01-Steve Jobs

CEO of Apple Computers

Commencement Address at Stanford University, 2005

Thank you!

I am honored to be with you today for your commencement from one of the finest universities in the world. Truth be told, I never graduated from college, and this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation. Today I want to tell you three stories from my life. That's it. No big deal. Just three stories.

The first story is about connecting the dots.

I dropped out of Reed College after the first 6 months, but then stayed around as a drop-in for another 18 months or so before I really quit. So why did I drop out?

It started before I was born. My biological mother was a young, unwed college graduate student, and she decided to put me up for adoption. She felt very strongly that I should be adopted by college graduates, so everything was all set for me to be adopted at birth by a lawyer and his wife. Except that when I popped out they decided at the last minute that they really wanted a girl. So my parents, who were on a waiting list, got a call in the middle of the night asking: "We got an unexpected baby boy; do you want him?" They said: "Of course." My biological mother found out later that my mother had never graduated from college and that my father had never graduated from high school. She refused to sign the final adoption papers. She only relented a few months later when my parents promised that I would go to college. This was the start in my life.(2:15)

And 17 years later I did go to college. But I naively chose a college that was almost as expensive as Stanford, and all of my working-class parents' savings were being spent on my college tuition. After six months, I couldn't see the value in it. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and no idea how college was going to help me figure it out. And here I was spending all of the money my parents had saved their entire life. So I decided to drop out and trust that it would all work out OK. It was pretty

scary at the time, but looking back it was one of the best decisions I ever made. The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn't interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked far more interesting.

It wasn't all romantic. I didn't have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms, I returned Coke bottles for the 5¢ deposits to buy food with, and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple. I loved it. And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on. Let me give you one example:

Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed. Because I had dropped out and didn't have to take the normal classes, I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about serif and sans serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can't capture, and I found it fascinating.

None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But 10 years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography. If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them. If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backward 10 years later. Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever, Because believing that the dots will connect down

the road, will give you the confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path and that will make all the difference

My second story is about love and loss.

I was lucky — I found what I loved to do early in life. Woz and I started Apple in my parents' garage when I was 20. We worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a $2 billion company with over 4,000 employees. We had just released our finest creation — the Macintosh — a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? Well, as Apple grew we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our Board of Directors sided with him. So at 30 I was out. And very publicly out. What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating.

I really didn't know what to do for a few months. I felt that I had let the previous generation of entrepreneurs down — that I had dropped the baton as it was being passed to me. I met with David Packard and Bob Noyce and tried to apologize for screwing up so badly. I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the valley. But something slowly began to dawn on me — I still loved what I did. The turn of events at Apple had not changed that one bit. I had been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over.

I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

During the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife. Pixar went on to create the world's first computer animated feature film, Toy Story, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world. In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I

returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance. And Laurene and I have a wonderful family together.

I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it. Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking. Don't settle.

My third story is about death.

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: "If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right." It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" And whenever the answer has been "No" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure — these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7:30 in the morning, and it clearly showed a tumor on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than

three to six months. My doctor advised me to go home and get my affairs in order, which is doctor's code for prepare to die. It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It means to say your goodbyes.

I lived with that diagnosis all day. Later that evening I had a biopsy, where they stuck an endoscope down my throat, through my stomach and into my intestines, put a needle into my pancreas and got a few cells from the tumor. I was sedated, but my wife, who was there, told me that when they viewed the cells under a microscope the doctors started crying because it turned out to be a very rare form of pancreatic cancer that is curable with surgery. I had the surgery and thankfully I'm fine now.

This was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more decades. Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful but purely intellectual concept:

No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

When I was young, there was an amazing publication called The Whole Earth Catalog, which was one of the bibles of my generation. It was created by a fellow named Stewart Brand not far from here in Menlo Park, and he

brought it to life with his poetic touch. This was in the late 1960s, before personal computers and desktop publishing, so it was all made with typewriters, scissors and Polaroid cameras. It was sort of like Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along: It was idealistic, and overflowing with neat tools and great notions.

Stewart and his team put out several issues of The Whole Earth Catalog, and then when it had run its course, they put out a final issue. It was the mid-1970s, and I was your age. On the back cover of their final issue was a photograph of an early morning country road, the kind you might find yourself hitchhiking on if you were so adventurous. Beneath it were the words: “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.” It was their farewell message as they signed off. Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish. And I have always wished that for myself. And now, as you graduate to begin anew, I wish that for you.

Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.

Thank you all very much.

02-Mark Zuckerberg

Facebook Founder

Harvard University, Harvard Commencement 2017

President Faust, Board of Overseers, faculty, alumni, friends, proud parents, members of the ad board, and graduates of the greatest university in the world,

I'm honored to be with you today because, let's face it, you accomplished something I never could. If I get through this speech, it'll be the first time I actually finish something at Harvard. Class of 2017, congratulations!

I'm an unlikely speaker, not just because I dropped out, but because we're technically in the same generation. We walked this yard less than a decade apart, studied the same ideas and slept through the same Ec10 lectures. We may have taken different paths to get here, especially if you came all the way from the Quad, but today I want to share what I've learned about our generation and the world we're building together.

But first, the last couple of days have brought back a lot of good memories. How many of you remember exactly what you were doing when you got that email telling you that you got into Harvard? I was playing Civilization and I ran downstairs, got my dad, and for some reason, his reaction was to video me opening the email. That could have been a really sad video. I swear getting into Harvard is still the thing my parents are most proud of me for.

What about your first lecture at Harvard? Mine was Computer Science 121 with the incredible Harry Lewis. I was late so I threw on a t-shirt and didn't realize until afterwards it was inside out and backwards with my tag sticking out the front. I couldn't figure out why no one would talk to me — except one guy, KX Jin, he just went with it. We ended up doing our problem sets together, and now he runs a big part of Facebook. And that, Class of 2017, is why you should be nice to people.

But my best memory from Harvard was meeting Priscilla. I had just launched this prank website Facemash, and the ad board wanted to "see me". Everyone thought I was going to get kicked out. My parents came to

help me pack. My friends threw me a going away party. As luck would have it, Priscilla was at that party with her friend. We met in line for the bathroom in the Pfoho Belltower, and in what must be one of the all time romantic lines, I said: “I’m going to get kicked out in three days, so we need to go on a date quickly.”

Actually, any of you graduating can use that line.

I didn’t end up getting kicked out — I did that to myself. Priscilla and I started dating. And, you know, that movie made it seem like Facemash was so important to creating Facebook. It wasn’t. But without Facemash I wouldn’t have met Priscilla, and she’s the most important person in my life, so you could say it was the most important thing I built in my time here.

We’ve all started lifelong friendships here, and some of us even families. That’s why I’m so grateful to this place. Thanks, Harvard.

Today I want to talk about purpose. But I’m not here to give you the standard commencement about finding your purpose. We’re millennials. We’ll try to do that instinctively. Instead, I’m here to tell you finding your purpose isn’t enough. The challenge for our generation is creating a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

One of my favorite stories is when John F Kennedy visited the NASA space center, he saw a janitor carrying a broom and he walked over and asked what he was doing. The janitor responded: “Mr. President, I’m helping put a man on the moon”.

Purpose is that sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, that we are needed, that we have something better ahead to work for. Purpose is what creates true happiness.

You’re graduating at a time when this is especially important. When our parents graduated, purpose reliably came from your job, your church, your community. But today, technology and automation are eliminating many jobs. Membership in communities is declining. Many people feel disconnected and depressed, and are trying to fill a void.

As I’ve traveled around, I’ve sat with children in juvenile detention and opioid addicts, who told me their lives could have turned out differently if they just had something to do, an after school program or somewhere to go.

I've met factory workers who know their old jobs aren't coming back and are trying to find their place.

To keep our society moving forward, we have a generational challenge — to not only create new jobs, but create a renewed sense of purpose.

I remember the night I launched Facebook from my little dorm in Kirkland House. I went to Noch's with my friend KX. I remember telling him I was excited to connect the Harvard community, but one day someone would connect the whole world.

The thing is, it never even occurred to me that someone might be us. We were just college kids. We didn't know anything about that. There were all these big technology companies with resources. I just assumed one of them would do it. But this idea was so clear to us — that all people want to connect. So we just kept moving forward, day by day.

I know a lot of you will have your own stories just like this. A change in the world that seems so clear you're sure someone else will do it. But they won't. You will.

But it's not enough to have purpose yourself. You have to create a sense of purpose for others.

I found that out the hard way. You see, my hope was never to build a company, but to make an impact. And as all these people started joining us, I just assumed that's what they cared about too, so I never explained what I hoped we'd build.

A couple years in, some big companies wanted to buy us. I didn't want to sell. I wanted to see if we could connect more people. We were building the first News Feed, and I thought if we could just launch this, it could change how we learn about the world.

Nearly everyone else wanted to sell. Without a sense of higher purpose, this was the startup dream come true. It tore our company apart. After one tense argument, an advisor told me if I didn't agree to sell, I would regret the decision for the rest of my life. Relationships were so frayed that within a year or so every single person on the management team was gone.

That was my hardest time leading Facebook. I believed in what we were doing, but I felt alone. And worse, it was my fault. I wondered if I was just

wrong, an imposter, a 22 year-old kid who had no idea how the world worked.

Now, years later, I understand that *is* how things work with no sense of higher purpose. It's up to us to create it so we can all keep moving forward together.

Today I want to talk about three ways to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose: by taking on big meaningful projects together, by redefining equality so everyone has the freedom to pursue purpose, and by building community across the world.

First, let's take on big meaningful projects.

Our generation will have to deal with tens of millions of jobs replaced by automation like self-driving cars and trucks. But we have the potential to do so much more together.

Every generation has its defining works. More than 300,000 people worked to put a man on the moon – including that janitor. Millions of volunteers immunized children around the world against polio. Millions of more people built the Hoover dam and other great projects.

These projects didn't just provide purpose for the people doing those jobs, they gave our whole country a sense of pride that we could do great things.

Now it's our turn to do great things. I know, you're probably thinking: I don't know how to build a dam, or get a million people involved in anything.

But let me tell you a secret: no one does when they begin. Ideas don't come out fully formed. They only become clear as you work on them. You just have to get started.

If I had to understand everything about connecting people before I began, I never would have started Facebook.

Movies and pop culture get this all wrong. The idea of a single eureka moment is a dangerous lie. It makes us feel inadequate since we haven't had ours. It prevents people with seeds of good ideas from getting started.

Oh, you know what else movies get wrong about innovation? No one writes math formulas on glass. That's not a thing.

It's good to be idealistic. But be prepared to be misunderstood. Anyone

working on a big vision will get called crazy, even if you end up right. Anyone working on a complex problem will get blamed for not fully understanding the challenge, even though it's impossible to know everything upfront. Anyone taking initiative will get criticized for moving too fast, because there's always someone who wants to slow you down.

In our society, we often don't do big things because we're so afraid of making mistakes that we ignore all the things wrong today if we do nothing. The reality is, anything we do will have issues in the future. But that can't keep us from starting.

So what are we waiting for? It's time for our generation-defining public works. How about stopping climate change before we destroy the planet and getting millions of people involved manufacturing and installing solar panels? How about curing all diseases and asking volunteers to track their health data and share their genomes? Today we spend 50x more treating people who are sick than we spend finding cures so people don't get sick in the first place. That makes no sense. We can fix this. How about modernizing democracy so everyone can vote online, and personalizing education so everyone can learn?

These achievements are within our reach. Let's do them all in a way that gives everyone in our society a role. Let's do big things, not only to create progress, but to create purpose.

So taking on big meaningful projects is the first thing we can do to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

The second is redefining equality to give everyone the freedom they need to pursue purpose.

Many of our parents had stable jobs throughout their careers. Now we're all entrepreneurial, whether we're starting projects or finding or role. And that's great. Our culture of entrepreneurship is how we create so much progress.

Now, an entrepreneurial culture thrives when it's easy to try lots of new ideas. Facebook wasn't the first thing I built. I also built games, chat systems, study tools and music players. I'm not alone. JK Rowling got rejected 12 times before publishing Harry Potter. Even Beyonce had to

make hundreds of songs to get Halo. The greatest successes come from having the freedom to fail.

But today, we have a level of wealth inequality that hurts everyone. When you don't have the freedom to take your idea and turn it into a historic enterprise, we all lose. Right now our society is way over-indexed on rewarding success and we don't do nearly enough to make it easy for everyone to take lots of shots.

Let's face it. There is something wrong with our system when I can leave here and make billions of dollars in 10 years while millions of students can't afford to pay off their loans, let alone start a business.

Look, I know a lot of entrepreneurs, and I don't know a single person who gave up on starting a business because they might not make enough money. But I know lots of people who haven't pursued dreams because they didn't have a cushion to fall back on if they failed.

We all know we don't succeed just by having a good idea or working hard. We succeed by being lucky too. If I had to support my family growing up instead of having time to code, if I didn't know I'd be fine if Facebook didn't work out, I wouldn't be standing here today. If we're honest, we all know how much luck we've had.

Every generation expands its definition of equality. Previous generations fought for the vote and civil rights. They had the New Deal and Great Society. Now it's our time to define a new social contract for our generation. We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things. We're going to change jobs many times, so we need affordable childcare to get to work and healthcare that aren't tied to one company. We're all going to make mistakes, so we need a society that focuses less on locking us up or stigmatizing us. And as technology keeps changing, we need to focus more on continuous education throughout our lives.

And yes, giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose isn't free. People like me should pay for it. Many of you will do well and you should too.

That's why Priscilla and I started the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and committed our wealth to promoting equal opportunity. These are the values of our generation. It was never a question of if we were going to do this. The only question was when.

Millennials are already one of the most charitable generations in history. In one year, three of four US millennials made a donation and seven out of ten raised money for charity.

But it's not just about money. You can also give time. I promise you, if you take an hour or two a week — that's all it takes to give someone a hand, to help them reach their potential.

Maybe you think that's too much time. I used to. When Priscilla graduated from Harvard she became a teacher, and before she'd do education work with me, she told me I needed to teach a class. I complained: "Well, I'm kind of busy. I'm running this company." But she insisted, so I taught a middle school program on entrepreneurship at the local Boys and Girls Club.

I taught them lessons on product development and marketing, and they taught me what it's like feeling targeted for your race and having a family member in prison. I shared stories from my time in school, and they shared their hope of one day going to college too. For five years now, I've been having dinner with those kids every month. One of them threw me and Priscilla our first baby shower. And next year they're going to college. Every one of them. First in their families.

We can all make time to give someone a hand. Let's give everyone the freedom to pursue their purpose — not only because it's the right thing to do, but because when more people can turn their dreams into something great, we're all better for it.

Purpose doesn't only come from work. The third way we can create a sense of purpose for everyone is by building community. And when our generation says "everyone", we mean everyone in the world.

Quick show of hands: how many of you are from another country? Now, how many of you are friends with one of these folks? Now we're talking. We have grown up connected.

In a survey asking millennials around the world what defines our identity, the most popular answer wasn't nationality, religion or ethnicity, it was "citizen of the world". That's a big deal.

Every generation expands the circle of people we consider "one of us". For us, it now encompasses the entire world.

We understand the great arc of human history bends towards people coming together in ever greater numbers — from tribes to cities to nations — to achieve things we couldn't on our own.

We get that our greatest opportunities are now global — we can be the generation that ends poverty, that ends disease. We get that our greatest challenges need global responses too — no country can fight climate change alone or prevent pandemics. Progress now requires coming together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community.

But we live in an unstable time. There are people left behind by globalization across the world. It's hard to care about people in other places if we don't feel good about our lives here at home. There's pressure to turn inwards.

This is the struggle of our time. The forces of freedom, openness and global community against the forces of authoritarianism, isolationism and nationalism. Forces for the flow of knowledge, trade and immigration against those who would slow them down. This is not a battle of nations, it's a battle of ideas. There are people in every country for global connection and good people against it.

This isn't going to be decided at the UN either. It's going to happen at the local level, when enough of us feel a sense of purpose and stability in our own lives that we can open up and start caring about everyone. The best way to do that is to start building local communities right now.

We all get meaning from our communities. Whether our communities are houses or sports teams, churches or music groups, they give us that sense we are part of something bigger, that we are not alone; they give us the strength to expand our horizons.

That's why it's so striking that for decades, membership in all kinds of groups has declined as much as one-quarter. That's a lot of people who

now need to find purpose somewhere else.

But I know we can rebuild our communities and start new ones because many of you already are.

I met Agnes Igoye, who's graduating today. Where are you, Agnes? She spent her childhood navigating conflict zones in Uganda, and now she trains thousands of law enforcement officers to keep communities safe.

I met Kayla Oakley and Niha Jain, graduating today, too. Stand up. Kayla and Niha started a non-profit that connects people suffering from illnesses with people in their communities willing to help.

I met David Razu Aznar, graduating from the Kennedy School today. David, stand up. He's a former city councilor who successfully led the battle to make Mexico City the first Latin American city to pass marriage equality — even before San Francisco.

This is my story too. A student in a dorm room, connecting one community at a time, and keeping at it until one day we connect the whole world.

Change starts local. Even global changes start small — with people like us. In our generation, the struggle of whether we connect more, whether we achieve our biggest opportunities, comes down to this — your ability to build communities and create a world where every single person has a sense of purpose.

Class of 2017, you are graduating into a world that needs purpose. It's up to you to create it.

Now, you may be thinking: can I really do this?

Remember when I told you about that class I taught at the Boys and Girls Club? One day after class I was talking to them about college, and one of my top students raised his hand and said he wasn't sure he could go because he's undocumented. He didn't know if they'd let him in.

Last year I took him out to breakfast for his birthday. I wanted to get him a present, so I asked him and he started talking about students he saw struggling and said "You know, I'd really just like a book on social justice."

I was blown away. Here's a young guy who has every reason to be cynical. He didn't know if the country he calls home — the only one he's known — would deny him his dream of going to college. But he wasn't feeling

sorry for himself. He wasn't even thinking of himself. He has a greater sense of purpose, and he's going to bring people along with him.

It says something about our current situation that I can't even say his name because I don't want to put him at risk. But if a high school senior who doesn't know what the future holds can do his part to move the world forward, then we owe it to the world to do our part too.

Before you walk out those gates one last time, as we sit in front of Memorial Church, I am reminded of a prayer, Mi Shebeirach, that I say whenever I face a challenge, that I sing to my daughter thinking about her future when I tuck her into bed. It goes:

"May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us, help us *find the courage* to make our lives a blessing."

I hope you find the courage to make your life a blessing.

Congratulations, Class of 2017! Good luck out there.

03-Bill & Melinda Gates

Philanthropists

Stanford University |June 15, 2014

Bill Gates: Congratulations, Class of 2014! Melinda and I are excited to be here. It would be a thrill for anyone to be invited to speak at a Stanford Commencement – but it's especially gratifying for us.

Stanford is rapidly becoming the favorite university for members of our family. And it's long been a favorite university for Microsoft and our foundation. Our formula has been to get the smartest, most creative people working on the most important problems. It turns out that a disproportionate number of those people are at Stanford.

Right now, we have more than 30 foundation research projects underway with Stanford. When we want to learn more about the immune system to help cure the worst diseases, we work with Stanford. When we want to understand the changing landscape of higher education in the United States so that more low-income students get college degrees, we work with Stanford.

This is where genius lives.

There is a flexibility of mind here – an openness to change, an eagerness for what's new. This is where people come to discover the future and have fun doing it.

Melinda Gates: Some people call you nerds – and you claim the label with pride.

Bill: Well, so do we.

There are so many remarkable things going on here at this campus. But if Melinda and I had to put into one word what we love most about Stanford, it's the optimism. There's an infectious feeling here that innovation can solve almost every problem.

That's the belief that drove me, in 1975, to leave a college in the suburbs of Boston and go on an endless leave of absence. I believed that the magic of computers and software would empower people everywhere and make the world much, much better.

It's been almost 40 years since then, and 20 years since Melinda and I were married. We are both more optimistic now than ever. But on our journey together, our optimism evolved. We'd like to tell you what we learned – and talk to you today about how your optimism and ours can do more – for more people.

When Paul Allen and I started Microsoft, we wanted to bring the power of computers and software to the people – and that was the kind of rhetoric we used. One of the pioneering books in the field had a raised fist on the cover, and it was called Computer Lib. At that time, only big businesses could buy computers. We wanted to offer the same power to regular people – and democratize computing.

By the 1990s, we saw how profoundly personal computers could empower people. But that success created a new dilemma: If rich kids got computers and poor kids didn't, then technology would make inequality worse. That ran counter to our core belief: Technology should benefit everybody. So we worked to close the digital divide. I made it a priority at Microsoft, and Melinda and I made it an early priority at our foundation – donating personal computers to public libraries to make sure everyone had access.

The digital divide was a focus of mine in 1997 when I took my first trip to South Africa. I went there on business, so I spent most of my time in meetings in downtown Johannesburg. I stayed in the home of one of the richest families in South Africa. It had only been three years since the election of Nelson Mandela marked the end of apartheid. When I sat down for dinner with my hosts, they used a bell to call the butler. After dinner, the men and women separated, and the men smoked cigars. I thought, "Good thing I read Jane Austen, or I wouldn't have known what was going on."

The next day I went to Soweto – the poor township southwest of Johannesburg that had been a center of the anti-apartheid movement.

It was a short distance from the city into the township, but the entry was sudden, jarring, and harsh. I passed into a world completely unlike the one I came from.

My visit to Soweto became an early lesson in how naïve I was.

Microsoft was donating computers and software to a community center there – the kind of thing we did in the United States. But it became clear to me very quickly that this was not the United States.

I had seen statistics on poverty, but I had never really seen poverty. The people there lived in corrugated tin shacks with no electricity, no water, no toilets. Most people didn't wear shoes; they walked barefoot along the streets. Except there were no streets – just ruts in the mud.

The community center had no consistent source of power, so they had rigged up an extension cord that ran about 200 feet from the center to a diesel generator outside. Looking at the setup, I knew the minute the reporters and I left, the generator would get moved to a more urgent task, and the people who used the community center would go back to worrying about challenges that couldn't be solved by a PC.

When I gave my prepared remarks to the press, I said: "Soweto is a milestone. There are major decisions ahead about whether technology will leave the developing world behind. This is to close the gap."

As I was reading those words, I knew they were irrelevant. What I didn't say was: "By the way, we're not focused on the fact that half a million people on this continent are dying every year from malaria. But we're sure as hell going to bring you computers."

Before I went to Soweto, I thought I understood the world's problems, but I was blind to the most important ones. I was so taken aback by what I saw that I had to ask myself, "Do I still believe that innovation can solve the world's toughest problems?"

I promised myself that before I came back to Africa, I would find out more about what keeps people poor.

Over the years, Melinda and I did learn more about the most pressing needs of the poor. On a later trip to South Africa, I paid a visit to a hospital for patients with MDR-TB, or multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, a disease with a cure rate of under 50 percent.

I remember that hospital as a place of despair. It was a giant open ward with a sea of patients shuffling around in pajamas, wearing masks.

There was one floor just for children, including some babies lying in bed.

They had a little school for the kids who were well enough to learn, but many of the children couldn't make it, and the hospital didn't seem to know whether it was worth it to keep the school open.

I talked to a patient there in her early thirties. She had been a worker at a TB hospital when she came down with a cough. She went to a doctor, and he told her she had drug-resistant TB. She was later diagnosed with AIDS. She wasn't going to live much longer, but there were plenty of MDR patients waiting to take her bed when she vacated it.

This was hell with a waiting list.

But seeing hell didn't reduce my optimism; it channeled it. I got in the car and told the doctor who was working with us: "Yeah, I know. MDR-TB is hard to cure. But we should be able to do something for these people." This year, we're entering phase three with a new TB drug regime. For patients who respond, instead of a 50 percent cure rate after 18 months for $2,000, we could get an 80-90 percent cure rate after six months for under $100.

That's better by a factor of a hundred.

Optimism is often dismissed as false hope. But there is also false hopelessness.

That's the attitude that says we can't defeat poverty and disease.

We absolutely can.

Melinda: Bill called me after he visited the TB hospital. Ordinarily, if we're calling from a trip, we just go through the agenda of the day: "Here's what I did; here's where I went; here's who I met." But this call was different. He said: "Melinda, I've gone somewhere I've never been before" and then he choked up and couldn't talk. Finally he just said: "I'll tell you when I get home."

I knew what he was going through. When you see people with so little hope, it breaks your heart. But if you want to do the most, you have to see the worst. That's what Bill was doing that day. I've had days like that, too.

Ten years ago, I traveled to India with friends. On the last day there, I spent some time meeting with prostitutes. I expected to talk to them about the risk of AIDS, but they wanted to talk about stigma. Most of these women had been abandoned by their husbands, and that's why they'd gone into

prostitution. They were trying to make enough money to feed their kids. They were so low in the eyes of society that they could be raped and robbed and beaten by anybody – even by police – and nobody cared.

Talking to them about their lives was so moving to me. But what I remember most is how much they wanted to touch me and be touched. It was as if physical contact somehow proved their worth. As I was leaving, we took a photo of all of us with our arms linked together.

Later that day, I spent some time in a home for the dying. I walked into a large hall and saw rows and rows of cots. Every cot was attended except for one far off in the corner that no one was going near, so I walked over there. The patient was a woman who seemed to be in her thirties. I remember her eyes. She had these huge, brown, sorrowful eyes. She was emaciated, on the verge of death. Her intestines weren't holding anything – so they had put her on a cot with a hole cut out in the bottom, and everything just poured through into a pan below.

I could tell she had AIDS, both from the way she looked, and the fact that she was off in the corner alone. The stigma of AIDS is vicious – especially for women – and the punishment is abandonment.

When I arrived at her cot, I suddenly felt totally helpless. I had absolutely nothing I could offer her. I knew I couldn't save her, but I didn't want her to be alone. So I knelt down next to her and reached out to touch her – and as soon as she felt my hand, she grabbed it and wouldn't let go. We sat there holding hands, and even though I knew she couldn't understand me, I just started saying: "It's okay. It's okay. It's not your fault. It's not your fault."

We had been there together for a while when she pointed upward with her finger. It took me some time to figure out that she wanted to go up to the roof and sit outside while it was still light out. I asked one of the workers if that would be okay, but she was overwhelmed by all the patients she had to care for. She said: "She's in the last stages of dying, and I have to pass out medicine." Then I asked another, and got the same answer. It was getting late and the sun was going down, and I had to leave, and no one seemed willing to take her upstairs.

So finally I just scooped her up – she was just skin over a skeleton, just a

sack of bones – and I carried her up the stairs. On the roof, there were a few of those plastic chairs that will blow over in a strong breeze, and I set her down on one of those, and I helped prop her feet up on another, and I placed a blanket over her legs.

And she sat there with her face to the west, watching the sunset. I made sure the workers knew that she was up there so they would come get her after the sun went down. Then I had to leave her.

But she never left me.

I felt completely and totally inadequate in the face of this woman's death.

But sometimes it's the people you can't help who inspire you the most.

I knew that the sex workers I linked arms with in the morning could become the woman I carried upstairs in the evening – unless they found a way to defy the stigma that hung over their lives.

Over the past 10 years, our foundation has helped sex workers build support groups so they could empower each other to speak out for safe sex and demand that their clients use condoms. Their brave efforts helped keep HIV prevalence low among sex workers, and a lot of studies show that is a big reason why the AIDS epidemic in India hasn't exploded.

When these sex workers gathered together to help stop AIDS transmission, something unexpected and wonderful happened. The community they formed became a platform for everything. They were able to set up speed-dial networks to respond to violent attacks. Police and others who raped and robbed them couldn't get away with it anymore. The women set up systems to encourage savings. They used financial services that helped some of them start businesses and get out of sex work. This was all done by people society considered the lowliest of the low.

Optimism for me isn't a passive expectation that things will get better; it's a conviction that we can make things better – that whatever suffering we see, no matter how bad it is, we can help people if we don't lose hope and we don't look away.

Bill: Melinda and I have described some devastating scenes. But we want to make the strongest case we can for the power of optimism. Even in dire situations, optimism can fuel innovation and lead to new tools to eliminate

suffering. But if you never really see the people who are suffering, your optimism can't help them. You will never change their world.

And that brings me to what I see as a paradox.

The world of science and technology is driving phenomenal innovations – and Stanford stands at the center of that, creating new companies, prize-winning professors, ingenious software, miracle drugs, and amazing graduates. We're on the verge of mind-blowing breakthroughs in what human beings can do for each other. And people here are really excited about the future.

At the same time, if you ask people across the United States, "Is the future going to be better than the past?" most people will say: "No. My kids will be worse off than I am." They think innovation won't make the world better for them or for their children.

So who's right?

The people who say innovation will create new possibilities and make the world better?

…or…

The people who see a trend toward inequality and a decline in opportunity and don't think innovation will change that?

The pessimists are wrong in my view, but they're not crazy. If technology is purely market-driven and we don't focus innovation on the big inequities, then we could have amazing inventions that leave the world even more divided.

We won't improve public schools. We won't cure malaria. We won't end poverty. We won't develop the innovations poor farmers need to grow food in a changing climate.

If our optimism doesn't address the problems that affect so many of our fellow human beings, then our optimism needs more empathy. If empathy channeled our optimism, we would see the poverty and the disease and the poor schools, we would answer with our innovations, and we would surprise the pessimists.

Over the next generation, you Stanford graduates will lead a new wave of innovation and apply it to your world. Which problems will you decide to

solve? If your world is wide, you can create the future we all want. If your world is narrow, you may create the future the pessimists fear.

I started learning in Soweto that if we're going to make our optimism matter to everyone and empower people everywhere, we have to see the lives of those most in need. If we have optimism, but we don't have empathy – then it doesn't matter how much we master the secrets of science, we're not really solving problems; we're just working on puzzles.

I think most of you have a broader worldview than I had at your age. You can do better at this than I did. If you put your hearts and minds to it, you can surprise the pessimists. We can't wait to see it.

Melinda: Let your heart break. It will change what you do with your optimism.

On a trip to South Asia, I met a desperately poor mother who brought me her two small children and implored me: "Please take them home with you." When I begged her forgiveness and said I could not, she said: "Then please take one."

On another trip, to South Los Angeles, I was talking to a group of high school students from a tough neighborhood when one young woman said to me: "Do you ever feel like we are just somebody else's kids whose parents shirked their responsibilities, that we're all just leftovers?"

These women made my heart break – and still do. And the empathy intensifies if I admit to myself: "That could be me."

When I talk with the mothers I meet during my travels, I see that there is no difference at all in what we want for our children. The only difference is our ability to give it to them.

What accounts for that difference?

Bill and I talk about this with our kids at the dinner table. Bill worked incredibly hard and took risks and made sacrifices for success. But there is another essential ingredient of success, and that ingredient is luck – absolute and total luck.

When were you born? Who were your parents? Where did you grow up? None of us earned these things. They were given to us.

When we strip away our luck and privilege and consider where we'd be

without them, it becomes easier to see someone who's poor and sick and say "that could be me." This is empathy; it tears down barriers and opens up new frontiers for optimism.

So here is our appeal to you: As you leave Stanford, take your genius and your optimism and your empathy and go change the world in ways that will make millions of others optimistic as well.

You don't have to rush. You have careers to launch, debts to pay, spouses to meet and marry. That's enough for now.

But in the course of your lives, without any plan on your part, you'll come to see suffering that will break your heart.

When it happens, and it will, don't turn away from it; turn toward it.

That is the moment when change is born.

Congratulations and good luck

04-Richard Costolo

Twitter CEO

Commencement Speech at University of Michigan 2013

I love you too. You know, I have to start with by tweeting, this so just give me one second, I'm a professional so this will only take a second. All right. I want to start off by thanking president Coleman all the graduates, friends and family faculty, of course and finally the Board of Regents who sit behind me quietly judging us all. I'd like to also take a moment to thank my mother and father who are here today and I'd like all of you to remember at the end of the day to take a moment to thank your parents or whoever it was that helped you get where you are today, they have sacrificed greatly for you and we'll be out of here by 3:30, I promise.

When I woke up this morning and started writing my speech, I was thinking about my first month on campus but in September when I was a freshman and the football team went into that season ranked number one in the nation preseason and there was all this I remember that September when I got here there was all this excitement on campus and our first game was at Wisconsin and we went up there and we lost our first game 21 to 14 and there was this just crushing disappointment afterwards and I'd like you to think of that soaring expectations followed by crushing disappointment as a metaphor for your next 20 minutes with me.

When I was sitting where you are so many years ago but what seems to me really like just yesterday. I was earning my degree in computer science and yay nerds and at the time the cs department was in the school of literature science in the arts so I had to have a certain number of arts credits to graduate and so my first semester senior year I decided well I'll take I'll take an acting class because

I'm just gonna pander to the crowd that's the kind of person I am.

I thought I'll take an acting class because we won't have a lot of homework and I'll go in and we'll say Arthur Miller lines to each other and then I can work on my operating systems programs at night and I loved the class

so much that my second semester senior year I took another acting class

and in fact I started doing stand-up comedy which I'd never done before at the Michigan Union at the U Club.

So that by the time I was sitting where you guys are today with my cs degree I had offers from three technology companies to go work for them as a programmer but I decided instead that what i would do is move to Chicago try to get into the improv comedy group ii city and go on from there to Saturday at live and ultimate fame and glory.

Now in the Hollywood version of my story what would happen is I'd there would be about three minutes where I would move to Chicago and I would suffer mightily probably at night or in the rain there would be music in the background and I would come home at night to a dog in a giant loft that I could somehow miraculously afford and fall asleep and after those three minutes I would be discovered by a director who would cast me in a film and I'd walk down the red carpet and my parents would be across the red carpet giving me the thumbs up in the real world story of what happened when I decided to make a big bet on myself and take the chance to do this because it's what I loved I was grinding away for a long time and I had no money and we would rehearse during the day and perform in these little theaters at night for free and I was taking classes during the day at Second City as well trying to learn station and I eventually had to get odd jobs because I had no money so I put my CS degree from Michigan to use wrapping flatware and selling play settings at Crate & Barrel but while I kept on improvising in Chicago for many years I want to tell you two lessons I learned in that very first year they're learning at Second City the first one was we had this director at Second City who was instructing a class I was in named Don de pollo and there were four people up on stage there about ten of us in the class and these guys are improvising that they're in a laundromat when the scene ends and Don asks all of us in the room what do you see up there on that stage right now and there was nothing up there so we describe what we see up on this stage it's an empty stage and Don says so far today you guys have improvised that you're in an apartment an apartment a laundromat an apartment what

are you afraid of we all kind of looked at each other like we're not water what do you mean what are we afraid of and he said you need to make more courageous choices the reason the stage is completely empty and doesn't have a set on it is so that you can go out there and be in the Keebler Elf Factory or be on the Space Shuttle as an astronaut who's never even tried to fly a plane before make bigger choices take courageous risks and a few months later I was studying at second city with another legendary director there Martin Jamaat and Steve Carrell was out on stage Steve and I were on the same group and he was improvising something I was backstage and I thought of this amazing line and I thought I got to go out there and get into the scene and I'm gonna get this line out and so I enter this stage and I tried to start moving the scene in the direction of what I wanted to say and Martin stops the scenes to stop stop and he says to the whole class but really he's talking to me he says you can't plan a script the beauty of improvisation is you're experiencing it in the moment if you try to plan what the next line is supposed to be you're just going to be disappointed when the other people onstage with you do or say what you want them to do and you'll stand there frozen be in this moment and you stopped everyone in the stop everyone in the room and said all of you right now be in this moment now be here in this moment now be here in this moment I continued to stay in Chicago and improvised there for many years and ultimately got lots of auditions for shows and got all none of them fortunately during this time the internet happened and now that was great because when the Internet have I know I know it's funny to you guys when I was her age we didn't have the internet in our in our pants we didn't even have the Internet not in our pants that's how bad it was I know I sound like my grandfather right now we didn't have teeth there were no question marks we just had words what was I talking about the Internet so I dove into the internet because I saw it as this extensible structure that had these amazing possibilities and I created a sequence of companies over the course of the next 20 years that led me to Twitter if there's ever an example of the importance of making bold bets and

focusing on what you love its Twitter when the founder when Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey talks about the origins of his thinking for the product he talks about his fascination with maps he talks about his ultimate fascination with dispatch systems as he studied maps and the more efficient way of getting things like taxis and ambulances to where they needed to go more quickly and when he sent out his first tweet just setting up my Twitter he didn't plan for President Obama to declare victory on that platform in the 2012 election none of us had Twitter thought during the earthquake and ensuing tsunami in Fukushima Japan that our service would be a great alternative communication platform if the mobile networks in Japan were spotty in the aftermath and certainly none of us even hoped let alone considered that our platform would be one of those used to organize protests across the Middle East in Tunisia and Eric and an Egypt during the Arab Spring here's here's the here's the amazing thing about what I've observed when I've witnessed all those things not only can you not plan the impact you're going to have you often won't recognize it even while you're having it a few months after I started at Twitter Russian president Boris Russian President Medvedev was coming to was to the office and that morning going into the office the streets were all completely blocked off by the San Francisco police and the US Secret Service was there and Russian security forces were there and so it was this crazy scene walking into the building and I remember going through the metal detector to get into our office which was there just for the day and there were these guys in his crazy uniforms with these beautiful German Shepherds that looked like they could kill you standing right next to them and so there was this huge build up and and President Medvedev came into the office with this with his entourage and there were all these reporters and cameras behind him and he was going to send out his first tweet from the office to the rest of the world and there were everyone was waiting for that to happen and as he was walking down the hall taking a tour of the office before going to send his first tweet I get a tap on my shoulder and I turn around and I say what is it and this person says to me the site's

down and being the you know thoughtful charismatic leader that I am I said like totally down totally down so the next day you know you guys in the rest of the world read President Obama welcoming Russian President Medvedev to Twitter and declaring that we maybe no longer needed the red phone anymore because we could now use Twitter but for me that moment was the site is down and it's always like that not the site is down part the impact is what others frame for you and the world after it happens the present is only what you're experiencing and focused on right now and every so often my past and present come together I was invited to this fundraiser at this Children's Hospital in the Bay Area last year and Steve Carrell was the guest speaker and so I took a photocopy of this review of the group that Steve and I were in in Chicago over 25 years ago to the to the to the charity auction and I showed it to Steve when I got a chance to talk to him he's mobbed the whole time by people but we got a chance to have a brief conversation and we looked at this photocopy of the review and talked about the different people in the group and where they were now and we'd kept in touch with some but not with all of them and at the end of that conversation is Steve patted me on the back and he said I'm really sorry it didn't work out for you you cannot draw that path looking forward you cannot draw any of your paths looking forward so you have to figure out what you love to do what you have conviction about and go do that here's the challenge so far you guys have gotten where you are by meeting and exceeding expectations you are awesome you have excelled look at you you look like an amazing giant choir but from here on out you have to switch gears you are no longer meeting and exceeding expectations your there are no expectations there's no script when you're doing what you love to do you become resilient because that's the habit you create for yourself you create a habit of taking chances on yourself and making bold choices in service to doing what you love if on the other hand you do what you think is expected of you or what you're supposed to do and things go poorly or chaos ensues as it surely will you will look to external sources for what to do next because that

will be the habit you've created for yourself you'll be standing there frozen on the stage of your own life if you're just filling a role you will be blindsided here's the other problem I don't feel like I can stand here and tell you to try to have an impact because the problem seems so massive it seems impossible to make any impact at all and you just end up feeling like you can't do anything just thinking about it you know in Syria and Iran and North Korea is you go through that listed you know makes me want to sweat and not just because I'm wearing this robe that has no natural fibers in it that was think this was synthesized from tractor fuel three days ago so instead what I implore you to do is believe that if you make courageous choices and bet on yourself and put yourself out there that you will have an impact as a result of what you do and you don't need to know now what that will be or how it will happen because nobody ever does so I like to think of you guys in the metaphor of my early improv days as having been backstage preparing and you are here now and look at everything you've accomplished it's remarkable you you are just all so amazing to me and I'm so proud of everything you've done but as you get ready to walk out under the bright lights of the improvisational stage of the rest of your life I implore you to remember those two lessons I learned years ago be bold make courageous choices for yourself be in the Keebler Elf Factory what are you afraid of and secondly don't always
worry about what your next line is supposed to be what you're supposed to do next there's no script live your life be in this moment be in this moment now be in this moment 20 years from now you will be sitting in a different seat in this stadium and you will be lying in a field looking up at the clouds and you will be holding a patient's hand walking into surgery and you will be grading or evaluating a student's essay and you will be sitting on the sidelines of your daughter's soccer practice and you will be standing behind this podium be right there and nowhere else in that moment soak it all in and remember to say thank you thank you hashtag go blue.

05-JIM CARREY

Actor

Maharishi University of Management | May 24, 2014

Thank you Bevan, thank you all!

I brought one of my paintings to show you today. Hope you guys are gonna be able see it okay. It's not one of my bigger pieces. You might wanna move down front — to get a good look at it. (kidding)

Faculty, Parents, Friends, Dignitaries... Graduating Class of 2014, and all the dead baseball players coming out of the corn to be with us today. (laughter) After the harvest there's no place to hide — the fields are empty — there is no cover there! (laughter)

I am here to plant a seed that will inspire you to move forward in life with enthusiastic hearts and a clear sense of wholeness. The question is, will that seed have a chance to take root, or will I be sued by Monsanto and forced to use their seed, which may not be totally "Ayurvedic." (laughter)

Excuse me if I seem a little low energy tonight — today — whatever this is. I slept with my head to the North last night. (laughter) Oh man! Oh man! You know how that is, right kids? Woke up right in the middle of Pitta and couldn't get back to sleep till Vata rolled around, but I didn't freak out. I used that time to eat a large meal and connect with someone special on Tinder. (laughter)

Life doesn't happen to you, it happens for you. How do I know this? I don't, but I'm making sound, and that's the important thing. That's what I'm here to do. Sometimes, I think that's one of the only things that are important. Just letting each other know we're here, reminding each other that we are part of a larger self. I used to think Jim Carrey is all that I was...

Just a flickering light

A dancing shadow

The great nothing masquerading as something you can name

Dwelling in forts and castles made of witches – wishes! Sorry, a Freudian slip there

Seeking shelter in caves and foxholes, dug out hastily
An archer searching for his target in the mirror
Begging to be enslaved
Pleading for my chains
Blinded by longing and tripping over paradise – can I get an “Amen”?! (applause)
You didn’t think I could be serious did ya’? I don't think you understand who you're dealing with! I have no limits! I cannot be contained because I’m the container. You can’t contain the container, man! You can’t contain the container! (laughter)
I used to believe that who I was ended at the edge of my skin, that I had been given this little vehicle called a body from which to experience creation, and though I couldn’t have asked for a sportier model, (laughter) it was after all a loaner and would have to be returned. Then, I learned that everything outside the vehicle was a part of me, too, and now I drive a convertible. Top down wind in my hair! (laughter)
I am elated and truly, truly, truly excited to be present and fully connected to you at this important moment in your journey. I hope you’re ready to open the roof and take it all in?! (audience doesn’t react) Okay, four more years then! (laughter)
I want to thank the Trustees, Administrators and Faculty of MUM for creating an institution worthy of Maharishi’s ideals of education. A place that teaches the knowledge and experience necessary to be productive in life, as well as enabling the students, through Transcendental Meditation and ancient Vedic knowledge to slack off twice a day for an hour and a half!! (laughter) — don’t think you’re fooling me!!! — (applause) but, I guess it has some benefits. It does allow you to separate who you truly are and what’s real, from the stories that run through your head.
You have given them the ability to walk behind the mind’s elaborate set decoration, and to see that there is a huge difference between a dog that is going to eat you in your mind and an actual dog that’s going to eat you. (laughter) That may sound like no big deal, but many never learn that distinction and spend a great deal of their lives living in fight or flight

response.

I'd like to acknowledge all you wonderful parents — way to go for the fantastic job you've done — for your tireless dedication, your love, your support, and most of all, for the attention you've paid to your children. I have a saying, "Beware the unloved," because they will eventually hurt themselves... or me! (laughter)

But when I look at this group here today, I feel really safe! I do! I'm just going to say it — my room is not locked! My room is not locked! (laughter) No doubt some of you will turn out to be crooks! But white-collar stuff — Wall St. ya' know, that type of thing — crimes committed by people with self-esteem! Stuff a parent can still be proud of in a weird way. (laughter)

And to the graduating class of 2017 — minus 3! You didn't let me finish! (laughter) — Congratulations! (applause) Yes, give yourselves a round of applause, please. You are the vanguard of knowledge and consciousness; a new wave in a vast ocean of possibilities. On the other side of that door, there is a world starving for new leadership, new ideas.

I've been out there for 30 years! She's a wild cat! (laughter) Oh, she'll rub up against your leg and purr until you pick her up and start pettin' her, and out of nowhere she'll swat you in the face. Sure it's rough sometimes but that's OK, 'cause they've got soft serve ice cream with sprinkles! (laughter) I guess that's what I'm really here to say; sometimes it's okay to eat your feelings! (laughter)

Fear is going to be a player in your life, but you get to decide how much. You can spend your whole life imagining ghosts, worrying about your pathway to the future, but all there will ever be is what's happening here, and the decisions we make in this moment, which are based in either love or fear.

So many of us choose our path out of fear disguised as practicality. What we really want seems impossibly out of reach and ridiculous to expect, so we never dare to ask the universe for it. I'm saying, I'm the proof that you can ask the universe for it — please! (applause) And if it doesn't happen for you right away, it's only because the universe is so busy fulfilling my order. It's party size! (laughter)

My father could have been a great comedian, but he didn't believe that was possible for him, and so he made a conservative choice. Instead, he got a safe job as an accountant, and when I was 12 years old, he was let go from that safe job and our family had to do whatever we could to survive.

I learned many great lessons from my father, not the least of which was that you can fail at what you don't want, so you might as well take a chance on doing what you love. (applause)

That's not the only thing he taught me though: I watched the affect my father's love and humor had on the world around me, and I thought, "That's something to do, that's something worth my time."

It wasn't long before I started acting up. People would come over to my house and they would be greeted by a 7 yr old throwing himself down a large flight of stairs. (laughter) They would say, "What happened?" And I would say, "I don't know — let's check the replay." And I would go back to the top of the stairs and come back down in slow motion. (Jim reenacts coming down the stairs in slow-mo) It was a very strange household. (laughter)

My father used to brag that I wasn't a ham — I was the whole pig. And he treated my talent as if it was his second chance. When I was about 28, after a decade as a professional comedian, I realized one night in LA that the purpose of my life had always been to free people from concern, like my dad. When I realized this, I dubbed my new devotion, "The Church of Freedom From Concern" — "The Church of FFC"— and I dedicated myself to that ministry.

What's yours? How will you serve the world? What do they need that your talent can provide? That's all you have to figure out. As someone who has done what you are about to go do, I can tell you from experience, the effect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is. (applause)

Everything you gain in life will rot and fall apart, and all that will be left of you is what was in your heart. My choosing to free people from concern got me to the top of a mountain. Look where I am — look what I get to do! Everywhere I go – and I'm going to get emotional because when I tap into this, it really is extraordinary to me — I did something that makes people

present their best selves to me wherever I go. (applause) I am at the top of the mountain and the only one I hadn't freed was myself and that's when my search for identity deepened.

I wondered who I'd be without my fame. Who would I be if I said things that people didn't want to hear, or if I defied their expectations of me? What if I showed up to the party without my Mardi Gras mask and I refused to flash my breasts for a handful of beads? (laughter) I'll give you a moment to wipe that image out of your mind. (laughter)

But you guys are way ahead of the game. You already know who you are and that peace, that peace that we're after, lies somewhere beyond personality, beyond the perception of others, beyond invention and disguise, even beyond effort itself. You can join the game, fight the wars, play with form all you want, but to find real peace, you have to let the armor fall. Your need for acceptance can make you invisible in this world. Don't let anything stand in the way of the light that shines through this form. Risk being seen in all of your glory. (A sheet drops and reveals Jim's painting. Applause.)

(Re: the painting) It's not big enough! (kidding) This painting is big for a reason. This painting is called "High Visibility." (laughter) It's about picking up the light and daring to be seen. Here's the tricky part. Everyone is attracted to the light. The party host up in the corner (refers to painting) who thinks unconsciousness is bliss and is always offering a drink from the bottles that empty you; Misery, below her, who despises the light — can't stand when you're doing well — and wishes you nothing but the worst; The Queen of Diamonds who needs a King to build her house of cards; And the Hollow One, who clings to your leg and begs, "Please don't leave me behind for I have abandoned myself."

Even those who are closest to you and most in love with you; the people you love most in the world can find clarity confronting at times. This painting took me thousands of hours to complete and — (applause) thank you — yes, thousands of hours that I'll never get back, I'll never get them back (kidding) — I worked on this for so long, for weeks and weeks, like a mad man alone on a scaffolding — and when I was finished one of my

friends said, “This would be a cool black light painting.” (laughter)

So I started over. (All the lights go off in the Dome and the painting is showered with black light.) Whooooo! Welcome to Burning Man! (applause) Some pretty crazy characters right? Better up there than in here. (points to head) Painting is one of the ways I free myself from concern, a way to stop the world through total mental, spiritual and physical involvement.

But even with that, comes a feeling of divine dissatisfaction. Because ultimately, we’re not the avatars we create. We’re not the pictures on the film stock. We are the light that shines through it. All else is just smoke and mirrors. Distracting, but not truly compelling.

I’ve often said that I wished people could realize all their dreams of wealth and fame so they could see that it’s not where you’ll find your sense of completion. Like many of you, I was concerned about going out in the world and doing something bigger than myself, until someone smarter than myself made me realize that there is nothing bigger than myself! (laughter) My soul is not contained within the limits of my body. My body is contained within the limitlessness of my soul — one unified field of nothing dancing for no particular reason, except maybe to comfort and entertain itself. (applause) As that shift happens in you, you won’t be feeling the world you’ll be felt by it — you will be embraced by it. Now, I’m always at the beginning. I have a reset button called presence and I ride that button constantly.

Once that button is functional in your life, there’s no story the mind could create that will be as compelling. The imagination is always manufacturing scenarios — both good and bad — and the ego tries to keep you trapped in the multiplex of the mind. Our eyes are not only viewers, but also projectors that are running a second story over the picture we see in front of us all the time. Fear is writing that script and the working title is, ‘I’ll never be enough.’

You look at a person like me and say, (kidding) “How could we ever hope to reach those kinds of heights, Jim? How can I make a painting that's too big for any reasonable home? How do you fly so high without a special

breathing apparatus?" (laughter)

This is the voice of your ego. If you listen to it, there will always be someone who seems to be doing better than you. No matter what you gain, ego will not let you rest. It will tell you that you cannot stop until you've left an indelible mark on the earth, until you've achieved immortality. How tricky is the ego that it would tempt us with the promise of something we already possess.

So I just want you to relax—that's my job—relax and dream up a good life! (applause) I had a substitute teacher from Ireland in the second grade that told my class during Morning Prayer that when she wants something, anything at all, she prays for it, and promises something in return and she always gets it. I'm sitting at the back of the classroom, thinking that my family can't afford a bike, so I went home and I prayed for one, and promised I would recite the rosary every night in exchange. Broke it—broke that promise. (laughter)

Two weeks later, I got home from school to find a brand new mustang bike with a banana seat and easy rider handlebars — from fool to cool! My family informed me that I had won the bike in a raffle that a friend of mine had entered my name in, without my knowledge. That type of thing has been happening ever since, and as far as I can tell, it's just about letting the universe know what you want and working toward it while letting go of how it might come to pass. (applause)

Your job is not to figure out how it's going to happen for you, but to open the door in your head and when the doors open in real life, just walk through it. Don't worry if you miss your cue. There will always be another door opening. They keep opening.

And when I say, "life doesn't happen to you, it happens for you." I really don't know if that's true. I'm just making a conscious choice to perceive challenges as something beneficial so that I can deal with them in the most productive way. You'll come up with your own style, that's part of the fun! Oh, and why not take a chance on faith as well? Take a chance on faith — not religion, but faith. Not hope, but faith. I don't believe in hope. Hope is a beggar. Hope walks through the fire. Faith leaps over it.

You are ready and able to do beautiful things in this world and after you walk through those doors today, you will only ever have two choices: love or fear. Choose love, and don’t ever let fear turn you against your playful heart.

Thank you. Jai Guru Dev. I’m so honored. Thank you.

06-Mindy Kaling

Actress

Darmouth Commencement Address, 2018

Good morning to the Class of 2018, the faculty, the parents, the grandparents, fellow honorees, and the paid laughers I have scattered throughout the audience.

It is an honor to join you this morning for this special occasion.

It is also an honor to speak to you today from behind this gigantic tree stump. Like some sort of female Lorax with an advanced degree. That's right, you guys; I'm hitting Dr. Seuss hard and early in this speech. Because Dartmouth grads have a privilege unique among all the Ivy League: We will be forced to be mini-experts on Dr. Seuss for our entire lives.

On my deathbed, I'll be saying, "Did you know that his real name was Theodor Geisel? Did you know he was editor of the Dartmouth Jack-O-Lantern?" And yes, while no U.S. Presidents have gone to Dartmouth, we can at least lay claim for the wonderful Dr. Seuss.

Another notable alumnus is Salmon P. Chase, the man on the $10,000 bill. A symbolically powerful piece of paper that's largely useless in the real world. Like a degree in playwriting which I received from this very institution. Thank you for paying for that, Mom and Dad!

It's a thrill to be back here in New Hampshire, the Granite State, known for two things: the place where you can legally not wear your seatbelt, and Adam Sandler's birthplace.

New Hampshire has one of the best mottos of any state: "Live Free or Die." For outsiders, it sounds like an exciting declaration of freedom; but when you're here in January, "die" actually sounds like a pretty good option.

I remember the days when it was so cold your sneeze would become an ice sculpture before it hit the ground. In Los Angeles, where I live now, if I sneeze, I just call my doctor and have my blood replaced with that of a teenage track star. That's normal there. I'm mostly track star right now.

Before I get any further, I should actually probably clarify who I am for the parents and grandparents in the audience who are thinking to themselves,

“Who is this loud Indian woman? Is that the girl from Quantico? She looks so much worse in person.”

No, no, I’m not Priyanka Chopra, not even Padma Lakshmi. I’m the other Indian woman we have allowed to be on television, Mindy Kaling. Thank you, thank you.

You may remember me from my role on The Office as Kelly Kapoor, who internet commenters said was—quote—“shrill” and—quote—“took up valuable time that could have gone to Steve Carell.”

I then created and starred in my own TV show, The Mindy Project. Thank you, thank you very much. It was an uphill battle to get the show on the air, but it was worth it, because it enabled me to become Dartmouth’s most successful female minority show creator who has spoken at commencement!

Oh wait, no. Shonda Rhimes went here. Yup, and she’s created like 10 more shows than me, so great. No, cool. Cool, cool, cool, Shonda. Friggin’ role model, good for you.

But today is not about famous alumni. No, no. It’s about the men and women who have toiled in obscurity for years so that they might better our country. I speak, of course, of the 51 percent of Dartmouth grads who will go into finance—highest in the Ivy League! Look left. Look right. All three of you will be spending at least ten years in a white collar prison.

I know that going into the real world sounds scary, but it’s exciting too. Finally, you’ll be in control of your own lives. No longer will there be an irrational Board of Trustees telling you you can’t have hard liquor on campus, for the ridiculous reason that they don’t want you to die. Come tomorrow, no one can stop you from filling your apartment with $4.99 handles of Uncle Satan’s Unfiltered Potato Vodka. Go crazy.

It’s a real moment of reflection for me to be standing here speaking to all of you now, because it makes me harken back to my own time at my Dartmouth graduation. Madeleine Albright was my commencement speaker; and while I don’t remember any specific quotes she said, or even a general gist of what she was talking about, I do remember thinking: “I wonder what it will be like to have my own cell phone?”

How things have changed. For all I know, at this very moment, most of you are posting this speech on your Instagram stories with a GIF of Winnie the Pooh twerking. If you are, please at least use my official hashtag, MindyGoesBigGreenTwentyEighteen. Thank you.

I bet none of you remember a time before the internet. Hell, you probably don't even remember a time before the Facebook page, "Dartmouth Memes for Cold AF Teens." Yeah, yeah. I know about that. Made me feel like a real creep researching it. "Hello, I'm a 38-year-old woman who wants to join your teen Facebook group. It's for research, I swear!"

Meanwhile, when I was in college we didn't even have Google. If you wanted to find out, say, how tall Ben Affleck was, you were out of luck. You just had to sit there, not knowing, and your entire day would be ruined. Or, say I wanted to meet up with a friend—I couldn't just text her. I had to walk outside and hope I accidentally bumped into her. Or, I "blitzed" her. Ah, BlitzMail. You know that feeling you have when you tell your friends that you "blitz" and they don't get it and you roll your eyes all smug like "Oh, it's a Dartmouth thing." That ends today. You try to say "blitz" one hundred yards east of White River Junction and you will get laughed back to your one-room triple in the Choates.

Fun fact: In 2001, the year I graduated, a pinkeye epidemic broke out amongst my classmates because we were all using public BlitzMail iMac terminals and not washing our hands. Those are just the kind of the sexy stories indicative of my time at Dartmouth.

You have so many cool new things here now. Like, look at the new logo, the D-Pine. It's beautiful. It reminds me of what college-aged Mindy thought a marijuana leaf might look like but I was too scared to actually find out. And this new House System sounds really cool! It's so Hogwarts-y! You know, you're sorted into your little Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, except they're called … South House. West House. School House.

Okay, come on guys. School House? Really? We're just saying what we see? That's the laziest name I've ever heard in my life, and I've spent over a decade working on shows called The Office and The Mindy Project.

Still, I remember sitting where you're sitting. I was so full of questions like,

“When is this thing going to end?” and “How many friends can I invite to dinner and still have mom and dad pay?” And, most importantly, “Why didn’t I wear any clothes underneath my gown?”

Now we’re reaching the part of the speech where I am supposed to tell you something uplifting like “follow your dreams.”

In general, advice isn’t actually an effective way to change your life. If all it took to make your life great was hearing amazing advice, then everyone who watched TED Talks would be a millionaire.

So don’t trust any one story of how how to become successful. As Madeline Albright said at my Commencement—see, I don’t remember anything. And I did just fine.

So here is some practical advice that you may or may not remember at the end of this speech because, hey, that’s the gig:

1. First off, remove “Proficient at Word” from your resume. That is ridiculous. You’re really scraping the bottom of the barrel of competency there. This is how you become proficient at Word: You open Word on your computer.

2. Most of your post-college life is simply filling out forms. Car insurance, health insurance, W-2s. W-4s, 1099s. Guess what? None of us know what any of those forms mean, but you will fill out a hundred of them before you die.

3. You never need more than one pancake. Trust me on this. Cartoons have trained us to want a giant stack of those bad boys, but order one first and then just see how you feel later.

4. This one is just for guys: When you go on dates, act as if every woman you’re talking to is a reporter for an online publication that you are scared of. One shouldn’t need the threat of public exposure and scorn to treat women well; but if that’s what it’s gonna take, fine. Date like everyone’s watching, because we are.

5. And this might be the most important—buy a toilet plunger. Trust me on this. Don’t wait until you need a plunger to buy a plunger.

Commencement is a time of transition for parents, too. That empty nest you were enjoying these past four years? Gone as soon as this speech is

over. I hope you like full-time lodgers who don't pay rent, don't do laundry, eat all the food in your fridge, and binge Family Guy on your sofa for weeks. That is your life now.

Although some of your graduates will be making more money than you—51% to be exact. And to the parents of those investment bankers, consultants, and hedge fund analysts—congratulations. Your kids will be fabulously wealthy but still somehow sharing your cell phone plan because it—quote—"saves everybody money."

Okay, now let's get real. Let me rip off the Band-Aid for all you, the '18s. Next year, the next year of your life is going to be bad. You have been in the comfortable fleece-lined womb of mother Dartmouth for four years now, and you're gonna go out in the cold, hard world.

Out there in the real world, there will be a target on your back. People will want to confirm their expectations of Ivy League graduates—that you're a jerk, that you're spoiled, that you use the word "summer" as a verb. Those stereotypes exist for a reason. I mean come on, the guy from the ten-thousand-dollar bill went to this school.

You're graduating into a world where it seems like everything is falling apart. Trust in institutions are at a record low; the truth doesn't seem to matter anymore; and for all I know, the president just tweeted us into a war with Wakanda, a country that doesn't exist.

So, Class of 2018, you are entering a world that we have toppled—we have toppled—like a Jenga tower, and we are relying on you to rebuild it.

But how can you do that with the knowledge that things are so unstable out there? I'll tell you my secret, the one thing that has kept me going through the years, my superpower: delusion.

This is something I may share with our president, a fact that is both horrifying and interesting. Two years in, I think we can pretty safely say that he's not getting carved onto Mount Rushmore; but damn if that isn't a testament to how far you can get just by believing you're the smartest, most successful person in the world.

My point is, you have to have insane confidence in yourself, even if it's not real. You need to be your own cheerleader now, because there isn't a

room full of people waiting with pom-poms to tell you, “You did it! We’ve been waiting all this time for you to succeed!”

So, I’m giving you permission to root for yourself. And while you’re at it, root for those around you, too. It took me a long time to realize that success isn’t a zero-sum game. Which leads me to the next part of my remarks.

I thought I might take a second to speak to the ladies in the audience. (Guys, take a break; you don’t have to pay attention during this part. Maybe spend the next 30 seconds thinking about all the extra money you’ll make in your life for doing the same job as a woman. Pretty sweet.)

Hey girls, we need to do a better job of supporting each other. I know that I am guilty of it too. We live in a world where it seems like there’s only room for one of us at the table. So when another woman shows up, we think, “Oh my god, she’s going to take the one woman spot! That was supposed to be mine!”

But that’s just what certain people want us to do! Wouldn’t it be better if we worked together to dismantle a system that makes us feel like there’s limited room for us? Because when women work together, we can accomplish anything. Even stealing the world’s most expensive diamond necklace from the Met Gala, like in Ocean’s 8, a movie starring me, which opens in theaters June 8th. And to that end, women, don’t be ashamed to toot your own horn like I just did.

Okay, guys, you can listen again. You didn’t miss much. Just remember to see Ocean’s 8, now playing in theaters nationwide. Ocean’s 8: Every con has its pros.

Now I wanted to share a little bit about me, Mindy Kaling, the Dartmouth student. When I came to Hanover in the fall of 1997, I was, as many of you were: driven, bright, ambitious, and really, really into The Black Eyed Peas. I arrived here as a 17-year-old, took the lay of the land, and immediately began making a checklist of everything I wanted to accomplish. I told myself that by the time I graduated in 2001, I would have checked them all off.

And here was my freshman fall checklist: be on Hanover crew, on Lodge crew, be in an a cappella group, be in an improv troupe, write a play that’s

performed at the Bentley, do a cartoon for the D, and try to be in a cool senior society. And guess what? I completed that checklist. But before you think: “Wait, why is this woman just bragging about her accomplishments from 17 years ago?”—keep listening.

Then, I graduated. And I made a new checklist for my twenties: get married by 27, have kids at 30, win an Oscar, be the star of my own TV show, host the MTV Music Awards (this was 2001, guys; it made more sense then), and do it all while being a size 2.

Well, spoiler alert: I’ve only done one of those things, and I’m not sure I will ever do the others. And that is a really scary feeling. Knowing how far that I’ve strayed from the person that I was hoping to be when I was 21.

I will tell you a personal story. After my daughter was born in December, I remember bringing her home and being in my house with her for the first time and thinking, “Huh. According to movies and TV, this is traditionally the time when my mother and spouse are supposed to be here, sharing this experience with me.” And I looked around, and I had neither. And for a moment, it was kind of scary. Like, “Can I do this by myself?”

But then, that feeling went away, because the reality is, I’m not doing it by myself. I’m surrounded by family and friends who love and support me. And the joy I feel from being with my daughter Katherine eclipses anything from any crazy checklist.

So I just want to tell you guys, don’t be scared if you don’t do things in the right order, or if you don’t do some things at all. I didn’t think I’d have a child before I got married, but hey, it turned out that way, and I wouldn’t change a thing. I didn’t think I’d have dessert before breakfast today, but hey, it turned out that way and I wouldn’t change a thing.

So if I could impart any advice, it’s this: If you have a checklist, good for you. Structured ambition can sometimes be motivating. But also, feel free to let it go. Yes, my culminating advice from my speech is a song from the Disney animated movie, Frozen.

I’ve covered a lot of ground today, not all of it was serious, but I wanted to leave you with this: I was not someone who should have the life I have now, and yet I do. I was sitting in the chair you are literally sitting in right

now and I just whispered, “Why not me?” And I kept whispering it for seventeen years; and here I am, someone that this school deemed worthy enough to speak to you at your Commencement.

Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do something, but especially not yourself. Go conquer the world. Just remember this: Why not you? You made it this far.

Thank you very much, and congratulations to the Class of 2018.

07-Maz Jobrani

Actor

UC Berkeley, 2017

Chancellor, Faculty, Staff, Parents, Students, and Ann Coulter welcome to the graduation ceremonies for the U.C. Berkeley class of 2017. No, I'm just kidding. She's not here. Yes she is. She's right there. No she's not. But maybe she's watching. Hey Ann! They let me speak!

Students! Congratulations. You're graduating! After 4 arduous years. For some of you 5 or 6 and a few of you 7 years! If you've been here 7 years you probably don't know what the word arduous means. After 7 years of hard work, the point is, you did it! You're getting out! You're free! Way to go. Today is about you. So let me spend the next hour and a half telling you about me. I'm kidding. It's only going to be 15 minutes but, let's talk about me.

To be honest with you I can't believe I'm giving the commencement speech today here at Cal! I graduated from U.C. Berkeley almost 25 years ago and I never would've thought I would be giving this speech! When I first got the invite I immediately said yes. As a graduate of Cal I was honored. But the next day I started freaking out. What the hell was I thinking? I'm a comedian. I don't know how to write a speech! I dropped out of a Ph.D. program so I could tell jokes. It's almost like I gave myself homework. And the worst part is that if I didn't in this homework and write this speech, not only would I not graduate, but you wouldn't graduate. The pressure was building. I started losing sleep over it. I kept asking myself, "Why have they picked me?"

But then I found ways to calm myself. I tried putting things in perspective. For example, I don't even remember who gave the Commencement speech at my graduation. I think it was a former Governor or a businessman or something. Would you guys remember who gave your speech here today? I'm guessing not…since many of you are probably stoned.

In preparing for this speech, I found that Cal faculty, alumni and researchers have won 90 Nobel Prizes, 45 MacArthur Fellowships, 14

Pulitzer Prizes, 117 Olympic gold medals, and 20 Academy Awards…and yet, you picked ME to give your commencement speech. I graduated from this school in 1993 with a B.A. in political science and a minor in Italian. I have won zero Nobels, zero Pulitzers, zero Academy Awards, zero gold medals – I haven't even won a bronze… but I'm that guy from the CBS sitcom Superior Donuts, so I'm giving the speech!

Yeah, that doesn't sound right to me either. I dug further. I was told you originally went out to Barack Obama. Now see, he would've been a good choice. But when he said no, you guys settled…on me. What are you guys, lazy? You asked the first African American President of the United States of America, he said no, and you said screw it, who's someone who's looking to increase their Instagram followers? Let's get Maz. He's desperate for attention. And you know what? You were right. I am looking to increase my Instagram followers. Here come in close. Let's do a selfie. I'll totally tag you.

Okay, now we have the picture, but I still don't know why you picked me. One reason, I thought was because I am a proud Cal alumnus and I could make you all feel good by reciting some amazing facts about our school.

-For example Forbes just ranked Cal as the #1 Best Value College in the country. That has your parents breathing a sigh of relief going, "Oh good, we got our money's worth."

-At a tuition of just under $13,000/year your parents could've been driving around in a Jaguar XE for the past 4 years, but instead they sent your ass to Cal. So, you better get a job soon and pay them back or at least start working as a Lyft driver and give them free rides for a while. That's value for your money!

-Just this year, Cal scientists figured out why shoelaces come untied! I read that in the Daily Cal and thought, you can get a grant for that? They should've given me the money. I have kids. I would've told them to just double knot it! Duh!

-Cal is not just an academic behemoth, but it also has great sports. Cal football fans are number one in spending their time watching a game going yeah, oh, yeah, oh, yeah, oh…usually ending in oh. But we still love our

team!

-Cal's Sproul Plaza was the birthplace of the free speech movement in the 1960s and has since been the birthplace of thousands of drug deals.

-If Cal were a celebrity it would be Lucy Liu — smart, beautiful and mostly Chinese.

-Lastly, Cal is the #1 University in all of the Bay Area, beating out Stanford in every category that counts. That's a study done by… me…in my own head. Go Bears!

It's clear I'm a Cal alumnus, but that couldn't be the only reason I was chosen. Then I thought that perhaps the students at Cal chose me to speak today because I'm a Cal graduate who also happens to be an immigrant. That's right! Immigrants. Taking your jobs.

In a time when anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise and we have a President who fans the flames of fear against immigrants and refugees leave it to the students at U.C. Berkeley to send a message of inclusivity to the world by having an immigrant give their commencement speech today.

Now before I go any further, I know that some of you are thinking, "oh no, here comes the anti-Trump stuff." And this being Cal, many of you are thinking "oh yes, here comes the anti-Trump stuff." Let me say that this is not about Democrats or Republicans or Independents or Greens. There's only love for everyone here today. Even if you voted for Trump, we still love you. Hell, I know some immigrants who voted for Trump. Yes, some of my immigrant friends voted for Trump because they wanted fewer taxes. They ended up with fewer relatives, but still. Speaking of Trump, if you're looking to commit a federal crime this weekend would be a good time to do it since he just fired the Head of the FBI. Easy come-y, easy gome-y. He keeps firing people. I think Trump still thinks he's on the Apprentice!

Okay that's enough Trump. Let's get serious. Let me start by saying that immigrants love America. We run away from strife, conflict and poverty to come here for a better life. As cliché as it might sound, America is truly the land of opportunity where anyone can be anything.

I was born in Iran. At the age of 6 my family was forced to flee because of the Iranian Revolution. Today I stand in front of you giving the

commencement speech at one of the top universities in America, if not the world. I am the American dream!

Berkeley has students from over 160 different countries and that number doesn't include the immigrant students with US high school degrees. Cal was the first campus to have an Undocumented Students Program and is the role model for dozens of other programs that are being created across the country.

I know that many of you are first generation Americans getting your degrees. Some of you are the first in your families to graduate college. Your parents have sacrificed so much. Some have fled war and revolution, worked multiple jobs, swallowed their pride and gotten you here. Today we have Mexican-Americans! Where are you at? Chinese-Americans! Koreans! Iranians! Indians! Pakistanis! Syrians! Italians! Greeks! Vietnamese! Just yell out where you're from! What a beautiful mix! Let's keep it going – Native Americans, African Americans! White People! We love you white people! White people you are the rice and we are the spice. Without us you'd be eating meat loaf all day long. We give you burritos, dim sum, sushi, kebabs, hummus, jerk chicken and curry. Who doesn't love curry? This is America!

My parents came to America in late 1978. They were in the middle of their lives back in Iran, with a home and kids and work and they had to pick up and come to a foreign land. But back then America welcomed us.

However, things turned when Iranians took Americans hostage in Iran and suddenly we were blamed for the actions of a government we had fled and we opposed. Quickly this anti-Iranian sentiment turned ugly when I was in the 4th grade and I would be called an f'in Iranian by some of the older kids at school. Other Iranians were beaten and shot at just for being Iranian in America.

Unfortunately, other immigrants have also experienced such persecution. Japanese-Americans were blamed for the actions of the Japanese government and put into internment camps during World War 2, just recently a man in Kansas shot two Indian men and gloated that he had shot 2 Iranians and our own president Donald Trump calls Mexicans rapists and

drug dealers or lumps Syrian refuges in with Isis when those refugees are fleeing Isis.

Earlier this year when the Administration tried to implement their travel ban I knew a storm was coming. We were told that the ban was for America's safety, but none of the countries in the ban had committed an act of terror in the U.S. Again, people who had done nothing wrong were being blamed. I heard of an elderly couple landing at LAX to visit their son only to be told the ban revoked their visa. They were put back on a plane and sent back to Iran. I heard of another Iranian man who lived in Norway who had obtained a visa to visit his dying father in the U.S. but had his visa revoked and wouldn't be able to see his dad's final days. I heard of a Syrian family in a refugee camp in the Middle East who had been vetted over a few years and were finally told they could come to America. They sold their belongings and were told last minute they couldn't come. The travel ban wasn't making America safer. It was tearing families apart and ruining lives.

Hearing these stories reminded me of my own experience. What would've happened if I had arrived in the U.S. on December 5th 1978 as a 6 year old and been told that I wasn't welcome. What kind of psychological damage would that have done to me and my family if we were put back on a plane and returned to a Revolution we were fleeing? Imagine if your own parents or grandparents had experienced that when they first came to America. How would that have changed your destiny.

Immigrants and refugees aren't just numbers. They are people coming to America for a better life. I believe most Americans are good and if they could only hear the stories of immigrants and what they are fleeing it would open their hearts to accept those people rather than shun them. If I can drive one point home today – it would be to put yourself in the shoes of the less fortunate and have empathy.

You are blessed to be graduating from one of the top institutions in the world. Not everyone has the opportunities that you do SO when you come across others in America or around the world who are less fortunate than you, be open to them and try to understand their experiences. Try to help

them if you can. Always fight for the underdog. I went to a protest against the travel ban at LAX and one of the coolest things I saw was all of the lawyers who had shown up at the arrivals gate and were ready to volunteer their services to those in need. Be that lawyer!

Whether you're an immigrant or not we are at a crossroads in American history. And you graduates are right in the thick of it. Do we keep the American dream alive and let people from around the world come to this country to make the best of their lives or do we close ourselves in and kill the American dream? 25 years from now, who will be giving the Commencement Speech? Will it be a kid from Damascus or Mogadishu or who knows, maybe even an undocumented student? Or will they be shunned? I would encourage us to aim for a future America that welcomes people of different backgrounds and thrives on diversity.

Now, since we're in Berkeley, there's another topic I would like to talk about today and that is free speech. As someone born in Iran where free speech is limited and people fight for it on a daily basis, even dying for it, I would urge you to not take that freedom for granted. Recently U.C. Berkeley has found itself in controversies around Milo Yiannapolis and Ann Coulter. To prepare for this part of my speech I went online and read some of their writings. Oh God! Talk about cruel and unusual punishment! They say a lot of stupid stuff Berkeley so I can't blame you for not wanting them to talk here! However, as much as I'm appalled by their despicable words, as an American and as a comedian, I would encourage you to defend their rights to free speech. I know that's not the most popular thing to say on campus, but we should have that discussion. I also believe that if we let them speak, their own words will ultimately hang them as was the case with Milo.

I have done standup comedy around the world and the first time I went to the Middle East in 2007 the promoters would tell us that we could talk about anything we wanted except for sex, religion and politics. Well then, "Hello and goodnight!"

When I returned to the U.S. I would tell people that what made America such a great country and differentiated us from many dictatorships in the

region was our freedom of speech. While those countries were so insecure in their government that they didn't want comedians to make fun of their leaders, in the U.S., I would argue we are encouraged to make fun of our leaders. Not only do all of our late night TV hosts take jabs at the President daily, but we actually hold an annual event where the President shows up and gets roasted. Yes, the Correspondent's Dinner. And then this year our President decided to break from tradition and not attend. And I thought, Oh My God! We are starting to look more like a Middle Eastern dictatorship than an American democracy. Why is Mr. Trump afraid of being joked about? Is he not secure in his leadership? Why does he attack any piece of news he doesn't like about himself and call it Fake News. That's more a tactic a Middle Eastern dictator would use than the president of the free world should be using in 2017! If we limit free speech from the right then we sound hypocritical when we criticize Trump for trying to delegitimize our free press. Let's not be the ones attacking free speech but the ones defending it.

Now I know I'm getting a little political and I might be upsetting your parents and grandparents, but hey, that will give you something to talk about over mimosas at brunch! I'm not going to apologize.

In many immigrant cultures we are told not to question authority and do as we're told. My parents used to tell me that we had a reputation in the community so I should stay out of trouble and not rock the boat. But in America we are encouraged to question authority and I implore you to keep rocking the boat even when you're out of college! Criticize our leaders! Hold them accountable!

The travel ban reminded me that even though I've been here most of my life some people don't consider me American. It reminded me that my rights could be taken away at the drop of a hat and it made me be politically active. I started posting on my social media and went to the protests at LAX. I had some people who followed me on Facebook hit me up saying "if you keep talking politics you're losing a fan." Oh well. I would rather speak up and do what's right in my heart than sell tickets to my comedy shows. I would rather fight for the underdog than to stand on the sideline with the

majority and just watch it happen. Get involved. Be politically active. Lord knows there's enough causes and protests to join. It would be easy to get into a 9-5, put your head down and collect a check. But why would you do that? The world needs you. You've got many battles to fight. Immigrant rights, women's rights, black lives matter, global warming, LGBTQ rights, and many many more.

Though there's much work to be done and that work falls in your laps, I am optimistic about your future. I think you will be more integrated and more progressive than any generation before you. I know that I'm Iranian-American, my wife is Indian-American, and our kids are confused. But they don't judge people based on the color of their skin. Keep pushing the envelope of integration. Although I'm not religious I try to live my life by the tenets I have heard in the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. Good words, good thoughts and good deeds. If you can live up to these 3 basic principles on a daily basis I believe you will have a good life.

And to end on a less political note, let me give you a few tips that I have gleaned the past 24 years since I sat where you sit today. Let's call these final tips:

Tip 1 – Always tip! 20% if you can. I believe in karma and that what you put out in the world comes back to you, but it also feels good. And besides, being stingy sucks and nobody likes you!

Tip 2 – Find what it is you love to do in life and do it! And by the way, only you know what that thing is. My mom wanted me to be a lawyer. When I told her I didn't want to be a lawyer she said, and I quote, "At least become a mechanic." I asked, "How did you go from lawyer to mechanic?" She said, "People need a mechanic. Nobody needs a comedian!" I realized she didn't know my passions, she just wanted me to have a secure future because she loved me. I love my mom too, as I'm sure most of you love your moms, but your parents don't know crap! Following your passion is not a secure choice in life, but if you can find the light and go for it you will see that it is the best choice. You should love what you do!

Tip 3 – Travel – Go see the world. It is big and it is beautiful. And by seeing the world I don't mean a weekend in Cabo. Go overseas, go to South

America, go to Beirut! Yes, Beirut Lebanon! Visit the Muslim world. You will quickly see that Muslims are not out to get you. They just want you to visit their country and buy a rug.

Tip 4 – Never pay full price for the rug. Always negotiate. And when negotiating try saying “my friend.” It helps get you a discount. “My friend, for you five dollars!”

Tip 5 – Kiss your parents every time you see them. Especially if they’re immigrants because you never know, tomorrow they might be deported!

Once again congratulations to the class of 2017 and Go Bears!

08-James Ryan

Harvard Professor

Harvard Commencement Address, 2016

Welcome graduates, colleagues, family and friends. Congratulations to you all.

Before we begin, I would like to pause to remember Yan Yang, a beloved member of our community who passed away this year. I ask that we take a moment of silence in honor of her life.

I'd like to begin by thanking all of the families and friends in the audience today. I've been touched by your stories over the past few days and to learn about the distances and obstacles you overcame to be here. I share your pride in the accomplishments of our graduating students and your joy at the prospects that lie ahead. At the same time, I share in the gratitude that I know our graduating students feel toward all of you.

As you all know, and as I have said before, no one makes it to graduation alone. For that reason, I'd like to ask all of the graduates to stand, turn toward the audience, and give a round of applause to those who helped you on this journey.

I would also like to thank all of the staff who have worked tirelessly throughout this year to help all of us, and who have worked especially hard to make graduation special for you all. They are the heart and soul of this place, and they deserve a huge round of applause.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the faculty, who have served not simply as teachers and colleagues but also as mentors and friends, and I would like give special thanks to Bob Kegan, a pillar of this community and a giant in the field of adult development. He is retiring this year, and we will miss his wisdom, his grace, and his kindness.

We will soon hand out diplomas to our graduating students, but first I will deliver a short 60-70 minute speech. This is my third graduation speech, if you don't count the one I gave in high school. And I would ask as a favor that you don't count the speech I gave in high school. My first year as dean I gave a speech about time. Last year, I talked about sin. When people

started asking me what I would talk about this year, I usually just replied: That's a good question. And then I finally realized:That's a lame answer, but it's also a great topic for a speech. So today, I'd like to talk with you about the beauty and power of good questions. To be specific, the title of my speech is "Three suggestions about asking and hearing good questions, including five examples of essential questions plus a bonus question at the end, the correct answer to which is 'I did.'" Next year I plan to talk about the importance of using good titles for speeches.

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Outside of Appian Way, we have witnessed a truly bizarre and unsettling political season. We bid farewell to the likes of Prince, Harper Lee, Antonin Scalia, and David Bowie. We witnessed student protests across the country and across Harvard. We applauded the compassion of individuals like Isiah Britt, a 7-year old from Virginia who raised $10,000 for elementary schools in Flint, Michigan so they would have clean water to drink. And let's just say we had mixed feelings about the various rulings on Tom Brady's role in deflategate. Go Giants.

You may be worried about the world that you are about to re-enter. And I'm here to tell you: That's not a bad idea. (Can I have some applause for that?) In all seriousness, disparities and injustices based on income, wealth and race continue to weaken the fabric of our world, our nation and of our communities. Intolerance and authoritarianism appear, by some measures, on the rise both at home and abroad. Our world seems to be getting hotter and less hospitable, both politically and environmentally, though it was truly heartening to learn that, as of this year, the lovable manatee is no longer an endangered species. Redemption, it seems, is still possible.

By coming to HGSE, you have signaled that your response to societal inequities and injustices is through education. I'm surely biased, but I applaud your choice, as I am convinced that education is the only long-term solution to these long-term problems. For that reason, I believe that you are the luckiest graduates in the entire university, because you are going to work in education, and there is no higher calling, no more rewarding or meaningful field in which to work. I hope and trust you feel

prepared and inspired for the tasks that lie ahead. I have seen your passion, your commitment to social justice, and your enormous talents on display all year, and while I am sad to bid you farewell, I take solace in knowing that you are leaving here to make the world a better place.

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Ok, any questions so far? No? Clearly we have some work to do on the importance of good questions.

As my title suggests, I have three suggestions for you in this regard.

The first suggestion is that you cultivate the art of asking good questions. With your newly minted Harvard degree, you might think you are now expected to have all of the answers, and others might think the same, including especially those family members who financially contributed to your education here. More broadly, it's obvious that we live in a world where people both want instant answers and are ready to offer answers (and judgments) at a moment's notice. Indeed, this tendency defines too much of our public discourse, which is disturbingly shallow for just this reason.

I would urge you to resist the temptation to have answers at the ready and to spend more time thinking about the right questions to ask. The simple truth is that an answer can only be as good as the question asked. I know this from experience.

The scene was Charlottesville, Virginia, 1990, at a UVA law school dance. I had finally mustered the courage to introduce myself Katie Homer, a fellow law student on whom I had a crush.　But I made two mistakes. First, I decided to introduce myself while Katie was dancing with someone else. (Please don't ask me why, though that would be a good question). The second and more important mistake is that I lost my nerve at the last minute, and instead of introducing myself to Katie, I introduced myself to her dance partner, whom I'll call Norman: I asked, quite loudly so I could be heard over the music: "Are you Norman Huckelby, by any chance? I ask because I think we're in civil procedure class together and I've really admired your contributions to class discussion." (All I can say is please don't judge me.)　In any event, Norman cheerfully answered: "I sure am, and thanks!" Now, given the question I asked, that was a perfectly appropriate answer.

But it was still the wrong answer. The right answer was “I’m Katie Homer, it’s so nice to meet you, and yes, I actually would like to marry you.” But without asking the right question, I couldn’t hope to get the right answer. Luckily for me, Katie understood the real question I was trying to ask, which may explain why we are married today, rather than Norman and I. Raises another point.

Posing good questions is harder than it might seem, and I say this not simply by way of explaining why I asked the wrong question at the dance. It’s hard because asking good questions requires you to see past the easy answers and to focus instead on the difficult, the tricky, the mysterious, the awkward, and sometimes the painful. But I suspect that you and your listeners will be richer for the effort, and that this will be in both your professional and your personal life.

For those who will be teachers, for example, you know that well-posed questions make knowledge come to life and create the spark that lights the flame of curiosity. And there is no greater gift to bestow on students than the gift of curiosity. For those who will be leaders, which is to say all of you, don’t worry about having all the answers. Great leaders don’t have all the answers, but they know how to ask the right questions — questions that force others and themselves to move past old and tired answers, questions that open up possibilities that, before the question, went unseen.

For those of you who will be researchers and innovators, remember this observation of Jonas Salk, who discovered and developed the vaccine for polio: “What people think of as the moment of discovery,” he observed, “is really the discovery of the question.” It takes time and work to discover the question. Einstein famously said that if he had an hour to solve a problem, and his life depended on it, he would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask.

Asking good questions will be just as rewarding in your personal life. Good friends, as you know, ask great questions, as do good parents. They pose questions that, just in the asking, show how much they know and care about you. They ask questions that make you pause, that make you think, that provoke honesty, and that invite a deeper connection. They ask questions

that don't so much demand an answer as prove irresistible. My simple point is that posing irresistible questions is an art worth cultivating.

Stressing the importance of asking good questions implies that there are bad questions, which brings me to my second suggestion. It is a cliché to say that there is no such thing as a bad question. That is actually false, but only partially so. There are plenty of questions that are bad at first glance — as in "are you Norman Huckelby?" Whether these questions remain bad, however, often depends on the listener. And the suggestion I want to make is that you, as listeners, have within you the power to turn most bad questions into good ones, provided that you listen carefully and generously. To be sure, you will come across some questions that are beyond repair, but many that seem bad at first glance are actually good questions, or at least innocent ones that are dressed in awkward clothing. To help you see this, I'd like to give you a short quiz, or, as they say today, a formative assessment. I will tell two stories, both true, and your task is to identify what's different about them.

Shortly after I arrived on the Yale campus as a college freshman, I struck up a conversation with a female classmate. (Yale is important to the next story, by the way, and not just my way of trying to slip that into my talk. It's not like gratuitously saying "Boola boola." Boola-boola.) In any event, it was a lively and easy conversation, and after about 20 minutes, my classmate paused and said: "Can I ask you a question?" And I thought to myself: "This is incredible! Two days into college, and I'm about to be asked out on a date!"

Now, before I tell you the question she actually asked, I should tell you that at this point in my life I was roughly five feet, three inches tall — a good six inches shorter than the hulking 5 foot 9 inch frame that stands before you today. Perhaps more relevant, puberty was, to me, still a hypothetical concept.　In short, so to speak, I looked like I was about 12 or 13 years old. So back to the question. My hoped for date said, "um, I'm not sure how best to ask this, but are you one of those, you know, child prodigies?"

Funny for you, maybe.

Now, contrast that to a question my mother was asked, about two months

after my child prodigy conversation. I grew up in a tiny town in northern New Jersey called Midland Park; it was a blue-collar town, filled with plumbers, electricians, and landscapers. It was surrounded by wealthier suburbs, whose homeowners employed the plumbers, electricians and landscapers from Midland Park. Our grocery store, the A&P, was on the border of Midland Park and a wealthy neighboring town. As my mother was putting groceries in her car, a particularly well-coiffed woman came over and asked my mom if she was from Midland Park. After my mom told her yes, the woman pointed to the Yale sticker on the back windshield of my parent's car. And she asked: "I don't mean to pry but I'm just so curious: was that Yale sticker on the car when you bought it?"

You see the difference between the two questions, right? The first one was innocent, which I ultimately recognized once I got over feeling embarrassed and finally hit puberty just a few, agonizingly long, years later. The second question was hostile — it wasn't even a question, really. It was an insult.

You will get, if you haven't already, some hostile questions in your life — some from strangers, others from colleagues or supervisors or parents or school board members or even from students. The trick is to distinguish the hostile ones from the genuine but clumsy ones, because the clumsy question might really be the questioner's way of asking to get to know you better or could just be motivated by a mixture of anxiety and ignorance. And to close the loop here, the only truly bad questions are not really questions at all — they are statements meant to be demeaning or designed to trip you up that are disguised as questions. Beware of those, denounce them or ignore them as the occasion demands, but let your heart, ears, and mind remain open to all others.

My final suggestion is that there are five truly essential questions that you should regularly ask yourself and others. My claim is that, if you get in the habit of asking these questions, you have a very good chance of being both successful and happy, and you will be in a good position to answer "I did" to the bonus question at the end.

The first is a question my own kids are fond of asking, and it's one you

may have heard other teenagers pose — or maybe you still pose it yourself. The question is “Wait, what?” My kids typically pose this question when I get to the point in a conversation where I’m asking them to do a chore or two. From their perspective, they hear me saying something like: “blah, blah, blah, blah, and then I’d like you to clean your room.” And at that precise moment, the question inevitably comes: “Wait, what? Clean what?” “Wait what” is actually a very effective way of asking for clarification, which is crucial to understanding. It’s the question you should ask before drawing conclusions or before making a decision. The Dean of Harvard College, Rakesh Khurana, gave a great master class this year, where he emphasized the importance of inquiry before advocacy. It’s important to understand an idea before you advocate for or against it. The wait, which precedes the what, is also a good reminder that it pays to slow down to make sure you truly understand.

The second question is “I wonder” which can be followed by “why” or “if.” So: I wonder why, or I wonder if. Asking “I wonder why” is the way to remain curious about the world, and asking “I wonder if” is the way to start thinking about how you might improve the world. As in, I wonder why our schools are so segregated, and I wonder if we could change this? Or I wonder why students often seem bored in school, and I wonder if we could make their classes more engaging?

The third question is: "Couldn’t we at least...?" This is the question to ask that will enable you to get unstuck, as they say. It’s what enables you to get past disagreement to some consensus, as in couldn’t we at least agree that we all care about the welfare of students, even if we disagree about strategy? It’s also a way to get started when you’re not entirely sure where you will finish, as in couldn’t we at least begin by making sure that all kids have the chance to come to school healthy and well-fed?

The fourth question is: “How can I help?” You are at HGSE, I presume, because you are interested in helping others. But you also know, from your time here, to be aware of the savior complex, of the stance where you are the expert or hero who swoops in to save others. We shouldn’t let the real pitfalls of the savior complex extinguish one of the most humane instincts

there is — the instinct to lend a hand. But how we help matters as much as that we do help, and if you ask “how” you can help, you are asking, with humility, for direction. And you are recognizing that others are experts in their own lives and that they will likely help you as much as you help them.

The fifth question is this: "What truly matters?" You can tack on “to me” as appropriate. This is the question that forces you to get to the heart of issues and to the heart of your own beliefs and convictions. Indeed, it’s a question that you might add to, or substitute for, New Year’s resolutions. You might ask yourself, in other words, at least every new year: what truly matters to me?

So these are the five essential questions. “Wait, what” is at the root of all understanding. “I wonder” is at the heart of all curiosity. “Couldn’t we at least” is the beginning of all progress. “How can I help” is at the base of all good relationships. And “what really matters” gets you to the heart of life. If you ask these questions regularly, especially the last one, you will be in a great position to answer the bonus question, which is, at the end of the day, the most important question you’ll ever face.

This bonus question is posed in many ways, and you have surely heard a version of it before. To me, the single best phrasing of this question is in a poem by Raymond Carver, called “Late Fragments.” It’s one of the last poems he wrote. I came across it recently on the very sad occasion of a memorial service for one of my dearest and closest friends, my former law school roommate Doug Kendall, who died in September at the far too young age of 51. The poem was printed on the back of the program for his memorial and it starts with this question, what I’m calling the bonus question:

“And did you get what you wanted out of life, even so?”

The “even so” part of this, to me, captures perfectly the recognition of the pain and disappointment that inevitably make up a full life, but also the hope that life, even so, offers the possibility of joy and contentment.

My claim is that if you regularly ask: wait, what, I wonder, couldn’t we at least, how can I help, and what really matters, when it comes time to ask yourself “And did you get what you wanted out of life, even so,” your

answer will be “I did.”

So the poem asks “And did you get what you wanted out of life, even so,” and then continues:

“I did./And what did you want?/To call myself beloved. To feel beloved on the earth.”

The word "beloved" is important here as it not only means dearly loved, but also cherished and respected. And while I promise I’m very near the end of my speech, let me just say that when I read these lines, it’s hard for me not to think about students. We spend a lot of time, here and elsewhere, thinking about how we might improve student performance, which is how it should be. Yet I can’t help but think that schools, and indeed, the world, would be better places if students didn’t simply perform well but also felt beloved — beloved by their teachers and by their fellow classmates.

To tie this all together into one slightly misshapen package, and to bid you a final farewell: As you leave Appian Way and head into a world that desperately needs you, let me express my sincere hope and belief that: if you never stop asking and listening for good questions, you willfeel beloved on this earth, and, just as importantly, you will help others, especially students, feel the same.

09-Steven Levitan

Television Producer

University of Wisconsin-Madison 2017

Thank you, Andre, for that lovely introduction. And thank you Provost Mangelsdorf for your colorful last name—which makes me feel like I'm at the commencement for Hogwarts. Especially thank you to the Class of 2017 for inviting me to speak.

It means so much because I have kids about your age who are here today and I want them to witness what it's like for people to actually listen to me. The next time they ignore my advice, I'll just tell them, "Well, I guess you're right and those 52,000 people who cared about what I had to say were wrong."

It's hard to believe I graduated here thirty-three years ago. I still have the official university photo of me receiving my diploma, wearing only shorts under my cap and gown and holding a big bottle of champagne as if to say, "Hey World, lower your expectations!"

I came to Madison from my hometown Chicago in the fall of 1980. The truth is, I almost went to Indiana. Well because, during my visit to Wisconsin the previous fall, I got pretty freaked out by all the dead deer on people's cars.

In the end it was my mom who convinced me: Wisconsin had an 18-year-old drinking age back then while Indiana's was 21. "Why", she asked, "would you want to go to some backwards state where they force you to hide out and drink in a basement?"

I made lifelong friends at UW, some of whom are here today, which I appreciate so much. We went to Badger games, dressed up as Mediterranean fruit flies for Halloween, sang and danced our hearts out in Humorology, suntanned on the Union Terrace on the first 40-degree spring day and occasionally we even went to class. After two years in the Lakeshore dorms, we lived at the SAE house and at the Kollege Klub, 151 steps away. So, much to my mom's chagrin, there I was, partying in basements.

To get a sense of how long ago that was, there were no cellphones and no Internet. To register for classes, we had to do this insane mad dash from building to building. We had to literally race back and forth across a campus we didn't know—to get the classes we wanted at the times we needed. People were terrified, out of breath, freaking out. I remember this poor freshman girl literally crying as I pushed her to the ground so I could get a later Econ class.

We wrote papers on typewriters, took Polaroids and listened to albums on vinyl. Not to be hip and old school. Back then, old school was just school. There was no Facebook. If we wanted to friend someone, we had to actually meet them. And if we wanted people to know we did something cool, we had to awkwardly work it into a conversation, like: "Wow, that exam was as hard as when I climbed Machu Picchu" or "That ice cream is as sweet as Molly Ringwald, with whom I recently took this Polaroid."

There was no Tinder, no Bumble, no Grindr. If we wanted to hook up with someone, we couldn't just look on our phones. Our phones were attached to the wall and there was nothing on them except a dial tone. We had to approach people in real life and use our charm and wit— so we were almost always alone.

We couldn't even call our high school sweethearts because the long-distance phone bill would be too expensive. Instead, we'd have to write letters like we were soldiers in the civil war. "My dearest Amanda, how my heart yearns for your sturdy frame. I am filled with fear for tomorrow I go sliding down Bascom Hill on a lunch tray."

Back then, we didn't even have the Jump Around. We had a fat guy with a W shaved on his back doing the Moonwalk.

So I must admit I'm a bit jealous of all the advantages you've had, but, just like on a John Cougar Mellencamp record, there's a B-side. Our choices were simpler—we could either go to grad school or work for a big company. But now there's so much you could do, it becomes paralyzing. With the world at your fingertips, you always feel you should be making something and putting it online, or amping your presence on LinkedIn or keeping up with all the amazing things everyone's doing on social media. Plus your

phone's always dying.

So, how do you deal with all that? Well, as commencement speaker, I'm supposed to impart wisdom. This is where I tell you a bunch of clichés like "Follow Your Dream" and "Be Yourself." But I'm not going to do that because I don't know your dream. Your dream may be stupid. Your dream may be to open a DVD store or to sell Jell-O art. Those are bad dreams, don't do it. And, if you're like my freshman roommate, maybe you shouldn't be yourself. Anybody else would be better.

So I'll do my best to avoid the clichés, and instead tell you five things I've learned since I stood here wearing shorts.

#1. Roll The Dice In Your Twenties

When you're unencumbered, when your expenses are low, when you're still on your parents' health insurance and living in their basement… that's when you should take chances.

My first job after graduation was as a TV news reporter here in Madison. But at night I'd look up at the network monitors on the wall and wonder if I could write those sitcoms I loved so much. So I tried. And when I realized I liked it more than my real job, I quit and took the next step. I moved to Chicago to work for an ad agency, where I got to be creative and make TV commercials. We filmed one in Los Angeles at a studio where they shot sitcoms, and suddenly I realized sitcoms were made by human beings and I was a human being so maybe it wasn't such a crazy goal after all.

So, at 27, I took a job making trailers and TV commercials for a movie studio and moved to LA. An agent read my spec script for "The Wonder Years" and asked if I had a multicam writing sample. I told him I had an episode of "Cheers." He told me to send it to him immediately. I hung up the phone and started writing an episode of "Cheers." A year later, the right people read that "Cheers" script, and I was offered my dream job as a staff writer on a television comedy. I had four careers in seven years—either because I refused to play it safe or, more likely, because I had a severe case of A-D-D.

#2. Succeed Or Fail On Your Own Terms

Very early in my writing career a friend told me a story that has served me

well ever since. He had created a show with two lead characters who were always butting heads. The network told him to tone down the relationship and make them nicer to each other, so they were more likable. He said, “No, that’s the crux of the show, the fire between them.” They said, if you want to get it on the air, you’ll do it. So he did. And the network passed on his show, saying the dynamic between the two main characters felt flat. He said, “But you told me to tone it down!” And they said, “Well, you shouldn’t have listened.” When I created my first show, I was fairly young and just the kind of person studio and network executives were most likely to push around, but that story kept popping into my head. So I was respectful, but, when I felt strongly, I stuck to my guns. Footnote: This works best when you’re right. I can’t help you with that.

#3. It’s Hard To Fail 10 Times In A Row.

Professionally-speaking, the years 2000 to 2008 were not my finest. After my first success creating a show, I did eight shows in a row that were cancelled after one season or never picked up in the first place and frankly I was sick of failing on my own terms.

So I took some time off and I spent a lot of days in my gym clothes without ever going to the gym. Then I took a shower and I called an old friend, who was coming off his own set of failures, and we decided to shake things up and work together.

And we failed yet again. For me that was now nine shows in a row.

We regrouped and this time we started talking about all the funny things happening in our lives. I was a super cool dad who didn’t understand why my two girls and a boy didn’t think I was at all cool… and my writing partner was a bit of a curmudgeon with a sophisticated young son who wore a smoking jacket. Plus we had plenty of gay friends who weren’t anything like the gay characters on TV. They were in long-term relationships, they were neither fit nor fabulous and they were bad parents just like the rest of us.

So we deluded ourselves into thinking this time it could work. We took everything we learned from our few successes and many failures and wrote what we knew best. We auditioned roughly fourteen-hundred actors. When

the network president told us he wouldn't cast our choice for Phil Dunphy, I thought of my friend's story and we stuck to our guns. And finally, it worked. Now, gratefully, I'm introduced as the co-creator of Emmy-winning "Modern Family" and no one remembers I'm the idiot who failed nine times in a row.

#4 Be Calm In A Crisis. Years ago, I got stuck in an elevator with someone and there was no one else in the building. It was the first day of the writer's strike and I was stressed and late for a meeting and, frankly, I don't like tight spaces. We phoned for help which was at least an hour or two away. I started banging on the locked trap door on top of the elevator car, so hard that I knocked out all the lights, sending us into total darkness. The other person tried to make the best of it, while I spent the next forty minutes cursing my bad luck. Why me? Why now? Then suddenly the door opened and we were blasted with sunlight. See, the elevator did its job and slowly, imperceptibly lowered itself to the ground floor. We gathered our things, stepped outside and I said something like, "Well, that was interesting." The other person just looked at me, shook her head and said, "What a fool." Which, sadly, was true. The point is, no matter how dark it gets, the door will open, the sunlight will return and all you'll be left with is how you acted when the going got tough. Also, always go to the bathroom before getting on a sketchy elevator.

Finally #5. It's Hard To Live Up To Your Potential When You Don't Like What You Do.

Growing up, I was a terrible student. Here's what one high school teacher wrote, "Steve could be an A-student if he wanted to. He shows no interest in Spanish and does as little work as possible." That was mucho true, Señora. And had I settled for a job in which I showed little interest, I guarantee that would have been my report card for life. I would have been a mediocre journalist or a decent adman. But, because I love what I do, I happily give it my all and I've been able to rise above my Spanish teacher's expectationés and live up to my potential. Not everyone is so lucky, I know that. Not everyone can reach their dream job. But maybe you can and thus live up to your potential. And what a shame to not even try.

This is a true story:

I was about half way to work one day about ten years ago when all of a sudden a person popped up in my back seat of my car and said, “Hi, Daddy!” I nearly drove off the road. Fortunately, it was my 11-year-old daughter who decided she was coming to work with me.

It was a day all the writers would sit around a table and dream up new ideas for stories. Unfortunately, this day we hit a lot of dead ends—and my sweet little daughter got to witness all the bizarre ways we tried to get back on track: The running jokes, the latest gossip, the competitive game of “Name That Tune.” By 6 p.m., all we had to show for our day’s work was a bunch of notions that added up to nothing. Still, I was thrilled that Allie had a chance to experience the creative process and see people doing what they love—and thus living up to their potential.

We got home and she said, “Thanks for taking me to work with you, Daddy. It was so amazing to see what you do.” Then she walked into the kitchen, turned to her mom and said, “It’s a wonder we have a roof over our heads.”

So as you sit here today, with an amazing education from one of the finest universities in the world, that is what I wish for you: The happiness, the confidence, the feeling of self-satisfaction that comes from leaving nothing on the table. So don’t sit back and wait for good things to happen, make them happen. Put in extra hours. Learn new skills. Identify and seek new opportunities. Call that person you’ve always admired and take him or her to lunch.

Spend time with people who are different than you. Spend time with those who lift you up rather than those who drag you down. Drink a glass of water in between every cocktail. Give to charity. Adopt a dog. Put the (expletive) phone down and drive. Ask out the person who’s out of your league. Don’t be the boring one who never dances at weddings. Be generous. Be kind. Be good to your parents and thank them for everything they’ve done—mine screwed me up just enough to be a comedy writer, but not so much that I’m an actor.

The world is changing, make sure you change with it. But don’t worry about what everyone else is doing. If their life is so great, they wouldn’t

stop to post pictures of it every two minutes. Shake off your past limitations and be the best version of yourself. Live up to your potential.

You are graduates of the University of Wisconsin—Madison. You can do it. Starting now. Thank you very much.

10-David Brooks

Author

Dartmouth College, 2015

Dartmouth Class of 2015: It's an honor to be at your tree stump. As your Commencement speaker, I have important responsibilities. Commencement speakers have to be skilled at pretentious verbiage and pompous but completely meaningless rhetoric. I think you made a smart move when you asked someone who normally teaches at Yale.

Graduates, I congratulate you. I feel like I know you. To get into a place like Dartmouth, you had to spend your high school years starting four companies; curing two formerly fatal diseases; and participating in three obscure sports, like fencing, planking, and snow volleyball.

Since you got into Dartmouth, you spent one spring break unicycling across Thailand while reading to lepers. You spent another exciting summer interning at a congressional office in Washington, providing your boss with policy advice and sexual tension. You tell your friends you like Kendrick Lamar, but secretly you like Jason Mraz.

While on campus, you have mastered new skills. You've learned how to dominate a classroom discussion even though you didn't do any of the reading. In lecture halls, you mastered another skill. Right now, for example, it looks like you're staring at me with rapt attention, but you're all completely asleep. (In response to laughter from the crowd) I'm missing something over there.

You negotiated the route between the major you are actually interested in and the mercenary major your parents wanted you to choose. Just once I'd like to have a kid come up to me and say, "You know, I really wanted to major in finance, but my parents forced me to major in art history." That will never happen.

Now on this big day, your life takes an exciting turn. There are two paths ahead of you. One leads to a soul-crushing job as a cog in the corporate machine. The other leads to permanent residence in your parents' basement. I'm here to help you navigate these exciting opportunities.

I start by reminding you that you are in a beautiful spot in your lives. You

are more mature than the freshmen, still sexier than the faculty. And let's face it; you're a lot sexier than the Dartmouth faculty.

You may not have been through other college Commencements before, so you may not know the etiquette. After you get your degree, it's customary to give President Hanlon a little tip. Ten or twenty bucks just to show him he did a good job.

It's also customary to give the Commencement speaker a little tip, no more than $600 or $700—$5,000 for econ majors.

This may be your first college Commencement, but you probably know these addresses have a certain formula. The school asks a person who has achieved a certain level of career success to give you a speech telling you that career success is not important.

Then we're supposed to give you a few minutes of completely garbage advice: Listen to your inner voice. Be true to yourself. Follow your passion. Your future is limitless.

First, my generation gives you a mountain of debt; then we give you career-derailing guidelines that will prevent you from ever paying it off.

I especially like all the Commencement addresses telling graduates how important it is to fail. These started a few years ago with a Steve Jobs address at Stanford built around the message. Well, failure is wonderful if you're Steve Jobs. For most people, failure just stinks. Don't fail.

I've decided to use this Commencement to cut through all that, and I'm going to tell you what's going to happen to you over the next 60 years of your life. So right now I'm giving you the ultimate spoiler alert. If you don't want to know how this thing called your life is going to turn out, pay less attention to me over the next ten minutes than even you are right now.

For the rest of you, this is your life. First, you're going to graduate today. Parts of the next year will be amazing, and parts are really going to suck. Very few will have jobs as exciting as being a college senior. From now on, no one will be paid to read your writing or your fascinating seminar interventions. You won't have a social life pre-organized right there in front of you the way it is here at Dartmouth.

Happiness research suggests that after your 60s, your 20s are your happiest

phase of life. People are happy in their 20s and then it dips down until it bottoms out at age 47—which is called having teenage children—and then it shoots up again. You'll have long periods of loneliness and heartbreak. If you're like the average college graduates, a third of you will move back home at some point in the next two years, and your parents will give you blindingly obvious advice about things you've been doing on your own for years. A third of you will be unemployed, underemployed, or making less than $30,000 a year. In two years, half of you will feel that you don't have a plan for life or a clear direction.

But this is part of the process. It's part of the process of finding your loves and testing your loves. Let me explain.

All of us love certain things: certain friends, certain subjects, certain dreams, certain professional goals. But you don't really know the nature of your love until you've tested it with reality.

When I graduated from college, I knew I wanted to be a writer. I knew I wanted to do some teaching. I thought I wanted to be a playwright or a novelist, go into politics, have a spouse, children.

But I didn't know exactly what order my loves came in. So like everyone in their 20s, I got to test my loves and I got to sample some new loves. It was like trying on clothes at the mall. After ten years, some of my loves, like playwriting, just didn't fit or faded away. Some new ones came into view. But most important, over the next ten really formless years, my heart developed some contours and I learned what I loved most—writing was more important to me than politics. I could write out a priority list on a piece of paper of the things I loved, and I could rank them and I could devote my best energies to my highest loves.

When you have the ability to write that list in order, you've achieved your agency moment.

I had a student who was a young Army officer. During one of his tours, he had a terrible superior officer who gave him nothing but negative feedback. During those 18 months, he said he could not rely on external validation or criticism from outside to get a sense of whether he was doing a good job. He had to come up with his own criteria to judge himself.

That’s the agency moment. When you hit this moment, you’re not molding yourself to some prefab definition of success.

You have your own criteria. You’re not relying on the opinions of others. Your own standard and your own ability to judge your own life. For most people this agency moment comes just before 30. But then you can have a few other agency moments later in life, at age 53 or 75, when your loves change order, and you have to realize that and you have to adjust.

Once you have achieved your agency moments, you can begin to make commitments.

We are not a society that nurtures commitment-making. We live in a culture that puts a lot of emphasis on individual liberty and freedom of choice. Ivy League student culture is built around keeping your options open and fear of missing out. We live in a society filled with decommitment devices. Tinder, OkCupid, Instagram, Reddit; the entire Internet is commanding you to sample one thing after another. Our phones are always beckoning us to shift our attention span. If you can’t focus your attention for 30 seconds, how can you make a commitment for life?

But your fulfillment in life will not come from how well you explore your freedom and keep your options open. That’s the path to a frazzled, scattered life in which you try to please everyone and end up pleasing no one.

Your fulfillment in life will come by how well you end your freedom. By the time you hit your 30s, you will realize that your primary mission in life is to be really good at making commitments.

Making commitments sounds intimidating, but it’s not. Making a commitment simply means falling in love with something, and then building a structure of behavior around it that will carry you through when your love falters.

When you make a commitment to something you truly love, whether it’s a spouse, a job, a company, or a school, it won’t feel like you are putting on an uncomfortable lobster shell. It will feel like you are taking off the shell and becoming the shape you were meant to be.

When you’re making a commitment, you won’t be paralyzed by self-focus because you’ll have something besides yourself to think about.

Specifically, as you go through your 30s, you will make four major commitments, and your life depends on how you do with these four things. First, a commitment to your spouse and to your family. Second, a commitment to a career and a vocation. Third, a commitment to your faith or philosophy. Fourth, a commitment to a community and a village.

Somewhere between the ages or 28 and 32, you will begin to realize you have already begun to make a commitment to a vocation and a career.

But a vocation is not a career. A career is something you choose. A vocation is something that summons you.

My hero here is Frances Perkins. She was a young woman in the early 20th century whose life was somewhat adrift in her late 20s. She witnessed a horrible fire, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, and was watching as hundreds of people died, either burned to death or leaping to their deaths. She became forever after an instrument in the cause of worker safety and worker rights. This tear in the fabric of creation had to be addressed.

People with vocations don't ask: What do I want from life? They ask: What is life demanding me to do? What gap is there in my specific circumstances around me that demands my skill set?

It's not found by looking inside you for your passion. People have studied this. Eighty percent of you don't have a passion. It's found by looking outward, by being sensitive to a void and need, and then answering the chance to be of use.

A calling, like being a teacher or a nurse or a scientist, comes with certain rules, obligations, and standards of excellence. These customs structure the soul and guide behavior and become deeply woven into the identities of the people who practice them. A teacher's relationship to the craft of teaching is not an individual choice that can be renounced when the psychic losses exceed the psychic benefits. Being a teacher is who she is.

The second commitment is the one you'll make to a partner or a spouse or to your kids. I hope you've already had one great love affair in college and that you weren't one of those students who controlled the love life so they could spend more time doing homework.

If you've already had a great love, you know that it humbles you. You've

been captured by a delicious madness and lost control of your own mind. Love plows open hard ground, exposing soft, vulnerable soil below. Love decenters the self and reminds you that your true riches are in another person. Marriage is a 30- or 40- or 50-year conversation that ends with a confusion: I don't just love you. I am you.

Like all great commitments, love operates simultaneously on two different levels: the level of gritty reality and the level of transcendent magic.

The level of gritty reality in marriage is the grocery shopping, the cleaning, and the compromises. Do you do the dishes after each meal or do you put them in the sink and do them at the end of the day? Does the toilet paper roll from over the top or from under the bottom? The gritty reality of love involves the particular gifts and foibles of this or that partner or beloved. This particularity was captured in one of my all-time favorite wedding toasts, by Leon Wieseltier at the wedding of Samantha Power and Cass Sunstein:

This kind of real love, Weiseltier said, "is private and it is particular. Its object is the specificity of this man and that woman, the distinctiveness of this spirit and that flesh. This kind of love prefers deep to wide, here to there, the grasp to the reach. … When the day is done, and the lights are out, there is only this other heart, this other mind, this other face, to assist in repelling one's demons or in greeting one's angels. It does not matter who the president is. When one consents to marry, one consents to be truly known, which is an ominous prospect; and so one bets on love to correct for the ordinariness of the impression and to call for the forgiveness that is invariably required. Marriages are exposures. We may be heroes to our spouses but we may not be idols."

And that is the gritty vulnerability of love.

But there is another side to it which is poetic and transcendent and idealistic and universal. This is side that Taylor Swift sings about.

Like being summoned by a vocation, this love demands you cast off cost-benefit analysis. This love demands that you enter into a different and inverse logic.

I remember the birth of my first son involved a very long and painful

delivery. It happened in Belgium, and the doctor put a plunger to my kid's head and yanked him out. He came out after many, many hours blue and in very poor health and was rushed to the intensive care ward. It was scary, and it introduced me to a level of soul-deep anxiety you're not aware of until you become a parent. But I remember having an awareness in that instant that if he could just live for one hour, it would still be worth it. An hour of his life will be worth a lifetime of grief.

Now that doesn't make sense from any normal cost-benefit terms. He wouldn't have even been aware of his hour of life. How could it be worth a lifetime of grief for his parents? But every parent here will know it makes perfect sense by some other logic. Every parent here knows that every second of life for one you love has infinite dignity, and the essence of that love is not counting the cost. And fortunately he came out of it fine and is now strong and healthy and 24.

But love has its own logic that defies normal utilitarian logic. For example, most resources are scarce; you can use them up. But love is the opposite; the more you love, the more you can love. A person who has one child does not love that child less when he or she has another. A person in love is capable of more love. A person who loves his college does not love his country less. Love expands with use.

Again, against the grain of normal logic, people in love make themselves vulnerable to great suffering, and sometimes they knowingly walk into suffering. Sometimes you tell people in love that it doesn't make sense for them to be together because they'll be in different cities or they drive themselves crazy. But lovers rarely break off a love just because that doesn't make sense. They'd rather be unhappy together than happy apart.

And so here we're coming to an essential feature of commitment making. It's sort of like quantum mechanics. It doesn't make sense from a normal logic. A commitment spills outside the bounds of normal utilitarian logic and has a different logic. This logic is a moral logic, and it is filled with inversions. A commitment is a moral act.

The moral world is not structured like the market world. It has an inverse logic. To develop morally and inside you have to follow an inverse set of

rules. You have to give to receive. You have to surrender to something outside yourself to gain strength within yourself. You have to conquer your desire to get what you crave. Success leads to the greatest failure, which is arrogance and pride. Failure can lead to the greatest success, which is humility and learning. In order to fulfill yourself, you have to forget yourself. In order to find yourself, you have to lose yourself.

Taking a job is not a moral act. Going on a date is not a moral act. Having a vocation is a moral act. Entering a 30- or 50-year marriage is a moral act. Making a commitment is a moral act.

A couple of months ago. I published a book around the distinction between the resume virtues and the eulogy virtues. The resume virtues are the ones you bring to the marketplace that make you good at your job. The eulogy virtues are the moral virtues. They are the things they say about you after you are dead—whether you are honest or brave or caring or capable of great love.

My point in the book was that we all know that the eulogy virtues are more important than the resume virtues, but we live in a society that puts a lot more emphasis on how to build skills than how to build character. A lot of us are clearer on how to be successful than on how to be virtuous.

I wrote the book because I wanted to understand how some people become deeply good and radiate a sort of inner light. When I finished the book, I believed that goodness and character comes from internal struggle against your own weakness. But in the months since, I've come to see that I put too much emphasis on the individual exercise of character building. Becoming a good, moral person is not being able to control your temptations; it's about this ability to make commitments.

Your education has opened you up to possibilities. Adulthood is about closing around commitments. Dartmouth has opened your mind. The purpose of an open mind is to close around certain beliefs. The highest joy is found in sending down roots.

There will come a time 20 years from now, or 25 years from now, when you will come back to this spot for your reunion. And as you walk and drink wine and beer, you'll think of your former selves and your current

selves and the decades of life that will still be in front of you. You'll be with people who knew you back when, when you had no branding; no success status to fall on; when you were, like today, both very brave and very scared.

And you'll remember some professor or some book assigned you and you'll realize that Dartmouth had set off little time bombs in your head that give you pieces of wisdom that only come decades letter when you are ready to receive them.

You'll see your own kids across the lawn soaking themselves with whatever version of a Super Soaker water cannon they have in the year 2040. You'll make a mental note to take them back to the hotel to change them before dinner. You'll be sitting in Adirondack chairs and you'll reach over and slip your hand into the hand of the person you love most in the world. You'll tell your old Dartmouth friends about the town you live in, the neighborhood kid you mentor, the things that really mean the most to you. Your mind will slip back to today and the incredible weather and the people who you love you who came to watch you graduate.

You'll think at some random moment in that day, after a few glasses of wine, about the totality of your life: Where you came from, where you were when you graduated, and where you are a quarter-century later, and you'll know that you were so lucky to have been at Dartmouth and that after a few years of stumbling, you found a place for yourself in the world, a place deeply connected to commitments of affection that will never fade.

At reflective moments like this, it feels like time is suspended and reality will slip outside its bounds, and you'll experience a sense of gratitude that your life is filled with joy, a joy beyond anything you could possibly have earned.

There's nothing to be done at such moments except be thankful, to be thankful for people, places, ideas, and causes that you have embraced and that embraced you back. And that is the moment come to the realization that is the full definition of maturity: It's the things you chain yourself to that set you free.

Congratulations Class of 2015.

11-Michael Lewis

Non-fiction Author and Financial Journalist

Princeton University's 2012 Baccalaureate Remarks

Thank you. President Tilghman. Trustees and Friends. Parents of the Class of 2012. Above all, Members of the Princeton Class of 2012. Give yourself a round of applause. The next time you look around a church and see everyone dressed in black it'll be awkward to cheer. Enjoy the moment.

Thirty years ago I sat where you sat. I must have listened to some older person share his life experience. But I don't remember a word of it. I can't even tell you who spoke. What I do remember, vividly, is graduation. I'm told you're meant to be excited, perhaps even relieved, and maybe all of you are. I wasn't. I was totally outraged. Here I'd gone and given them four of the best years of my life and this is how they thanked me for it. By kicking me out.

At that moment I was sure of only one thing: I was of no possible economic value to the outside world. I'd majored in art history, for a start. Even then this was regarded as an act of insanity. I was almost certainly less prepared for the marketplace than most of you. Yet somehow I have wound up rich and famous. Well, sort of. I'm going to explain, briefly, how that happened. I want you to understand just how mysterious careers can be, before you go out and have one yourself.

I graduated from Princeton without ever having published a word of anything, anywhere. I didn't write for the Prince, or for anyone else. But at Princeton, studying art history, I felt the first twinge of literary ambition. It happened while working on my senior thesis. My adviser was a truly gifted professor, an archaeologist named William Childs. The thesis tried to explain how the Italian sculptor Donatello used Greek and Roman sculpture — which is actually totally beside the point, but I've always wanted to tell someone. God knows what Professor Childs actually thought of it, but he helped me to become engrossed. More than engrossed: obsessed. When I handed it in I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life: to write senior theses. Or, to put it differently: to write books.

Then I went to my thesis defense. It was just a few yards from here, in McCormick Hall. I listened and waited for Professor Childs to say how well written my thesis was. He didn't. And so after about 45 minutes I finally said, "So. What did you think of the writing?"

"Put it this way" he said. "Never try to make a living at it."

And I didn't — not really. I did what everyone does who has no idea what to do with themselves: I went to graduate school. I wrote at nights, without much effect, mainly because I hadn't the first clue what I should write about. One night I was invited to a dinner, where I sat next to the wife of a big shot at a giant Wall Street investment bank, called Salomon Brothers. She more or less forced her husband to give me a job. I knew next to nothing about Salomon Brothers. But Salomon Brothers happened to be where Wall Street was being reinvented—into the place we have all come to know and love. When I got there I was assigned, almost arbitrarily, to the very best job in which to observe the growing madness: they turned me into the house expert on derivatives. A year and a half later Salomon Brothers was handing me a check for hundreds of thousands of dollars to give advice about derivatives to professional investors.

Now I had something to write about: Salomon Brothers. Wall Street had become so unhinged that it was paying recent Princeton graduates who knew nothing about money small fortunes to pretend to be experts about money. I'd stumbled into my next senior thesis.

I called up my father. I told him I was going to quit this job that now promised me millions of dollars to write a book for an advance of 40 grand. There was a long pause on the other end of the line. "You might just want to think about that," he said.

"Why?"

"Stay at Salomon Brothers 10 years, make your fortune, and then write your books," he said.

I didn't need to think about it. I knew what intellectual passion felt like — because I'd felt it here, at Princeton — and I wanted to feel it again. I was 26 years old. Had I waited until I was 36, I would never have done it. I would have forgotten the feeling.

The book I wrote was called "Liar’s Poker." It sold a million copies. I was 28 years old. I had a career, a little fame, a small fortune and a new life narrative. All of a sudden people were telling me I was born to be a writer. This was absurd. Even I could see there was another, truer narrative, with luck as its theme. What were the odds of being seated at that dinner next to that Salomon Brothers lady? Of landing inside the best Wall Street firm from which to write the story of an age? Of landing in the seat with the best view of the business? Of having parents who didn't disinherit me but instead sighed and said "do it if you must?" Of having had that sense of must kindled inside me by a professor of art history at Princeton? Of having been let into Princeton in the first place?

This isn't just false humility. It's false humility with a point. My case illustrates how success is always rationalized. People really don’t like to hear success explained away as luck — especially successful people. As they age, and succeed, people feel their success was somehow inevitable. They don't want to acknowledge the role played by accident in their lives. There is a reason for this: the world does not want to acknowledge it either. I wrote a book about this, called "Moneyball." It was ostensibly about baseball but was in fact about something else. There are poor teams and rich teams in professional baseball, and they spend radically different sums of money on their players. When I wrote my book the richest team in professional baseball, the New York Yankees, was then spending about $120 million on its 25 players. The poorest team, the Oakland A's, was spending about $30 million. And yet the Oakland team was winning as many games as the Yankees — and more than all the other richer teams.

This isn't supposed to happen. In theory, the rich teams should buy the best players and win all the time. But the Oakland team had figured something out: the rich teams didn't really understand who the best baseball players were. The players were misvalued. And the biggest single reason they were misvalued was that the experts did not pay sufficient attention to the role of luck in baseball success. Players got given credit for things they did that depended on the performance of others: pitchers got paid for winning games, hitters got paid for knocking in runners on base. Players got blamed

and credited for events beyond their control. Where balls that got hit happened to land on the field, for example.

Forget baseball, forget sports. Here you had these corporate employees, paid millions of dollars a year. They were doing exactly the same job that people in their business had been doing forever. In front of millions of people, who evaluate their every move. They had statistics attached to everything they did. And yet they were misvalued — because the wider world was blind to their luck.

This had been going on for a century. Right under all of our noses. And no one noticed — until it paid a poor team so well to notice that they could not afford not to notice. And you have to ask: if a professional athlete paid millions of dollars can be misvalued who can't be? If the supposedly pure meritocracy of professional sports can't distinguish between lucky and good, who can?

The "Moneyball" story has practical implications. If you use better data, you can find better values; there are always market inefficiencies to exploit, and so on. But it has a broader and less practical message: don't be deceived by life's outcomes. Life's outcomes, while not entirely random, have a huge amount of luck baked into them. Above all, recognize that if you have had success, you have also had luck — and with luck comes obligation. You owe a debt, and not just to your Gods. You owe a debt to the unlucky.

I make this point because — along with this speech — it is something that will be easy for you to forget.

I now live in Berkeley, California. A few years ago, just a few blocks from my home, a pair of researchers in the Cal psychology department staged an experiment. They began by grabbing students, as lab rats. Then they broke the students into teams, segregated by sex. Three men, or three women, per team. Then they put these teams of three into a room, and arbitrarily assigned one of the three to act as leader. Then they gave them some complicated moral problem to solve: say what should be done about academic cheating, or how to regulate drinking on campus.

Exactly 30 minutes into the problem-solving the researchers interrupted each group. They entered the room bearing a plate of cookies. Four cookies.

The team consisted of three people, but there were these four cookies. Every team member obviously got one cookie, but that left a fourth cookie, just sitting there. It should have been awkward. But it wasn't. With incredible consistency the person arbitrarily appointed leader of the group grabbed the fourth cookie, and ate it. Not only ate it, but ate it with gusto: lips smacking, mouth open, drool at the corners of their mouths. In the end all that was left of the extra cookie were crumbs on the leader's shirt.

This leader had performed no special task. He had no special virtue. He'd been chosen at random, 30 minutes earlier. His status was nothing but luck. But it still left him with the sense that the cookie should be his.

This experiment helps to explain Wall Street bonuses and CEO pay, and I'm sure lots of other human behavior. But it also is relevant to new graduates of Princeton University. In a general sort of way you have been appointed the leader of the group. Your appointment may not be entirely arbitrary. But you must sense its arbitrary aspect: you are the lucky few. Lucky in your parents, lucky in your country, lucky that a place like Princeton exists that can take in lucky people, introduce them to other lucky people, and increase their chances of becoming even luckier. Lucky that you live in the richest society the world has ever seen, in a time when no one actually expects you to sacrifice your interests to anything.

All of you have been faced with the extra cookie. All of you will be faced with many more of them. In time you will find it easy to assume that you deserve the extra cookie. For all I know, you may. But you'll be happier, and the world will be better off, if you at least pretend that you don't.

Never forget: In the nation's service. In the service of all nations.

Thank you. And good luck.

12-Ian Brennan

Creator of Glee

Loyola University Chicago, 2015

Very few people get to give a commencement address at their alma mater. And in fact this is my very first Loyola graduation, because I didn't attend my own 15 years ago. I was doing a play at Navy Pier, and I guess I figured I definitely couldn't miss a performance. (And looking back, I definitely could have missed a performance, because I had like 4 lines that were the Shakespeare equivalent of "Everybody, get in here!" I could have missed a performance and the other actors on stage wouldn't have noticed.)

At any rate I'm very happy to be here and very humbled. And nervous, because these things are all about sharing pearls of wisdom that has one as accumulated and sage pieces of advice. Well what advice to give a stranger, let alone 600 of them? You all have different dreams than I do, different skill sets, different backgrounds, different sensibilities, different ambitions – you're different people. And to give advice to a group of people as diffuse as that, you'd have to say something so toothless and so vague, it would have to be like "Go be good!" Which is also what you say to a dog when you want it to pee.

And what good is advice anyway? Everyone's path is so different, and so dependent on chance. Advice that helped me in my life wouldn't necessarily help you in yours. And it would be nonsensical to advise anybody to follow my path, because you wouldn't end up in the same place. My path standing here before you this morning involved yes, a lot of hard work and planning, but also a lot of chance, a lot of bizarre chance events, a lot of strange coincidences.

Case in point, I'm here presumably because I created a TV show. That TV show, "Glee", began its life as a screenplay, which was yes, based on my own experiences in show choir (which I hated — really didn't enjoy it, still having anxiety dreams about it), but it didn't occur to me to write about show choir until I met a girl I was in a play with in New York, and we ended up dating, and she had been in show choir, too, and then we would talk about it, laugh about it, watch old video tapes of it, and it's then I

realized, oh my God, no one's ever written about a glee club. That's hilarious. Such a funny setting for a movie. So then I sat down and wrote a screenplay about it. That screenplay was called "Glee."

Now: that girl I dated, I met during this play, a play I had to fly to New York from Seattle to audition for, because I was doing a play in Seattle. I had to catch a red eye or I'd miss the whole thing entirely. I kid you not, I was 15 seconds away from missing that flight. It was like a Tom Hanks movie, I was in Sea-Tac airport, running through screaming to the gate agents, just as the doors were closing they let me on the plane. Barely made the flight, got to the audition, booked the play, met the girl that inspired the screenplay that became the TV show. If I was 15 seconds later I would have missed the flight, not gotten cast, never met the girl who showed me the videotapes that inspired the screenplay that became the TV show. And someone else would be here talking to you.

I don't say that to exaggerate my abilities or to denigrate them, I just say that to illustrate the randomness that dictates every one of our lives. And in the face of such randomness what advice can you give, beyond Good luck. Buckle up. Enjoy the ride. To say anything else would just be hackneyed platitudes, and I do have hackneyed platitudes for you all. But before I get to that, I would like to speak a little bit about this institution we can now all say we share bachelors' degrees from.

So confession – My whole life I really wanted to go to Northwestern. I just always thought it was going to happen. I was born in Evanston, it seemed symmetrical. They had a good theater program. I could stay in Chicago, my parents could watch Ohio State beat them at football. I just always thought it would happen.

And then, it didn't happen. I didn't get in. I'm still furious about it. I was like, how could this – you know, you get the little envelope, and I was like, but the whole plan was… and then your mind starts going, "What did I do wrong?" And in my case I totally knew what it was, and it was show choir. GLEE CLUB, ARGH. I felt obligated to do it because I knew I wanted to be an actor, and you sort of had to do it to be in the musicals, and I wanted to be a theater major and I dropped AP Euro so I could do it. And it made

me too busy, it was literally the extracurricular activity that broke the camel's back. It made me grades suffer, in junior year I got a bunch of B's that should have been A's. Dropped me out of the top 10% of my class. And then the person I asked to my write college recommendation to Northwestern was the show choir director! And it wasn't even a good recommendation, because all he wrote about was how I was good at show choir! So dumb! And I didn't even really enjoy it, with the sequins and the smiles and the show tunes. For our final show choir event, for the whole school, I was forced to perform in something called "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Concert."

Looking back on it now, A) It all worked out. B) Sort of glad I was in Glee Club… and C) I am very glad I did not go to Northwestern, because if I had I could not have gone to Loyola.

I'm so proud of this institution, I'm so proud of the Jesuits, I think they represent just the absolute best of Catholicism. I'm so proud of the pope, the first Jesuit pope ever. Watching this man be pope is like watching Michael Jordan play basketball. I literally had T-shirts made with his face on it, waving, that said "This Pope is Dope." Not making that up.

And I'm so grateful to have gone to Loyola, a school that, as you will learn as you go out into the world, no one really knows where it is. You say "I went to Loyola", people are like "Oh, I love New Orleans." Nope. Or they're like, "Oh, I've never been to Baltimore, what's Baltimore like?" I don't know. Or they say, "Great view of Los Angeles, really really convenient to LAX." You go, Nope, that's Loyola Marymount. I went to Loyola in Chicago, where there's a Loyola.

I'm so grateful to have gone to a place where there's sort of no fraternities—apologies to any of you that are in a fraternity. When I was here, they didn't really even have houses, they had lunch tables. I don't know if they still have that? And the lunch tables, they looked like dollhouses, they had these little mailboxes on them with letter slots which presumably you could drop letters into. Fifty percent of the letters had to say just like, Nice lunch table.

And I'm so grateful to have spent four years in this weird little pocket of

Chicago called Rogers Park. It's such an amazing place, it's one of the most diverse places in the world, it's a place where everyone is technically a minority. It's amazing. It's true. A place where if you throw a party, actual street people will show up. Like, urchins will wander in with an empty milk jug, head to the keg, fill it up, and then just hang out. You'd always be like, strong street urchin component at this party, Bravo.

And I'm so grateful for this Jesuit education. When you go here, that's a phrase you hear a lot. For those who don't know – and most of you should, because you paid for it – it's a lot of classes over the broad range of the liberal arts, most of which you can't use AP credit to pass out of, so you have to take them, with a heavy concentration in theology and philosophy. Such a heavy concentration that when I was here at least you only had to take three more courses in either philosophy or theology and you'd have a minor.

So let me tell you, this Jesuit education sticks with you. There's still five or six classes that I still talk about on a weekly basis and bore people with at parties.

I took a class, it was a theology class, an astronomy professor my astronomy professor, wandered in one day, and he gave this lecture, and it was about how Hebrew tradition was really confused by the beginning, in the beginning, the first phrase in the book of Genesis begins with the letter Bet instead of Aleph, the letter B instead of A. Hebrew scholars were freaking out like for millenia, This perfect document, why does it start with B? Why wouldn't it start with the first letter of the alphabet?

And what they came up with is, the letter Bet, it's shaped like a bracket, and that that shape was itself a message, that it was pointing you that way, into the text. It was essentially saying Don't worry about what happened before "in the beginning". All this, by an astronomy professor…there's no other institution in the world where that would happen, an astronomy professor wanders in and gives you a lecture in Hebrew theology.

I learned so much there. So much of any of my success I can trace to this place. And you're like, Hold on, Wait, didn't you have that high school teacher that inspired you? And yes, his name is John Marquette, he totally

encouraged a small cadre of classmates of mine to go into a career in theater, he taught speech team, he directed all of the plays, and he want to Loyola. It was here at Loyola that I took my first acting class, taught by that woman right there. It was here I was in my first new play, a play that had never been directed before, also by that woman right there. It was where I wrote my first play, saw it produced, realized it was the worst play ever written. I couldn't even tell you the title of this play, such is my embarrassment. If any of you had read this play you would stand up right now and just go Shame! Shame! It's that bad.

This is where I directed a play for the first time, learned about 60% of what you need to know about directing. So I can't say I learned everything at Loyola, but a big chunk of what I learned, I learned at this place.

So, that having been said, what have I learned? What are my sage kernels of advice for 600 strangers? Here they are in no particular order.

Piece of Advice Number One: Work hard. Work hard. Be the hardest working person you know. Because if you're not, someone else will be. And you can't control how smart you are, how funny you are, how good-looking you are. The one thing you can control in your life is how hard you work. Make it a thing that people say about you, you know, "Man, he's ugly, but he sure works hard."

If you've got the lazy gene, you're in trouble, because there is literally no successful person in history who people look back on and say, "Yeah, she was a really amazing person, accomplished so much, super lazy."

It doesn't mean you have to be obsessive type A maniac, because for 8 hours a day you can just pretend that you are and then you can go home and be as lazy as you want. Work hard.

Piece of Advice Number Two: Sounds obvious, but find a job that you love. And don't stop searching until you do. Find a career you can get obsessed with. A career is like a mattress, you spend a third of your life on it, so make sure it's comfortable. Take it from me, if you love your job, you will never work a day in your life.

Piece of Advice Number Three: Don't follow money. Money is not your friend. Happiness in America – they've done studies about this, the

happiest people in America are the middle class. The sweet spot is like between eighty thousand dollars a year and one hundred and twenty thousand a year. I'm not saying that easy, but less than that and you're miserable, and more than that, and you're miserable. (It's sort of true.)

Money is good in that it gives you the freedom to continue to do the things you love. But it's not an end in itself. It will not make you happy. Ask any Powerball winner.

Piece of Advice Number Four: Foster your creativity. And then, protect it. Your creativity is the greatest gift you will ever be given, and it's the source of the greatest things you will achieve. It's the part of you that is the most you. So care for it, the way you would a child or a beloved pet. Be firm, don't let it just sit around. Make it do things. Toilet train it, be patient with it and it will grow and mature and get better and better and better. It will become the part of your life that you enjoy the most.

And more specifically, with regard to the two professions with which I can speak with some authority – to any actors out there, Act already. Start yesterday. Audition for everything. They say it takes ten years to get truly good at something? Well get up there and start being bad. Because once you stop being bad you're going to start being good.

To writers: Write. That's the one thing you have to do. Write for an hour every day. I remember I was told that once, and I thought, That sounds horrible. And it sort of is. But it doesn't matter what you write, just write for an hour a day. Two at most. Nobody is creative for more than two hours a day, and if they say they are, they're lying to you. Stephen King sort of was, but he did loads of cocaine.

Just let the world around you quiet down, and listen to your mind. Earplugs help for me. And when you get stuck, there's a book to read, it's called "Bird by Bird." It's by a writer named Anne Lamott. "Bird by Bird" – it's the single best book on the writing process I've ever read.

Writing is lonely and difficult. Every time I sit down to write the first 45 minutes consists of 90% of my brain that is critical telling the 10% that's creative that what it's doing is absolutely horrible. It's a job of the writer to not get up from the chair until that critical brain gets tired. And as soon

as it does that creative part will start creating. Writing is hard until it isn't, but when it comes flying out, it's the greatest feeling in the world.

And my final piece of advice, sort of my only piece of advice, begins with an anecdote. When I was here at Loyola, the theater department brought in a very successful Chicago actor to give a seminar on acting. And I won't say who his name is, I want to protect his anonymity, but his name is Bill Norris. He's a great actor, he's had a great career in Chicago theater for like 40 years.

Anyway I was like a freshman or sophomore, I can't remember, but at the end of the seminar he asked if we had any questions. And my hand shot up, and I was like, What advice would you give someone like me who wants to do this as a career? What would you advise?

And his advice was one word. He said, Quit.

Now: I understood what he was getting at, and he was probably half joking. And maybe some people in that room needed to hear that. But it stands as the single worst piece of advice I have ever received. I am only standing here because I didn't take it. So my only real advice to you is the opposite: Don't Quit. Never quit. If you've been blessed to know the thing you want to do, do not give up on it. It doesn't matter how hard it is.

The one way to guarantee you're not going to be successful at something is to give up on it. Yes, some dreams are harder to achieve than others. But there is not one that is impossible. I'm telling you. Really ambitious goals – starting a theater company, running for Congress, starting your own business, opening an art gallery in Prague. These things are hard. But even the hardest goal is not that hard. The hardest part is admitting to yourself that that's what you really want to do.

Dare to say out loud the thing that you actually want and the hard part is actually over. Because then you'll start to make a plan, and when you have a plan, then you'll start to make that plan real. And before you know it, you're just doing the thing that you always wanted to do.

And when you're busting your hump, following your dream, and someone asks you the question, What do you have to fall back on? Slap them. Don't worry about Plan B. You know what your Plan B should be? Plan A. You're

young. The world is full of possibilities for every one of you. Don’t second guess yourself. Don’t plant the seed of failure right next to the seed of success. You may not end up twenty years from now exactly where you thought you would be, but it’s going to feel like you did, because you followed your truest, deepest desires. You honored your truest, deepest self. So that’s my advice. So Go be good. You’re 600 strangers, you have your whole lives ahead of you, and I’m already in wonder of what you’re going to accomplish. Congratulations, Class of 2015.

13-John Legend

Singer-songwriter and Philanthropist

University of Pennsylvania| May19, 2014

Thank you. Thank you so much. Good morning. And congratulations!

Now I'll try to be brief this morning. As a musician, this is about 10 hours before I normally go to work, so I'm gonna need a nap soon. And you've got degrees to receive.

And I also have a feeling some of you are already tired of me. The thing about pop radio in America, somehow they've scientifically determined that the public is only capable of liking the same 10 songs at any given time, so they simply play those songs over and over and over until you're finally completely exasperated. Then they move on...

I've had a 10-year career as a solo artist and none of my songs has ever been one of those 10 songs. Until this moment. And now "all of you, are so over me, you're tired of hearing that I went to Penn. Why'd they bring him back again?" (sung to the tune of "All of Me" chorus)

That was my humblebrag way of saying I have the biggest song in the country. Very artful, wouldn't you say?

But, honestly, I am truly humbled and honored and grateful to be here at the commencement of one of the finest universities on the planet. I first visited this campus as a high school senior named John Stephens in 1995 -- 19 years ago -- and I would have never thought at that moment that I would be standing here as John Legend, speaking to you today.

The reason I'm here, the reason I've had such a wonderful journey so far, is that I've found love. Yes, love. We were all made to love. And I've found that we live our best lives, we are at our most successful, not simply because we're smarter than everyone else, or because we hustle harder. Not because we become millionaires more quickly. The key to success, the key to happiness, is opening your mind and your heart to love. Spending your time doing things you love and with people you love.

My life could have gone differently though. At first, I had a pretty good childhood. I grew up in a small blue-collar city called Springfield, Ohio. I

was surrounded by family, including 2 loving parents who cared so much about our education that they home-schooled us for several years during grade school. And they took the time to teach us more than academics. They taught us about character, about what it meant to live a good life.

My father often talked to us about his definition of success. He told us that it wasn't measured in money and material things, but it was measured in love and joy and the lives you're able to touch -- the lives you're able to help. And my parents walked the walk. They gave of themselves to our church. They took in foster kids and helped the homeless, even though we didn't have much money ourselves.

Growing up in the Stephens house also meant you were immersed in art and music and encouraged to be creative. We had a piano and a drum kit in the house. I begged to take piano lessons when I was 4. I started singing in the church choir and in school plays by the time I was 7. So I fell in love with music at a very young age.

My family was like a model family in our church and local community. My parents were leaders, raising intelligent, talented kids in a loving environment. We even had a little singing group called the "Stephens 5."

But things started to fall apart when I was 10. My maternal grandmother passed away that year when she was only 58 years old, and her death devastated my family. She was our church organist, and on Sundays after church, I would go to her house just to hang out with her. She would make chicken and collard greens and corn bread. And she would teach me how to play gospel piano. She was one of my favorite people on the planet.

She and my mother were also very close, and her death sent my mother into a deep depression that eventually tore our family apart. My world was shattered. My parents got divorced. My mother disappeared into over a decade of drugs and despair. And I was confused and disoriented.

After the initial shock of my family breaking apart, my outward response wasn't very emotional. I coped by being stoic and seemingly unaffected. I thought if I didn't expose myself to any more pain and vulnerability, I could never get hurt. If I didn't fall in love, no one could ever betray me like that again.

I busied myself with school work and lots of activities, and tried not to think too much about my family situation, tried to avoid pain whenever possible. A big reason I only applied to colleges on the east coast was to make sure I had no reminders of home in my daily life.

The only thing I allowed myself to really love without reservation was music. I put all of my passion into it. I spent so much of my spare time working on it, that I barely got any sleep. At night, I was doing community choir, show choir and musicals in high school; a cappella and a church choir in college. I wrote my own songs. Played in talent shows. I put a lot of energy into becoming a better artist, a better writer and a better performer. And in some ways, it made me a better student and a better leader. Because when you actually care about something, you want to lead. Apathy's not so cool any more.

When I graduated from Penn, I had many of the traditional opportunities in front of you now, and I took a job at the Boston Consulting Group. But I couldn't shake my passion for music. I had followed the path that the Penn graduate was supposed to take, but I didn't fall in love. I immediately started thinking about how I could leave BCG and become a full-time musician. I spent hours during the day preparing powerpoint presentations and financial models. And I spent almost as many hours at night writing songs and performing at small gigs around New York and Philadelphia.

I always believed that my big break would come sooner rather than later. In fact, from 1998, while I was still at Penn, to early 2004, I spent each of those years always thinking that I would get that big record deal within the next few months. I always thought my moment was just around the corner. But I was rejected by all the major labels; some of them rejected me multiple times. I played for all the giants of the business -- Clive Davis, L.A. Reid, Jimmy Iovine, you name it. And all of them turned me down.

But I did find a young producer from Chicago named Kanye West who believed in me. Kanye happened to be the cousin of my good friend DeVon Harris, a classmate and roommate of mine here at Penn. DeVon introduced me to Kanye in 2001, and we've been working together ever since. Our collaboration has been a huge part of my career, and it had a lot to do with

me finally getting a major recording contract in 2004.

Now, Kanye and I have very different personalities, as you might have guessed. But what unites us is our true love for music and art. We love to create, and at no point in our creative process do we stress about what will sell or what's already popular. We think about making something beautiful, something special, something we can be proud of. We truly do this because we love it. We put all of ourselves into it.

And it turns out that love requires that level of commitment from you. Half-doing it is not doing it right. You have to go all in. And yes, your personal relationships require that too.

I know what it's like to be all ego in your 20s. I know what it's like to be selfish and just focus on your immediate wants and desires. I know what it's like to protect your heart from pain and disappointment. I know what it means to be all about the rat race and winning.

But years from now, when you look back on your time here on earth, your life and your happiness will be way more defined by the quality of your relationships, not the quantity. You'll get much more joy out of depth, not breadth. It's about finding and keeping the best relationships possible with the people around you. It's about immersing yourself in your friendships and your family. It's about being there for the people you care about, and knowing that they'll be there for you.

I know. It's not easy to go all in on love. I'm 35 and I'm married and I'm still learning how to do this completely. But I've found someone who makes me want to try, someone who makes me want to take that risk. And it's made all the difference.

Now, I've already talked about the power of love in your work and your personal lives. But I also want to talk about how love changes the world. There are 7 billion other people out there. 7 billion strangers. I want you to consider what it means to love them too. What does it mean to love people we don't know, to see the value in every single person's life?

Think about that. It's a pretty radical notion. It means your daughter or son, your neighbor's daughter or son and the daughters and sons of people who live thousands of miles away, all deserve the right to life, liberty and the

pursuit of happiness. It means we let go of fear and see each other's humanity. It means we don't see Trayvon Martin as a walking stereotype, a weaponized human. We see him as a boy who deserves the chance to grow into a man, even if he makes boyish mistakes along the way. It means American lives don't count more than Iraqi lives. It means we see a young Palestinian kid not as a future security threat or demographic challenge, but as a future father, mother and lover. It means that the nearly 300 kidnapped girls in Nigeria aren't just their problem. They're "our" girls too. It's actually quite a challenge to love humankind in this way.

Professor Cornel West gives us a word for what this kind of love looks like in public. That word is justice.

If you're committed to loving in public, it requires you opening your eyes to injustice, to see the world through the eyes of another. This is not a passive activity. You have to read. You have to travel to other neighborhoods, other parts of the world. You may have to get your hands dirty. You have to allow people to love you, and you have to love them back

My team and I met a young girl named Rose from a small, impoverished village in Ghana. When you're working with development organizations and visiting the communities they work in, you're not really supposed to single out one child to fall in love with. You're supposed to stick to the program and focus on the interventions that lift the community as a whole. But we couldn't help it. We fell in love with Rose. Something about the spark in her eyes and her indomitable spirit made us want to go the extra mile to help her. So we decided to use our own funds to sponsor her tuition to secondary school.

We've stayed in touch with her over the past 7 years, and we're so proud of what she's done individually. But we're also happy that she inspired us to formalize and expand our scholarship program to many girls in communities like hers throughout Africa, communities where the parents often invest in the boys' secondary education, but don't do the same for the girls.

In my travels around the world, I've looked in the eyes of many young girls

and boys from Africa to Southeast Asia to Harlem, kids who had big dreams and needed someone to believe in them and invest in their future, in their education.

What would our schools look like if we were committed to love in public? If we cared about every kid in our school system, we would make sure they didn't go to school hungry. We would make sure they had proper health care and counseling. We would make sure they had excellent teachers in every classroom. We would make sure we weren't unfairly suspending them and criminalizing them for minor behavioral problems. We'd make sure all of them had the resources they need.

Every religion has this idea of philanthropy, love for mankind, at its core. But you shouldn't do this just to make sure you get into the "pearly gates." Look at the work of Marty Seligman here at Penn, who has literally written the book on happiness. Look at the work of Adam Grant, whom I hear is the most highly rated professor here: He has the data to show that giving works. There's an increasing body of research and knowledge that tells us that living a life of love and compassion is the true path to success and contentment.

So what's going to stop you? What's going to stand in your way? What's going to keep you from achieving your success? What will prevent you from going all in on love?

We're taught when we're young that the opposite of love is hate. But it's not. Hate is a byproduct. Hate is a result. Being a hater isn't cool. Nobody wants that. But hate comes from one thing: fear. And fear is the opposite of love. It's not a coincidence that when we talk about bigotry, we often talk in terms of fear: homophobia, xenophobia. Fear is what blinds us. Fear is corrosive. Fear makes us hold back. It whispers to us, tells us that we'll fail. It tells us that our differences are too much to overcome. Fear locks us in place. It starts fights. It causes wars.

And fear keeps us from loving. Even though we're made to love, we're often afraid to love. We're afraid of being hurt deeply. Afraid of feeling the pain I went through when my parents divorced. But you're never going to really love something or someone unless you put those fears aside. Don't

hold back. Being in love means being ready to give freely and openly, and being ready to risk something. Risking pain and disappointment, conquering your fears, and becoming anew.

Alice Walker once said, "The more I wonder, the more I love." Love calls you to open your eyes, to seek, to search, to wonder.

Love is all-consuming -- it infiltrates your body, it's what allows you to experience bliss, joy and true friendship. You'll be more disappointed when something goes wrong. You might fall harder. But the only way you'll reach any height in life and in love is by taking the chance that you might fall.

You have to give your all.

Yes, I've been not-so-subtly working in my song lyrics. And some might think it's all a bit too much. Here I am, this R&B singer with an album called Love in the Future, who's recently married and wrote the biggest love song of the year, and what did I choose to talk about? Love. It's so corny, isn't it. It's much cooler to be detached and apathetic, right? We all like a little snark and cynicism and irony, especially from our favorite artists and comedians and writers. I get it.

But that cool detachment only gets you so far. Passion gets you a lot further. It makes you a better entrepreneur, a better leader, a better philanthropist, a better friend, a better lover.

I want you to live the best life you can. You can be world-changers. When you leave here today, you're going to be looking for a lot of things: security, money, friendships, sex, all kinds of things. But the most important thing you'll find is love.

So love your self, love your work, love the people around you. Dare to love those who are different from you, no matter where they're from, what they look like, and who they love. Pursue this life of love with focus and passion and ambition and courage. Give it your all. And that will be your path to true success.

Congratulations to the Class of 2014 and thank you so much!

14- J.K. ROWLING

Author of the Harry Potter fantasy series

Commencement Speech at Harvard University, 2008

"The Fringe Benefits of Failure, and the Importance of Imagination," at the Annual Meeting of the Harvard Alumni Association.

President Faust, members of the Harvard Corporation and the Board of Overseers, members of the faculty, proud parents, and, above all, graduates.

The first thing I would like to say is 'thank you.' Not only has Harvard given me an extraordinary honour, but the weeks of fear and nausea I have endured at the thought of giving this commencement address have made me lose weight. A win-win situation! Now all I have to do is take deep breaths, squint at the red banners and convince myself that I am at the world's largest Gryffindor reunion.

Delivering a commencement address is a great responsibility; or so I thought until I cast my mind back to my own graduation. The commencement speaker that day was the distinguished British philosopher Baroness Mary Warnock. Reflecting on her speech has helped me enormously in writing this one, because it turns out that I can't remember a single word she said. This liberating discovery enables me to proceed without any fear that I might inadvertently influence you to abandon promising careers in business, the law or politics for the giddy delights of becoming a gay wizard.

You see? If all you remember in years to come is the 'gay wizard' joke, I've come out ahead of Baroness Mary Warnock. Achievable goals: the first step to self improvement.

Actually, I have wracked my mind and heart for what I ought to say to you today. I have asked myself what I wish I had known at my own graduation, and what important lessons I have learned in the 21 years that have expired between that day and this.

I have come up with two answers. On this wonderful day when we are gathered together to celebrate your academic success, I have decided to talk to you about the benefits of failure. And as you stand on the threshold

of what is sometimes called 'real life', I want to extol the crucial importance of imagination.

These may seem quixotic or paradoxical choices, but please bear with me. Looking back at the 21-year-old that I was at graduation, is a slightly uncomfortable experience for the 42-year-old that she has become. Half my lifetime ago, I was striking an uneasy balance between the ambition I had for myself, and what those closest to me expected of me.

I was convinced that the only thing I wanted to do, ever, was to write novels. However, my parents, both of whom came from impoverished backgrounds and neither of whom had been to college, took the view that my overactive imagination was an amusing personal quirk that would never pay a mortgage, or secure a pension. I know that the irony strikes with the force of a cartoon anvil, now.

So they hoped that I would take a vocational degree; I wanted to study English Literature. A compromise was reached that in retrospect satisfied nobody, and I went up to study Modern Languages. Hardly had my parents' car rounded the corner at the end of the road than I ditched German and scuttled off down the Classics corridor.

I cannot remember telling my parents that I was studying Classics; they might well have found out for the first time on graduation day. Of all the subjects on this planet, I think they would have been hard put to name one less useful than Greek mythology when it came to securing the keys to an executive bathroom.

I would like to make it clear, in parenthesis, that I do not blame my parents for their point of view. There is an expiry date on blaming your parents for steering you in the wrong direction; the moment you are old enough to take the wheel, responsibility lies with you. What is more, I cannot criticise my parents for hoping that I would never experience poverty. They had been poor themselves, and I have since been poor, and I quite agree with them that it is not an ennobling experience. Poverty entails fear, and stress, and sometimes depression; it means a thousand petty humiliations and hardships. Climbing out of poverty by your own efforts, that is indeed something on which to pride yourself, but poverty itself is romanticised

only by fools.

What I feared most for myself at your age was not poverty, but failure.

At your age, in spite of a distinct lack of motivation at university, where I had spent far too long in the coffee bar writing stories, and far too little time at lectures, I had a knack for passing examinations, and that, for years, had been the measure of success in my life and that of my peers.

I am not dull enough to suppose that because you are young, gifted and well-educated, you have never known hardship or heartbreak. Talent and intelligence never yet inoculated anyone against the caprice of the Fates, and I do not for a moment suppose that everyone here has enjoyed an existence of unruffled privilege and contentment.

However, the fact that you are graduating from Harvard suggests that you are not very well-acquainted with failure. You might be driven by a fear of failure quite as much as a desire for success. Indeed, your conception of failure might not be too far from the average person's idea of success, so high have you already flown.

Ultimately, we all have to decide for ourselves what constitutes failure, but the world is quite eager to give you a set of criteria if you let it. So I think it fair to say that by any conventional measure, a mere seven years after my graduation day, I had failed on an epic scale. An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded, and I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain, without being homeless. The fears that my parents had had for me, and that I had had for myself, had both come to pass, and by every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew.

Now, I am not going to stand here and tell you that failure is fun. That period of my life was a dark one, and I had no idea that there was going to be what the press has since represented as a kind of fairy tale resolution. I had no idea then how far the tunnel extended, and for a long time, any light at the end of it was a hope rather than a reality.

So why do I talk about the benefits of failure? Simply because failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at

anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena I believed I truly belonged. I was set free, because my greatest fear had been realised, and I was still alive, and I still had a daughter whom I adored, and I had an old typewriter and a big idea. And so rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.

You might never fail on the scale I did, but some failure in life is inevitable. It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case, you fail by default.

Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way. I discovered that I had a strong will, and more discipline than I had suspected; I also found out that I had friends whose value was truly above the price of rubies.

The knowledge that you have emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive. You will never truly know yourself, or the strength of your relationships, until both have been tested by adversity. Such knowledge is a true gift, for all that it is painfully won, and it has been worth more than any qualification I ever earned.

So given a Time Turner, I would tell my 21-year-old self that personal happiness lies in knowing that life is not a check-list of acquisition or achievement. Your qualifications, your CV, are not your life, though you will meet many people of my age and older who confuse the two. Life is difficult, and complicated, and beyond anyone's total control, and the humility to know that will enable you to survive its vicissitudes.

Now you might think that I chose my second theme, the importance of imagination, because of the part it played in rebuilding my life, but that is not wholly so. Though I personally will defend the value of bedtime stories to my last gasp, I have learned to value imagination in a much broader sense. Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that

enables us to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared.

One of the greatest formative experiences of my life preceded Harry Potter, though it informed much of what I subsequently wrote in those books. This revelation came in the form of one of my earliest day jobs. Though I was sloping off to write stories during my lunch hours, I paid the rent in my early 20s by working at the African research department at Amnesty International's headquarters in London.

There in my little office I read hastily scribbled letters smuggled out of totalitarian regimes by men and women who were risking imprisonment to inform the outside world of what was happening to them. I saw photographs of those who had disappeared without trace, sent to Amnesty by their desperate families and friends. I read the testimony of torture victims and saw pictures of their injuries. I opened handwritten, eye-witness accounts of summary trials and executions, of kidnappings and rapes.

Many of my co-workers were ex-political prisoners, people who had been displaced from their homes, or fled into exile, because they had the temerity to speak against their governments. Visitors to our offices included those who had come to give information, or to try and find out what had happened to those they had left behind.

I shall never forget the African torture victim, a young man no older than I was at the time, who had become mentally ill after all he had endured in his homeland. He trembled uncontrollably as he spoke into a video camera about the brutality inflicted upon him. He was a foot taller than I was, and seemed as fragile as a child. I was given the job of escorting him back to the Underground Station afterwards, and this man whose life had been shattered by cruelty took my hand with exquisite courtesy, and wished me future happiness.

And as long as I live I shall remember walking along an empty corridor and suddenly hearing, from behind a closed door, a scream of pain and horror such as I have never heard since. The door opened, and the researcher poked out her head and told me to run and make a hot drink for

the young man sitting with her. She had just had to give him the news that in retaliation for his own outspokenness against his country's regime, his mother had been seized and executed.

Every day of my working week in my early 20s I was reminded how incredibly fortunate I was, to live in a country with a democratically elected government, where legal representation and a public trial were the rights of everyone.

Every day, I saw more evidence about the evils humankind will inflict on their fellow humans, to gain or maintain power. I began to have nightmares, literal nightmares, about some of the things I saw, heard, and read.

And yet I also learned more about human goodness at Amnesty International than I had ever known before.

Amnesty mobilises thousands of people who have never been tortured or imprisoned for their beliefs to act on behalf of those who have. The power of human empathy, leading to collective action, saves lives, and frees prisoners. Ordinary people, whose personal well-being and security are assured, join together in huge numbers to save people they do not know, and will never meet. My small participation in that process was one of the most humbling and inspiring experiences of my life.

Unlike any other creature on this planet, humans can learn and understand, without having experienced. They can think themselves into other people's places.

Of course, this is a power, like my brand of fictional magic, that is morally neutral. One might use such an ability to manipulate, or control, just as much as to understand or sympathise.

And many prefer not to exercise their imaginations at all. They choose to remain comfortably within the bounds of their own experience, never troubling to wonder how it would feel to have been born other than they are. They can refuse to hear screams or to peer inside cages; they can close their minds and hearts to any suffering that does not touch them personally; they can refuse to know.

I might be tempted to envy people who can live that way, except that I do not think they have any fewer nightmares than I do. Choosing to live in

narrow spaces leads to a form of mental agoraphobia, and that brings its own terrors. I think the wilfully unimaginative see more monsters. They are often more afraid.

What is more, those who choose not to empathise enable real monsters. For without ever committing an act of outright evil ourselves, we collude with it, through our own apathy.

One of the many things I learned at the end of that Classics corridor down which I ventured at the age of 18, in search of something I could not then define, was this, written by the Greek author Plutarch: What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.

That is an astonishing statement and yet proven a thousand times every day of our lives. It expresses, in part, our inescapable connection with the outside world, the fact that we touch other people's lives simply by existing. But how much more are you, Harvard graduates of 2008, likely to touch other people's lives? Your intelligence, your capacity for hard work, the education you have earned and received, give you unique status, and unique responsibilities. Even your nationality sets you apart. The great majority of you belong to the world's only remaining superpower. The way you vote, the way you live, the way you protest, the pressure you bring to bear on your government, has an impact way beyond your borders. That is your privilege, and your burden.

If you choose to use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice; if you choose to identify not only with the powerful, but with the powerless; if you retain the ability to imagine yourself into the lives of those who do not have your advantages, then it will not only be your proud families who celebrate your existence, but thousands and millions of people whose reality you have helped change. We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better.

I am nearly finished. I have one last hope for you, which is something that I already had at 21. The friends with whom I sat on graduation day have been my friends for life. They are my children's godparents, the people to whom I've been able to turn in times of trouble, people who have been kind

enough not to sue me when I took their names for Death Eaters. At our graduation we were bound by enormous affection, by our shared experience of a time that could never come again, and, of course, by the knowledge that we held certain photographic evidence that would be exceptionally valuable if any of us ran for Prime Minister.

So today, I wish you nothing better than similar friendships. And tomorrow, I hope that even if you remember not a single word of mine, you remember those of Seneca, another of those old Romans I met when I fled down the Classics corridor, in retreat from career ladders, in search of ancient wisdom:

As is a tale, so is life: not how long it is, but how good it is, is what matters.

I wish you all very good lives. Thank you very much.

03- Mark Zuckerberg
Facebook Founder
Harvard University 2017

President Faust, Board of Overseers, faculty, alumni, friends, proud parents, members of the ad board, and graduates of the greatest university in the world,

I’m honored to be with you today because, let’s face it, you accomplished something I never could. If I get through this speech, it’ll be the first time I actually finish something at Harvard. Class of 2017, congratulations!

I’m an unlikely speaker, not just because I dropped out, but because we’re technically in the same generation. We walked this yard less than a decade apart, studied the same ideas and slept through the same Ec10 lectures. We may have taken different paths to get here, especially if you came all the way from the Quad, but today I want to share what I’ve learned about our generation and the world we’re building together.

But first, the last couple of days have brought back a lot of good memories. How many of you remember exactly what you were doing when you got that email telling you that you got into Harvard? I was playing Civilization and I ran downstairs, got my dad, and for some reason, his reaction was to

video me opening the email. That could have been a really sad video. I swear getting into Harvard is still the thing my parents are most proud of me for.

What about your first lecture at Harvard? Mine was Computer Science 121 with the incredible Harry Lewis. I was late so I threw on a t-shirt and didn't realize until afterwards it was inside out and backwards with my tag sticking out the front. I couldn't figure out why no one would talk to me — except one guy, KX Jin, he just went with it. We ended up doing our problem sets together, and now he runs a big part of Facebook. And that, Class of 2017, is why you should be nice to people.

But my best memory from Harvard was meeting Priscilla. I had just launched this prank website Facemash, and the ad board wanted to "see me". Everyone thought I was going to get kicked out. My parents came to help me pack. My friends threw me a going away party. As luck would have it, Priscilla was at that party with her friend. We met in line for the bathroom in the Pfoho Belltower, and in what must be one of the all time romantic lines, I said: "I'm going to get kicked out in three days, so we need to go on a date quickly."

Actually, any of you graduating can use that line.

I didn't end up getting kicked out — I did that to myself. Priscilla and I started dating. And, you know, that movie made it seem like Facemash was so important to creating Facebook. It wasn't. But without Facemash I wouldn't have met Priscilla, and she's the most important person in my life, so you could say it was the most important thing I built in my time here.

We've all started lifelong friendships here, and some of us even families. That's why I'm so grateful to this place. Thanks, Harvard.

Today I want to talk about purpose. But I'm not here to give you the standard commencement about finding your purpose. We're millennials. We'll try to do that instinctively. Instead, I'm here to tell you finding your purpose isn't enough. The challenge for our generation is creating a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

One of my favorite stories is when John F Kennedy visited the NASA space center, he saw a janitor carrying a broom and he walked over and asked

what he was doing. The janitor responded: “Mr. President, I’m helping put a man on the moon”.

Purpose is that sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, that we are needed, that we have something better ahead to work for. Purpose is what creates true happiness.

You’re graduating at a time when this is especially important. When our parents graduated, purpose reliably came from your job, your church, your community. But today, technology and automation are eliminating many jobs. Membership in communities is declining. Many people feel disconnected and depressed, and are trying to fill a void.

As I’ve traveled around, I’ve sat with children in juvenile detention and opioid addicts, who told me their lives could have turned out differently if they just had something to do, an after school program or somewhere to go. I’ve met factory workers who know their old jobs aren’t coming back and are trying to find their place.

To keep our society moving forward, we have a generational challenge — to not only create new jobs, but create a renewed sense of purpose.

I remember the night I launched Facebook from my little dorm in Kirkland House. I went to Noch’s with my friend KX. I remember telling him I was excited to connect the Harvard community, but one day someone would connect the whole world.

The thing is, it never even occurred to me that someone might be us. We were just college kids. We didn’t know anything about that. There were all these big technology companies with resources. I just assumed one of them would do it. But this idea was so clear to us — that all people want to connect. So we just kept moving forward, day by day.

I know a lot of you will have your own stories just like this. A change in the world that seems so clear you’re sure someone else will do it. But they won’t. You will.

But it’s not enough to have purpose yourself. You have to create a sense of purpose for others.

I found that out the hard way. You see, my hope was never to build a company, but to make an impact. And as all these people started joining us,

I just assumed that's what they cared about too, so I never explained what I hoped we'd build.

A couple years in, some big companies wanted to buy us. I didn't want to sell. I wanted to see if we could connect more people. We were building the first News Feed, and I thought if we could just launch this, it could change how we learn about the world.

Nearly everyone else wanted to sell. Without a sense of higher purpose, this was the startup dream come true. It tore our company apart. After one tense argument, an advisor told me if I didn't agree to sell, I would regret the decision for the rest of my life. Relationships were so frayed that within a year or so every single person on the management team was gone.

That was my hardest time leading Facebook. I believed in what we were doing, but I felt alone. And worse, it was my fault. I wondered if I was just wrong, an imposter, a 22 year-old kid who had no idea how the world worked.

Now, years later, I understand that *is* how things work with no sense of higher purpose. It's up to us to create it so we can all keep moving forward together.

Today I want to talk about three ways to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose: by taking on big meaningful projects together, by redefining equality so everyone has the freedom to pursue purpose, and by building community across the world.

First, let's take on big meaningful projects.

Our generation will have to deal with tens of millions of jobs replaced by automation like self-driving cars and trucks. But we have the potential to do so much more together.

Every generation has its defining works. More than 300,000 people worked to put a man on the moon – including that janitor. Millions of volunteers immunized children around the world against polio. Millions of more people built the Hoover dam and other great projects.

These projects didn't just provide purpose for the people doing those jobs, they gave our whole country a sense of pride that we could do great things.

Now it's our turn to do great things. I know, you're probably thinking: I

don’t know how to build a dam, or get a million people involved in anything.

But let me tell you a secret: no one does when they begin. Ideas don’t come out fully formed. They only become clear as you work on them. You just have to get started.

If I had to understand everything about connecting people before I began, I never would have started Facebook.

Movies and pop culture get this all wrong. The idea of a single eureka moment is a dangerous lie. It makes us feel inadequate since we haven’t had ours. It prevents people with seeds of good ideas from getting started.

Oh, you know what else movies get wrong about innovation? No one writes math formulas on glass. That’s not a thing.

It’s good to be idealistic. But be prepared to be misunderstood. Anyone working on a big vision will get called crazy, even if you end up right. Anyone working on a complex problem will get blamed for not fully understanding the challenge, even though it’s impossible to know everything upfront. Anyone taking initiative will get criticized for moving too fast, because there’s always someone who wants to slow you down.

In our society, we often don’t do big things because we’re so afraid of making mistakes that we ignore all the things wrong today if we do nothing. The reality is, anything we do will have issues in the future. But that can’t keep us from starting.

So what are we waiting for? It’s time for our generation-defining public works. How about stopping climate change before we destroy the planet and getting millions of people involved manufacturing and installing solar panels? How about curing all diseases and asking volunteers to track their health data and share their genomes? Today we spend 50x more treating people who are sick than we spend finding cures so people don’t get sick in the first place. That makes no sense. We can fix this. How about modernizing democracy so everyone can vote online, and personalizing education so everyone can learn?

These achievements are within our reach. Let’s do them all in a way that gives everyone in our society a role. Let’s do big things, not only to create

progress, but to create purpose.

So taking on big meaningful projects is the first thing we can do to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

The second is redefining equality to give everyone the freedom they need to pursue purpose.

Many of our parents had stable jobs throughout their careers. Now we're all entrepreneurial, whether we're starting projects or finding or role. And that's great. Our culture of entrepreneurship is how we create so much progress.

Now, an entrepreneurial culture thrives when it's easy to try lots of new ideas. Facebook wasn't the first thing I built. I also built games, chat systems, study tools and music players. I'm not alone. JK Rowling got rejected 12 times before publishing Harry Potter. Even Beyonce had to make hundreds of songs to get Halo. The greatest successes come from having the freedom to fail.

But today, we have a level of wealth inequality that hurts everyone. When you don't have the freedom to take your idea and turn it into a historic enterprise, we all lose. Right now our society is way over-indexed on rewarding success and we don't do nearly enough to make it easy for everyone to take lots of shots.

Let's face it. There is something wrong with our system when I can leave here and make billions of dollars in 10 years while millions of students can't afford to pay off their loans, let alone start a business.

Look, I know a lot of entrepreneurs, and I don't know a single person who gave up on starting a business because they might not make enough money. But I know lots of people who haven't pursued dreams because they didn't have a cushion to fall back on if they failed.

We all know we don't succeed just by having a good idea or working hard. We succeed by being lucky too. If I had to support my family growing up instead of having time to code, if I didn't know I'd be fine if Facebook didn't work out, I wouldn't be standing here today. If we're honest, we all know how much luck we've had.

Every generation expands its definition of equality. Previous generations

fought for the vote and civil rights. They had the New Deal and Great Society. Now it's our time to define a new social contract for our generation. We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things. We're going to change jobs many times, so we need affordable childcare to get to work and healthcare that aren't tied to one company. We're all going to make mistakes, so we need a society that focuses less on locking us up or stigmatizing us. And as technology keeps changing, we need to focus more on continuous education throughout our lives.

And yes, giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose isn't free. People like me should pay for it. Many of you will do well and you should too.

That's why Priscilla and I started the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and committed our wealth to promoting equal opportunity. These are the values of our generation. It was never a question of if we were going to do this. The only question was when.

Millennials are already one of the most charitable generations in history. In one year, three of four US millennials made a donation and seven out of ten raised money for charity.

But it's not just about money. You can also give time. I promise you, if you take an hour or two a week — that's all it takes to give someone a hand, to help them reach their potential.

Maybe you think that's too much time. I used to. When Priscilla graduated from Harvard she became a teacher, and before she'd do education work with me, she told me I needed to teach a class. I complained: "Well, I'm kind of busy. I'm running this company." But she insisted, so I taught a middle school program on entrepreneurship at the local Boys and Girls Club.

I taught them lessons on product development and marketing, and they taught me what it's like feeling targeted for your race and having a family member in prison. I shared stories from my time in school, and they shared their hope of one day going to college too. For five years now, I've been

having dinner with those kids every month. One of them threw me and Priscilla our first baby shower. And next year they're going to college. Every one of them. First in their families.

We can all make time to give someone a hand. Let's give everyone the freedom to pursue their purpose — not only because it's the right thing to do, but because when more people can turn their dreams into something great, we're all better for it.

Purpose doesn't only come from work. The third way we can create a sense of purpose for everyone is by building community. And when our generation says "everyone", we mean everyone in the world.

Quick show of hands: how many of you are from another country? Now, how many of you are friends with one of these folks? Now we're talking. We have grown up connected.

In a survey asking millennials around the world what defines our identity, the most popular answer wasn't nationality, religion or ethnicity, it was "citizen of the world". That's a big deal.

Every generation expands the circle of people we consider "one of us". For us, it now encompasses the entire world.

We understand the great arc of human history bends towards people coming together in ever greater numbers — from tribes to cities to nations — to achieve things we couldn't on our own.

We get that our greatest opportunities are now global — we can be the generation that ends poverty, that ends disease. We get that our greatest challenges need global responses too — no country can fight climate change alone or prevent pandemics. Progress now requires coming together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community.

But we live in an unstable time. There are people left behind by globalization across the world. It's hard to care about people in other places if we don't feel good about our lives here at home. There's pressure to turn inwards.

This is the struggle of our time. The forces of freedom, openness and global community against the forces of authoritarianism, isolationism and nationalism. Forces for the flow of knowledge, trade and immigration

against those who would slow them down. This is not a battle of nations, it's a battle of ideas. There are people in every country for global connection and good people against it.

This isn't going to be decided at the UN either. It's going to happen at the local level, when enough of us feel a sense of purpose and stability in our own lives that we can open up and start caring about everyone. The best way to do that is to start building local communities right now.

We all get meaning from our communities. Whether our communities are houses or sports teams, churches or music groups, they give us that sense we are part of something bigger, that we are not alone; they give us the strength to expand our horizons.

That's why it's so striking that for decades, membership in all kinds of groups has declined as much as one-quarter. That's a lot of people who now need to find purpose somewhere else.

But I know we can rebuild our communities and start new ones because many of you already are.

I met Agnes Igoye, who's graduating today. Where are you, Agnes? She spent her childhood navigating conflict zones in Uganda, and now she trains thousands of law enforcement officers to keep communities safe.

I met Kayla Oakley and Niha Jain, graduating today, too. Stand up. Kayla and Niha started a non-profit that connects people suffering from illnesses with people in their communities willing to help.

I met David Razu Aznar, graduating from the Kennedy School today. David, stand up. He's a former city councilor who successfully led the battle to make Mexico City the first Latin American city to pass marriage equality — even before San Francisco.

This is my story too. A student in a dorm room, connecting one community at a time, and keeping at it until one day we connect the whole world.

Change starts local. Even global changes start small — with people like us. In our generation, the struggle of whether we connect more, whether we achieve our biggest opportunities, comes down to this — your ability to build communities and create a world where every single person has a sense of purpose.

Class of 2017, you are graduating into a world that needs purpose. It's up to you to create it.

Now, you may be thinking: can I really do this?

Remember when I told you about that class I taught at the Boys and Girls Club? One day after class I was talking to them about college, and one of my top students raised his hand and said he wasn't sure he could go because he's undocumented. He didn't know if they'd let him in.

Last year I took him out to breakfast for his birthday. I wanted to get him a present, so I asked him and he started talking about students he saw struggling and said "You know, I'd really just like a book on social justice."

I was blown away. Here's a young guy who has every reason to be cynical. He didn't know if the country he calls home — the only one he's known — would deny him his dream of going to college. But he wasn't feeling sorry for himself. He wasn't even thinking of himself. He has a greater sense of purpose, and he's going to bring people along with him.

It says something about our current situation that I can't even say his name because I don't want to put him at risk. But if a high school senior who doesn't know what the future holds can do his part to move the world forward, then we owe it to the world to do our part too.

Before you walk out those gates one last time, as we sit in front of Memorial Church, I am reminded of a prayer, Mi Shebeirach, that I say whenever I face a challenge, that I sing to my daughter thinking about her future when I tuck her into bed. It goes:

"May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us, help us *find the courage* to make our lives a blessing."

I hope you find the courage to make your life a blessing.

Congratulations, Class of 2017! Good luck out there.

15-Siddhartha Mukherjee

Physician and Author

University of Southern California, 2018

Before I begin, I want you to turn to your left, turn to your right. And congratulate the person next to you, even if you don't know them. Congratulations to graduates of the class of 2018!

Yes, yes, yes; I know what you are now thinking. "Last year, we had Will Ferrell." He was funny, upbeat, quirky – a comic genius. How come we got stuck with the cancer guy?".

But hold that thought for a second, for here we are, on this absolutely glorious morning – and if there's one thing that Mr. Ferrell and I do share, it's this: We are both immensely, immensely honored to be asked to speak to you. And so let me congratulate you, and your families, on what is definitely one of the most memorable days of your life.

In writing this talk, I decided to take a break and play chess with my younger daughter, Aria, who is all of eight years old, and perhaps a future Trojan. It may have been the first time that I had played with her. We made a few perfunctory moves. I traded a pawn for a pawn, and a knight for a knight, and I saw her easing into the rhythm of the game. She made a few clumsy moves and then corrected herself. She almost sacrificed her queen. And then, about an hour into the game, I witnessed something astonishing happened. A dry, wily smile spread over her face – a smile that I had never seen – and she began to play well. Not just well – but very well. Every move that I made was countered by her move. I lost a rook, then a bishop, and then the whole kingdom. "Checkmate," she said triumphantly. And then I realized what had happened in the last half hour. She had learned to see the board through my eyes. She had climbed out of her own head into the crawl space of my head. She was thinking my thoughts before I had them. She was listening to my brain, eavesdropping on my mind.

This talk is not about talking, but about listening.

Let me tell you a very different story: In the early 1950s, the mortality rate from childhood lymphoblastic leukemia – cancer of white blood cells –

was 100 percent. Every child diagnosed with leukemia died. The illness was called a “suppuration of blood”: because doctors thought that the blood had somehow suddenly turned rotten, and, like spoiled milk, there was no way of turning it back.

But two young doctors in their thirties – Emil Frei and Emil Freireich – decided to launch an attack on childhood leukemia. They began to treat the kids with an experimental drug, a highly toxic form of chemotherapy. There was a brief, flickering response, but then all the patients relapsed. But far from backing off, Frei and Freireich doubled down, adding a second, even more, toxic form of chemotherapy. Then they added a third, and then a fourth. The effects of the combination chemo were terrifying – hair loss, infections, bleeding, organ failure. Other doctors began to call their hospital ward “a butcher shop.” The remissions now strengthened to four and then eight months. Yet, still, every child relapsed and died.

It was like playing a cellular chess match – a game against cancer. Every move that they made was met by a counterpoised move; a knight was traded for a knight, a pawn for a pawn. And that’s when Frei and Freireich realized that they had to get into the “mind” of the disease. To solve these relapses, they had to know what game the leukemia was playing before the cancer made its next move. “The best [doctors] seem to have a sixth sense about disease,” one physician wrote. “They feel its presence, know it to be there, they perceive its gravity before any intellectual process can define, catalog, and put it into words.”

“We began to understand its language, and its interior logic,” Frei once told me. And so in the final round of experiments, they instilled chemotherapy directly into the brain and spinal cord of four and five-year-old children. And at last, these children began to be cured. The cure rates climbed magnificently – from forty percent to sixty percent, to seventy percent. Childhood leukemia is now among the most curable forms of cancer – about eighty percent of the time. This cure ranks among the singular achievements of modern medicine. It inspired one doctor to say, “If I had the choice between walking on the moon and curing a child with cancer, I would never look at the moon again.”

Which brings me back to listening. I want to talk to you today about the possibility – the requirement, even – of climbing out of your own heads and into another mind. It seems to me to be a uniquely human capacity (although to be fair, my wife swears that our dog can do it too, but that's just a very smart dog). In fact, I might argue that it's a definingly human capacity – and yet, oddly, there's no word in our language for it.

This kind of listening takes three forms. The first is the kind that I experienced with my daughter. We occasionally term this "empathy" – but we need a different word here, for it could be purely strategic activity, as with my daughter entering my mind to beat me at chess, or a military general entering his or her enemy's head in the midst of a campaign, or a doctor entering the mind of an illness. The important feature of this kind of listening is that it asks you to do something nearly fantastical, like one of those transmorphic beings in Aliens: to abandon your own, private self – your identity, your past, your language – and to acquire the language, identity, skin of another person. What is it like to be him, or her? What is their suffering, or their joy, like? What makes them tick? What if I was born as that woman or that man? In a sense, all human conversation depends on the minor exercise of this faculty: every time we talk, we partly desire to enter each other's heads. This capacity is impaired in the severest forms of mental illness, leading to a person disturbingly unable to function in the world. That's the first kind of listening.

The second involves listening to the past, listening to history – climbing, as it were, into the mind of history. "History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes," is a quote attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to Mark Twain. To understand that rhyme – to comprehend the parts that come back, but with a slightly altered lilt, a slightly altered tone or emphasis – is also a profound form of listening.

The third form of listening is the most abstract. It is listening to nature. It's the kind of listening that scientists aspire to, or artists often talk about: eavesdropping on the universe, learning its natural laws, its geometries, its rhythms, and constancies – its "mind." In medicine, it might take the form of listening to the inner logic of an illness. In physics: listening for

equations that explain the cosmos. In literature: that illuminated moment when you've inhabited the characters on the page, or on the screen, so fully that they begin to speak back to you, like a gang of old friends. At the age of sixteen, Einstein asked himself what it would be to ride a beam of light. That question – what would it be like to inhabit the cosmos at its limits? What would it be like to "BE" light– would drive Einstein's scientific imagination for the rest of his life.

Here's the main point: these three forms of listening – to another mind; to history; to nature – mark your entry into adulthood. You might think of these as the three sides of a uniquely human triangle, or a three-sided portal through which we must all pass: we are the only species that can learn to think like another of our own species; the only one that records and remembers its history; the only one that tries to decipher the laws of the universe. Psychologists speak of the immense transitional moment in a child when he or she acquires a social smile. Does every parent here remember the first time their child acquired their social smile? That's the moment that a child engages the world: she begins to come out of her own head. You might imagine your emergence into adulthood marked by another kind of engagement: by listening. It marks the completion of the "coming out of your own head" that you began, decades ago, with that first smile.

I, for one, had not learned to listen when I graduated from college. It wasn't until three years later, when I was really in the thick of my studies in immunology, that I learned to listen to what an experiment had to say. That's when I made my first scientific discovery – about how viruses and cancers can learn to become invisible to the immune system. They do so, I learned, by tricking an ancient cellular system to recognize their "foreign-ness." I also learned that if you could undo this trick, you might goad your own immune system to detect the virus or cancer again – an idea that has emerged as one of the most exhilarating new themes in biology and medicine. I remember staying up past midnight looking at the radioactive counter tick-tick-ticking, waiting for the groaning old printer that was almost out of ink to print the pages of data, and realizing that I was, in fact,

suddenly eavesdropping into one of the most profound mysteries of biology and the universe.

It took me another four years before I learned to listen to a patient. In the first year of my residency, I cared for a young man with esophageal cancer. Steve was a plumber from North Boston, about thirty-six, and about to get his ninth round of chemo – a dose-dense, intense regimen that required a strict adherence to schedule. But that morning, he just wasn't having it. He'd had a bad day. He came to the hospital and said flatly: "I don't want to fight this war. You fight the war. I don't want to be a casualty. I am not a soldier. I want a cookie".

I learned, that morning, that words like "war" and "soldier" don't work for everyone every time; that the restoration of sanctity and sovereignty and dignity is a goal in and of itself; that the art of doctoring is negotiating with hope. And that when a grown man says he wants a cookie, he wants a cookie. I got Steve his cookie – mint chocolate chip – and asked him to go home and come back next week. The chemo could wait. The hospital could wait. The tests could wait. I could wait. Steve lived for an additional twenty-four months because of his intensive treatments. He got to see his oldest son graduate from high school. But if I had pushed him too hard that morning, I would have lost him as a patient.

And yes – ironically for a medical historian – I learned to listen to history last. I was a first-year fellow in oncology – you know the kind: aloof, exhausted, nose to the ground, the man in scrubs who snaps at you on the subway and tries to solve your crossword –when a woman asked me a question that stunned me: "where are we in this fight, and who is going to win?" And I realized that we had no history of this elemental, shape-shifting illness that has haunted us from the beginning of time. I had no intention of becoming a writer, but that was the day I started writing my book that eventually grew and grew and grew into a 600-page history of cancer.

I am telling you this because I wish someone had told me at my own commencement that the one and only requirement for graduation was not that I had to finish these many credits, or pull those many all-nighters, or

attend these many late night mixers – or, for that matter, survive Drew Caspar's lectures on – but that I had to emerge out of the closed, cordoned-off, space of my own head. This was the sole requirement that no one told me about. I had to learn to listen – to another mind; to nature; to history.

I cannot also help notice that in the past one year or so, we have turned into a nation of bad listeners. I had promised that I would not contaminate this talk with the tawdriness of contemporary politics, but is it possible to ignore the fact that we have stopped listening to each other? Or, for that matter, stopped listening to the lessons of the past, or to natural laws? It seems that every toxic rupture in our culture – our willful depredations on the climate and the environment, the circus of our elected leaders who encourage us to ignore their personal history and national history, or those who take fail to defend the defenseless and who goad us to reject natural laws and facts – is, at its root, a rupture of listening.

Nor can I help noticing that the word "listen" can be rearranged into "silent." Silence is the absolute pre-requisite of listening. It's opposite is not "sound" or "noise" or "cacophony" – but "Tweeting." Perhaps social media was intended, at the distant moment of its inception – oh when was Facebook invented? 1878? – as a means to enable communal listening. But it has, in fact, encouraged a pathological syndrome called "staying inside your own heads." The premium placed on self-curation, on individuality, on identity – who are you? – has created a perpetual echo chamber of self-actualization from which there is seemingly no escape.

But you, of course, will be part of the listening generation. Your predecessors tried – but we could not leave our tiny, reverberating chambers of navel-gazing identity and self-curation. We could not get out of our own heads. We have plenty of tools – social media, cell phones, emails. But we mistook them; these were hearing tools, not listing tools. You, however, are part of the new order. You will learn to hear each other out, learn to inhabit each other's joys and suffering. You will fight on, but you will listen in. Unlike us, you will really defend the defenseless. Unlike us, you will really learn history. You will discover the natural laws that we missed in the midst of our cacophony. You will be the listening generation

– Generation L.

The irony of this talk has not escaped me: I have spent twelve minutes talking to you about… um…listening. Only pathological people speak like this – without listening – so now it's time for you to carry the conversation forward. Congratulations, again, Generation L. Congratulations to your parents, to your friends, to your families, to everyone who supported you. And to yourselves. Go get out of your heads and go out into the world and listen to it. And most importantly: make us listen to you.