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Do clever and kind go together?

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Quad 136

Do Clever and Kind Go Together?

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Do Clever and Kind Go Together? *



Welcome to faculty, staff, parents and especially to the 2018 candidates for induction into the Theta of Minnesota Chapter of **Phi Beta Kappa**, the nation's oldest and among its most prestigious academic honor societies. I am delighted to be with you here on this gorgeous spring day in Collegeville to celebrate your academic successes.

I'd like to share with you a quote from the Polish-born American Rabbi and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel that I think is very appropriate for this academic occasion at our Catholic and Benedictine institutions.

Near the end of his life Heschel said, "When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people."

Now that I am well into at least early middle age, I have lived long enough to find that I agree with Rabbi Heschel's observation—to a point.

Ever since I came to Saint John's in 1977, I have lived almost entirely in the academic world, either as a student, faculty member or administrator. In this world it is completely natural and appropriate to admire people who are academically successful—intelligent, creative, quick, insightful—"clever people" in Heschel's phrasing. I too admired these people and still do, but I also came to realize, even during my undergraduate days, there were other human traits that

were at least as admirable as intelligence.

As Heschel describes his changing views, his quote suggests, at least implicitly, a juxtaposition between clever and kind. Is Heschel possibly suggesting the two can't go together? Villains in literature and film are almost always clever, while the good souls are often at least naïve and sometimes even simple.

As we are here today to honor our most academically successful students, I think it is important to recall that one of the incredible strengths of our Catholic and Benedictine academic institutions is that while we absolutely celebrate academic rigor, we also honor and try to live by Benedictine values—with an emphasis on respect for individuals and commitment to community.

In my experience, clever and kind very often do go together. In my 40 years of association with SJU, I have found the vast majority of the most exceptional individuals I have met at Saint Ben's and Saint John's are both clever and kind. Being one in no way diminishes the other.

At CSB and SJU we believe in the importance of both cleverness and kindness, and that is what we are celebrating today as we honor you as the newest members of the only Benedictine PBK Chapter among the 286 institutions that host a chapter.

I encourage you to take all that you have learned and developed at Saint Ben's and Saint John's with you as you leave our institutions. I wish you the best as you use your cleverness and kindness for your future success and for the good of the world.

*A version of these remarks was given at the PBK induction ceremony on April 25, 2018.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | May 7th, 2018 | Categories: [Higher Education](#), [Kudos](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).