

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
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President Vaughn, Board of Trustees, faculty, staff of the University, family, friends, and most importantly the graduating class of 2010, I want to say thank you for giving me the honor of addressing you today. It was just 18 years ago that I sat in your seat celebrating the same great achievement that you have gotten today by earning your degree. I came to the University of Tampa as a foreign student, and I have to admit that I did not really know anything about Tampa, or much about the United States for that matter. I did know that the UT was a great private school where I would be given personal attention and a chance to get a great education. In terms of the United States I knew it was the greatest country on earth and that it was the land of opportunity. I am pleased to say that I feel stronger about both of these facts today than when I first arrived on campus.

I came to Tampa with one suitcase and a passion to complete my degree. I am half Swedish, half Lebanese, married to a Texan so my son, Christian, is confused. We are trying to encourage him to marry someone from South America, Africa, or Australia to continue the expansion of the continents; as cultural diversity is very important to us.

I realize that I don't recall who gave the commencement address at my graduation and so the likelihood that you will remember this is slim to none. Nonetheless as I was

preparing my remarks I wanted to provide you with one thing that has helped me in my life, and I hope will help you along your journey as well. ***Live Fearlessly and Without Regret.*** I'll break it down to a few simple pieces.

In order to “Live Fearlessly & Without Regret you need to BELIEVE:

Believe in yourself, your values, and what you want to achieve. Always do the right thing and in accordance with your own beliefs. Never let anyone else tell you what is possible, right, or give you any other reason that you don't believe. This does not mean that you might not need to compromise along the way but never compromise on your key beliefs. This is what makes you who you are, and if you compromise on that you will be lost. I believe that anything is possible and that most things are even probable.

When I was starting off my career I worked for Ericsson. I had a great stint with them in the first couple of years as I was sent off to a management class. I went and the recommendation was that I be given a task at which I would fail. This was supposed to teach me how to handle failure. My bosses weren't too happy about this as I was having great success and exceeding our targets. Since corporate mandated it I was given a project with no chance of succeeding. Ericsson did not have the technology to make this happen nor was I given any people to help me; since I was supposed to fail. For nine months I woke up every day and told myself I would not fail and that I was going to find a solution to the customer's problem. I failed for months trying everything to find the right solution. It looked like I was going to meet the objective of the exercise, but I kept going from failure to failure, never giving up, before I found the right solution. We ultimately signed a five year, \$500 million contract. Although I was asked everyday "Are you done failing so you can get back to work?" I never let it discourage me.... Because I believed it could be done and that I was the person to do it.

In order to “Live Fearlessly & Without Regret you need to: TAKE RISK, EXPLORE & CHALLENGE YOURSELF:

The amount of information we consume and process is growing exponentially. What you take for granted today was just a dream 20 years ago. Google, Facebook, Twitter, ebooks, e-mail for the masses, and cell phones that do everything from e-mail to search the web were but a dream. Just imagine how exciting the next 20 years are going to be for you. Dare to dream, envision the possibilities and make them a reality. Your greatest asset for the next few years is that you are armed with a great education but don't know yet what can't be done. This is the greatest combination any person can ask for. The knowledge to logically think through a problem but the naivety to not know it can't be done. This is what fuels innovation in every aspect of a work environment. For most people this skill is quickly lost as we get wiser with time and realize that things just can't be done. For the few of you who retain this "skill" you will have a life more rewarding than anything you can imagine, both personally and professionally. If you dare to dream... failure is just a bump in the road.

Exploring possibilities, taking risks, by definition, puts you outside of your comfort zone. This is what challenges you to become better than what you are. Having lived in eight countries and growing up with a traditional Catholic Lebanese father and a liberal Swedish Protestant mother I knew only one thing: That there was not necessarily one right answer, only different ways to look at the same issue. My wife, a traditional Texas Baptist conservative, sees things in black and white, right and wrong; yet she loves me unquestionably. She challenges me, and I her. She makes me a better person and informed because I may not see the issue the same way she does. Whether I agree with her or not at the end is irrelevant, but the important part is that I understand and respect her opinion. Of course if you ask her what she says is not opinion at all but fact... which only further underscores my point.

On a professional level being challenged is best done by surrounding yourself with the smartest people possible. People that will challenge your thinking and force you to up your game.

For every success story we hear about from Google to Apple to the University of Tampa there are 10 that did not make it. As in business, in life, there are two kinds of people; those who play to win, and those who play not to lose. If you explore, take risks and challenge yourself everyday to be just a bit better than you were yesterday, then playing to win is the only option. The easy path is to play it safe, stay in your comfort zone, and to try only the tried and true. This is not a bad life, I am not making judgments, but you will be so much more satisfied if you just explore a little more every day.

I told you about the deal at Ericsson. I was on top of the world. My father, a 40-year veteran of Ericsson (and my greatest advisor), could not have been prouder, my management were high fiving, and my coworkers were congratulating me in the hallways. My career was just about to sling shot into overdrive, the future looked bright, and I could have written my own ticket..... Two weeks later I quit. I joined a no name start-up company I had run across in the previous year that I thought had great potential, but needed a whole new business plan. It was a company that had no real staff and no real market capitalization..... Sounds like a smart plan, right? Even my father tried to talk me out of it, and when he couldn't, he told me that this was the dumbest thing he had ever heard but if that was my final decision he would stand behind me as he and my mother had always done, albeit unwillingly. I was not ready for this job, the company was not ready, and we had to change everything while moving the company forward. The best way to describe it is that it is like changing the tires on the car while it is still in motion. In one year we added 250 people, signed a five-year, \$780 million deal and sold the company to Nortel for \$450 million. Career-wise this was against every philosophy, book, and advisor's recommendation. Personally, I wanted to take risk, explore, and challenge myself. The fact that it was a success is always appreciated, but I satisfied my own need to prove it could be done which was a reward in and of itself.

In order to “Live Fearlessly & Without Regret you need to have PASSION:

For everything in life you need to have passion. Life is a beautiful gift to be cherished..... Think of the alternative. We are truly blessed and belong to a small minority that has graduated from college, and an even smaller group who have been blessed to attend UT. Upon earning my masters degree, I went to interview with a company that makes razors and shaving cream. I already had a job at Ericsson but had never really gone through a formal interview process. They offered me a job in NY responsible for the Middle East, since I spoke both English and Arabic and understood both cultures. It was three times the salary that I would make at Ericsson.... I gracefully declined their offer. They were in shock and wanted to know if more money would change my mind. I kindly told them that it was not the money, which was more than generous, but I had no passion for razors and shaving cream. I could not picture myself waking up every morning and thinking about razors and shaving cream. I loved technology and specifically, communications technology. It strengthened me to think about how technology could be used to connect people and simplify the human interaction. It took me years to earn the same salary as I was offered that day before I had even graduated. It was the best decision I have ever made.

I hope that you look at your life and find the thing that you have passion for. Maybe it is razors and shaving cream. If so, I still have their number. Maybe it is the selling process itself or bringing a product or service to market. Maybe it is curing disease, helping others, teaching, or coaching sports. Whatever you have passion for is what you should do.

I have never met anyone that was successful who did not have an overwhelming passion for what they were doing. They believed in it. It showed and people were naturally drawn to them in this capacity. People who chase things that are material end up being the most miserable people you have ever met. These are the people who chase the paycheck, what other people tell them they should do, or what is expected of them by

others. If you end up doing what you love then your happiness is contagious and everything else in life will seem easier.

I wish you this type of passion.

On a personal side I married the woman I love and look at her with wonder every day. How many of you have a partner without any flaws or nothing you would change... The key is to focus on all the things that you love about your partner and put the small things to the side. These usually revolve around such important items as...squeezing the tooth paste just right, toilet seats being left up or down, cereal boxes being left open, and clothes on the floor... Maybe I am just talking about myself. I am lucky since we are still on our honeymoon. After 11 years of marriage we are still wearing rose-colored glasses, and I could not ask for a more supportive partner. She is not perfect, but neither am I so all that matters is that we are perfect together. Together we produced perfection in our 8-year-old son, Christian.

In order to “Live Fearlessly & Without Regret you need to Dare to take risks & Pick your Paths To quote one of our great philosophers.... Yogi Berra ... “When you come to a fork in the road take it.” Life is full of choices you have to make every day. Whatever the choice dare to choose a path, take risk, and never regret the paths you did NOT take.... Remember every day that you wake up above ground is a day you can make choices to alter your path..... The most important part of any journey is to start, don't wait for the perfect conditions to line up before you get going or you will stand still. The journey may be windy and you may feel like you have made no progress from time to time but just like walking against the wind in a Tampa storm you will get there if you remain committed to, and focused on, the final destination.

A number of years ago I had a great passionate young manager who worked for me. I was having problems with one of my departments and had replaced several managers in this job. I brought him into my office and I offered him a deal. He could run his department forever and do very well in that capacity or he could take over this problem department, as well as his current job, but there was a catch. He had 90 days to fix it and if he could not then he would lose both jobs. This new job was outside of his comfort zone in both skill and experience. I knew he could do it but I needed him to know it. He thought about it for a few seconds and agreed to take on the challenge. He did a great job and exceeded my expectations. He is today a VP within my company and has all of the potential to one day take my job. This is a story of taking opportunities when they are presented to you. Life is full of opportunities but most people are too afraid to fail to take them when they are presented. Not all opportunities will work out as well as the one I just gave you, but even if it doesn't, it will be a valuable learning experience. DON'T REGRET ANYTHING. If you can look yourself in the mirror every day and be happy with what you see and what you have done (no regrets) then every day is a blessing.

I am reminded of the great Winston Churchill talking about success where he said ***"Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."*** Failure will happen along your journey. Embrace it and look at it as part of your path to success.

So To summarize: Live Fearlessly & Without Regret:

Believe in yourself, take risks, explore, and challenge yourself every day, have passion and do the things that strengthen you, make choices and pick your paths. Life is short... never regret what you can't change ... but always look at it as a learning experience for what you can.

I will end with my favorite quote from Michelangelo that says:

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high... and we miss it..... but that it is too low... and we reach it”

I HOPE YOU WILL AIM HIGH