

University of Tampa
Spring Commencement, May 6, 2017

Talia, thank you for that warm and gracious introduction. President Vaughn, members of the board of trustees, faculty, and, most importantly, graduates, family, and friends, it is indeed an honor and a privilege for me to address the 2017 graduating class of my alma mater, the University of Tampa. Giving this speech is not just an extraordinary honor, but the weeks of the fear coupled by nausea I have had at the thought of giving this commencement address have made me lose weight. A win-win situation! So again thank you.

My years at the University of Tampa brought me some of my most cherished relationships and memories, to include meeting my husband, father of my four children and best friend, Reed Black. Though my husband didn't go to the University of Tampa, we met in Plant Hall or should I say because of Plant Hall. I met my Husband Reed while he was finishing his master's degree in Architecture from the Univ of Florida. We met because he was drawing Plant Hall as part of his master thesis. That award-winning drawing is now in the Library of Congress part of the collections of Historic American Building Survey. Today that drawing also is seen all over campus and is on the final page of the commencement program. Plant Hall, this University, and the wonderful staff will always hold fond memories for both of us and will always be part of who we are. I feel very fortunate to be an alumni of this wonderful institution.

I graduated from the University of Tampa 34 years ago, and to be honest with you; I don't remember the speaker at my commencement that day or a single word he or she said. This liberating discovery allows me to proceed without any fear

that I might inadvertently influence you in the wrong way. I do remember how anxious I was to get my diploma; I remember I didn't feel great maybe I celebrated a bit too much the night before. So I will keep it short, try to deliver value and quickly get to the point. I also have to confess I am at an advantage to most speakers, as Talia mentioned I host a radio show and the very last question we have asked over 150 guests is what advice they would give to their younger self as they crossed the graduation stage. These guests are a cross section of some of the most successful women in the most powerful city in the world. So I am totally going to cheat here and borrow from the wisdom they have shared sprinkled with my life experiences. I will share with you the top 3.

Number one, **Be true to who you are and trust yourself.**

Find a career you love, and you will find a passion that delivers you success. Until I was preparing for today; I had forgotten the University of Tampa's motto; *Esse Quam videri* which in Latin means To be rather than to seem. To translate, Be who you are not what people want you to be. When I sat in your seat 34 years ago, I had finally figured out what I wanted to study but not sure how that translated into what I would do for a living. See I had changed my major five times and finally settled on a double major in Information Systems and Business. I loved technology but didn't realize how much I wanted to work with and help people. I got my first job at a large technology company as a software engineer. My family, my friends all very proud of me. I was hired to work on a project for a major defense think tank Programming in ADA. A pretty geeky job. The company had a shortage of engineers that worked with Sales, so I got asked to sub in a few times on sales presentations. I began to do more Sales presentations than the job I was hired to do. So after a few months of this activity my boss pulled me aside and told me I was doing well

but he bet me within a year I would or should request to move into sales. He said I was the top requested Engineer by the sales team because the customers loved my passion. I laughed, and I told him never. He then bet for lunch that I would change my mind. Well, 12 months later as I transferred into a sales position, I had to pay up on that bet and take him to a top restaurant in the DC area. So there is really two lessons here never make a bet with your boss without working out the details, that lunch was very expensive. The more important point, be true to who you are, and sometimes you find out what that means to you by the experience not by what you know or been told. Find what makes you passionate, and you will never work a day in your life.

The second is **Don't Fear Failure but Fear not having the courage to try.**

My dad gave me some valuable advice. He said, In the real world you don't always win. You need to gain experience from your failures to help you prepare to try again. You only fail if you don't try or you give up.

Failures are points of opportunity and change. These are moments of time when things don't go as planned and you are out of your comfort zone, but these are also the time you grow the most. Don't fight that. Beth Killoran CIO of HHS said it best during her radio interview. Cherish your failures and your successes. I love it **CHERISH** your failures.....

Face it, every one of us is going to fail every once in awhile if you are going to live a life that is full. So really why worry about it anyway? When looking at the biographies of extraordinarily successful people, you will see that the number of failures are numerous but so are their accomplishments, successes and valuable contributions.

Here are some famous failures when I Googled:

Abraham Lincoln lost his job in 1832, was a business failure in 1833 and was defeated in eight elections (1838 – 1858) before becoming President

Thomas Edison's Wrote that he "discovered six thousand ways that won't work" while developing the light bulb.

Walt Disney was fired from his job and was told it was for lack of imagination.

John Grisham was rejected by twelve publishing houses and sixteen agents before his first novel was accepted.

The Beatles were turned down by their recording company telling them that "[. . .] guitar music is on their way out".

Michael Jordan In High School He was cut from the basketball team.

These folks failed long before they became successful people. This was part of their personal journey to become a CEO, inventor, and Sports icon. Without their failures, who knows if they could have reached such heights of success. Those that never failed in life are the ones that no one really remembers.

My final point is about **embracing change** and is probably my personal favorite. I am going to quote one of my favorite guest from the show, Joanne Chiedi, principal inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services "If you can help change the future, you will help guide your career,"

I have read many articles stating that the economic possibilities for this generation are not as great as your parents. Ken Hakuta put it best- People will try to tell you that all the great opportunities have been snapped up. In reality, the world changes every second and with that change blows in opportunities including yours. Let's face it growth and change can be painful. But nothing is as painful as staying where you

don't belong. Embrace change, be a change agent.

Change is a huge ingredient of being successful. Not only is change good, but these days the acceleration is increasingly at a more rapid pace than ever before. While it took 75 years for 100 million users to adopt the telephone, it only took four and a half for the Internet and a few days for Pokemon go.

In my 30 plus year career in technology, I have run to change using it to accelerate my career and to reach the success that I could not have imagined 34 years ago. I have always sought out technology that was disruptive but yet productive. Over the next decade, there is not a job or a part of our lives that won't change or be touched by advances in technology. I read an eye-popping statistic that 65% of today's grade school students will work in jobs that don't exist yet, Then folks your jobs will also drastically change.

As Mark Cuban recently stated about one aspect of evolving technology:

“Artificial Intelligence, deep learning, machine learning— whatever you're doing if you don't understand it—learn it. Because otherwise, you're going to be a dinosaur within 3 years.”

Now I am not telling you to run out and learn AI , I am suggesting you look at change or the integration of technology that will bring positive and productive disruption of your field of choice and embrace it. Learn how to leverage it. Technology advances like AI will eliminate some jobs but for the most part change how we do our jobs. If you embrace it at the minimum, it will make you better or more effective at your job and more valuable employee. Your generation has grown up from day one using technology this makes your generation uniquely qualified to leverage change created by new technologies. Embrace change as the platform to further your success.

In closing, I want to congratulate all of you! Be proud of your academic achievement. You are now members of an elite club of the Alumni of the University of Tampa. To the parents, grandparents, family and friends, congratulations to you, as well. You've contributed in countless ways to this momentous achievement. As a board member of the USO, I would additionally like to make a very special thank you to all of you joining the military or going into careers in public service. We are indebted to you for your service, your sacrifice and working to make a difference in our world at a time we need it more than ever.

As I close each radio show,
Thank you for listening.

I wish each of you success to reach your dreams and beyond.