

20 years ago, in May 2005, I sat where you are today, on the other side of the podium. Thank you for letting me spend time with you today. You are forever part of the enduring UTampa community, and I'm thrilled to be one of the first to welcome you as new alums!

I've lived in the best of times because I've experienced life on both sides of technological advances that revolutionized our connections to information and people. I've used a rotary phone and typed term papers on a typewriter. I remember listening with anticipation for the screech of a dial up modem. Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where Apple CarPlay has become my favorite technology. Long before it existed, I printed MapQuest directions from a parched printer that always seemed thirsty for ink.

I embrace change and the technology that places a certain **type of connection** in the palm of my hand. But I remember when these hands wrote long letters to faraway family and friends in cursive. We will continue to evolve, but for now our hands are made for more than cradling our phones. Hands are made for shaking other hands and giving reassuring pats on the back.

So how do we use the advancements in the palms of our hands to enhance our connection to family, friends, business partners, customers and even the casual acquaintances psychologists call "weak ties?" In 1973 sociologist Mark Granovetter wrote that weak ties can be a source of "diffusion of influence and information, mobility, opportunity, and community organization." A practical application for all of us UTampa alums is to stay connected and make introductions as our ties grow.

I earned my last master's degree in a hybrid program at Northwestern's Medill school of journalism, media and integrated marketing communications. I completed 80% of my coursework online. One of my favorite memories is the excitement I shared with my Medill classmates when we met in person for the first time after months of video meetings and discussion boards. Technology forged the bond that led to that exciting interpersonal connection.

Regardless of our degrees of separation, or strength of the personal ties between us, we are all connected through UTampa. Here are some reflections from this side of the podium shared with the hope of strengthening our tie.

**1. The "BIG ONE": You are prepared.** French microbiologist and chemist Louis Pasteur said, "Chance favors the prepared mind." The catch? You cannot know exactly what you've prepared for. But your education, experience and relationships provide you with the resources to handle the surprises along the way.

**2. You might be thinking, nice pep talk, but make it concrete.** Here you go:

- Even during times of great uncertainty, you are prepared to **solve problems;**
- to **calmly lead others through chaos and uncertainty;**
- to **face and effect change.**

You don't have all the answers. Don't let that deter you. Be humble and awestruck by how much you have yet to learn. Commit to lifelong learning. Learn from others and teach others.

**3. When you don't know what to do, START.** Do something. Do anything. Throw away the “easy” button. **Hit the “start” button.** Embrace ambiguity and the world outside your comfort zone to keep growing through opportunities disguised as problems.

**4. Reach out.** Call someone. Text someone. **Meet** with someone.

Your UTampa community is a powerful network. People care about you and your success. To mix metaphors, when the rug gets pulled out from under you, grab a few threads from it and ride them like a magic carpet to bring you back to this place in time full of possibilities and potential.

Today you celebrate your achievements, connections and memories made at UTampa. Experience all the emotions. Live in the moment. And be sure to use your technology to memorialize and share it all. Congratulations! And remember: you are prepared!