had this speech been delivered at the graduations of baby boomers and Generation X’ers our environmental reality may well have been a whole lot rosier at present. Nevertheless, inspiration can come at any time and any age. The paragraphs below present some excerpts from Mr. Hawken’s most eloquent speech. Enjoy!

*Hey, Class of 2009: you are going to have to figure out what it means to be a human being on earth at a time when every living system is declining, and the rate of decline is accelerating. Kind of a mind-boggling situation but not one peer-reviewed paper published in the last thirty years can refute that statement. Basically, the earth needs a new operating system, you are the programmers, and we need it within a few decades.*

*This planet came with a set of operating instructions, but we seem to have misplaced them. Important rules like don’t poison the water, soil, or air, and don’t let the earth get overcrowded, and don’t touch the thermostat, have been broken. Buckminster Fuller said that spaceship earth was so ingeniously designed that no one has a clue that we are on one, flying through the universe at a million miles per hour, with no need for seatbelts, lots of room in coach, and really good food, but all that is changing.*

*There is invisible writing on the back of the diploma you will receive, and in case you didn’t bring lemon juice to decode it, I can tell you what it says: **YOU ARE BRILLIANT, AND THE EARTH IS HIRING.** The earth couldn’t afford to send any recruiters or limos to your school. It sent you rain, sunsets, ripe cherries, night blooming jasmine, and that unbelievably cute person you are dating. Take the hint. And here’s the deal: Forget that this task of planet-saving is not possible in the time required. Don’t be put off by people who know what is not possible. Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done.*

*When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren’t pessimistic, you don’t understand data. But if*

*you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world. . . . Humanity is coalescing. It is reconstituting the world, and the action is taking place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, campuses, companies, refuge camps, deserts, fisheries, and slums.*

*You join a multitude of caring people. No one knows how many groups and organizations are working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights, and more. This is the largest movement the world has ever seen.*

*. . . Inspiration is not garnered from the litanies of what may befall us; it resides in humanity's willingness to restore, redress, reform, rebuild, recover, reimagine, and reconsider. "One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice," is Mary Oliver's description of moving away from the profane toward a deep sense of connectedness to the living world.*

*This extraordinary time when we are globally aware of each other and the multiple dangers that threaten civilization has never happened, not in a thousand years, not in ten thousand years. Each of us is as complex and beautiful as all the stars in the universe. We have done great things, and we have gone way off course in terms of honoring creation. You are graduating to the most amazing, challenging, stupefying challenge ever bequeathed to any generation. The generations before you failed. They didn't stay up all night. They got distracted and lost sight of the fact that life is a miracle every moment of your existence. Nature beckons you to be on her side. You couldn't ask for a better boss. The most unrealistic person in the world is the cynic, not the dreamer. . . . This is your century. Take it and run as if your life depends on it.*

***Sonya Hull is a local consultant and Project Manager for The City of Fredericton's environmental programs. For ideas on how to make some green changes in your life go to [www.greenmattersfredericton.com](http://www.greenmattersfredericton.com).***