

**Javier A. Baldor University of Tampa Commencement Address (Final)**  
**College of Business and College of Arts and Letters**  
**May 7, 2022**

President Vaughn, distinguished platform guests, family, friends, and loved ones and the Class of 2022, thank you very much for the distinct honor to speak before you all on this very special day marking a tremendous achievement and milestone in your young lives. I am truly humbled by this privilege. I must say I do not recognize the University of Tampa today as it is stunning in its beauty and what has unfolded since I graduated is truly amazing and transformational.

I would like to begin by sharing a little bit of my background with you all today. I was born in Boston but have lived just about my whole life in Tampa. I grew up in a local neighborhood called Town and Country; I went on to Jesuit High School and ultimately graduated from the University of Tampa with a degree in business.

I vividly remember my mom telling me one morning in my senior year of high school that after classes, we were going to the provost office at UT so I can sign some papers. I had an academic scholarship and would have the opportunity to walk on and play baseball at UT as well. There would be no other college visits and that simple meeting would be one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life. You see, I did take my education very seriously while I was here, but I must admit that I also had a very good time as well (maybe too much fun if you were to ask my parents back then), which I am sure is the case for many of you all as well.

My older brother, Carlos, who will deliver the commencement address this afternoon, and my late younger sister Ana Maria, were also distinguished graduates of the University of Tampa. My father-in-law, Thomas Spack, is also in attendance today for this special event. Thomas is a graduate of the Class of 1956 and a legendary football player at UT.

I went on to play baseball at UT in 1986 and 1987 and had the opportunity to play for a team that went to the Division II College World Series in 1986 in Montgomery, Alabama. This would also be the first time in my life I had ever been on a plane at the age of 19.

Fast forward, I would go on to travel the world over the last 25 years including visits to more than 35 countries on 5 continents while setting up our businesses in the UK, Europe, Asia and Australia.

Today I am going to share with you three things. These are the tenets with stories from the people that have helped shape my life. You see I believe we are all on this journey of life. It is a journey filled with incredible highs and some very difficult times as well. To me the journey of life is not at all about accumulating assets or ascending to the highest level of this company or that organization by any means possible. It is rather about somehow finding a way to make a true impact on the lives of those you love, those you know or perhaps those you have never even met. Your impacts can last well beyond our days here on earth. Let's begin.

### **1. Dream Really, Really “Big”**

What does this mean? I learned this from my beloved late sister Ana Maria Baldor-Bunn who passed away at the age of 30 from rare cancer in 2002. I believe that God places a dream in each and every one of us. Some of these dreams are very big; these dreams are specifically for you and no one else. Often many of us wonder if we can actually achieve our dream, or our calling in life. I vividly remember Ana telling me that she wanted to have two things: 1. She wanted a large family; and 2. She wanted to open a baby store. I looked at Ana and simply told her:

“Are you crazy?”

I then shared every logical reason I could come up with why opening a baby store was not a good idea; she had just been diagnosed with cancer and the treatments would be very difficult, let alone dealing with traditional business challenges. Ana listened to me intently and then said she was going to do it anyway. Ana did not just imagine her dreams, she realized them; she lived them with the birth of her beloved son William, who just graduated with a business degree from FSU, and the opening of her baby store called MiBebe. I share her story and dream here today because Ana would have delivered an amazing commencement speech in her own right. Ana, you see, was the best one of us all.

My dream was first to be a great father, just like my late father had been, and at the same time, help to grow the business he had started many years ago with literally \$100 in his pocket.

I wanted to play a part in building a global software company that could support the dreams of hundreds of families and stand the test of time. I also wanted to be there for my kids along the way by coaching their baseball teams for nearly a decade and be present for all their events, while simultaneously traveling the world on business.

What is the dream that you have in your heart? Whether you are 22 and graduating from college like many of you are today, or 30, 40 or even 70 years old it is never too late to realize your dream.

You just need to believe in yourself when no one else does. Tenacity, commitment and dedication to your dream is what it takes, along with working very hard. In due time, your dreams can come true.

## **2. Love, Be Kind & Have a Big Heart**

As you look around you today, realize that you are very blessed. Many of you are surrounded by family and friends that love you for who you are. They have supported you in some cases for many years, to help you achieve this tremendous milestone in your life. Take a moment to genuinely thank them at some point today.

I believe that you simply cannot achieve anything of consequence without the love and support of so many. I would not be here today without the unconditional love of my parents, my wife Cindy Nell, my children, my family, friends and business colleagues.

I learned very early on in my life that you need to give your whole heart to your family, your friends and also those you work with. These are the very people that you spend your life with each and every day.

You will soon be making important decisions that will impact the rest of your life as well.

- Who your partner or significant other will be?
- What will you do for the rest of your life? Many of you will work for the next 40 years or so. That is about 80,000 working hours, 3,333 days or 4.8 million minutes. Why not do what you love and do it with people that you love and respect? This is your life and your dreams, after all.

You will also run across people that will not do well by you. This, I can guarantee. However, the key is to simply always give more than you get, be grateful for what you have and always focus on the best in people.

Just be kind and have a big heart. Love those around you and love what you do. Ultimately, a happy life will take shape and fall into place.

### **3. Always Have Faith, Hope & Persevere**

I have been through many things in my life and experienced tremendous joys; I've also experienced difficult times like many of you here today. I learned first-hand the importance of faith, hope and perseverance from my parents as they had emigrated to the United States from Cuba to escape the Castro Communist regime in 1960, with literally nothing.

In 2020, as everyone was witnessing and living through a devastating global pandemic, my father was courageously battling cancer. He was the patriarch of our family and the founder of our family business as well. On August 5, 2020, he passed away at home, and my brother and I would need to take the helm of a business that my father had run for nearly 50 years against the backdrop of a global pandemic.

Just a few months later, on December 28, 2020, my youngest son Javi, who had just turned 21 in recent days, suffered a near-sudden death heart attack at home a little after 5 A.M. A virus had attacked his heart, and my wife had found him unresponsive at our home. I performed CPR on him until the paramedics arrived. Javi would be put into a coma nearby at Tampa General Hospital to save his brain, cognitive function and life.

According to doctors, my son is a living miracle that cannot be medically explained as he literally had a 1 in a million chance of surviving and being fully

restored. Javi is our miracle child as he has made a complete recovery and is finishing his studies this Fall at FSU.

I share this with you all today as many of you will be tested in life in many different ways. Some of which you may understand and much of which you will not. I believe what helped me through this tsunami of hardships was the very faith, hope and perseverance that my parents had instilled in me so many years ago.

I truly believe that with God, all things are possible, and you need to always have hope that things will get better and persevere until they do.

My late father had a poem that he gave to us when we were very young. He always stressed the importance of having resilience and perseverance. I will share this poem with you all today. It is called "Don't Quit."

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high  
And you want to smile but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
As everyone of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about  
When he might have won had he stuck it out;  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow –  
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out –  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
And you can never tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems so far;  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

In closing, I congratulate you all on this extraordinary achievement. Always remember this day and to:

1. Dream really, really “Big”
2. Love, be kind and have a big heart
3. Always turn to your faith, have hope and persevere

I cannot promise you what kind of life you will have but I can say that if you do these things, you will live a life well-lived. I wish you all a long and blessed life filled with peace, health and happiness.

May God bless you all.