

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

Commencement Address by Ariel Acosta-Rubio (Class of 1984)
CO-FOUNDER/PRESIDENT AND CEO of CHURROMANIA
Saturday, May 10, 2014
Tampa Bay Times Forum

*Members of the Board of Trustees
Faculty, Staff and Students
Members of the graduating class of 2014
Parents, Family and Friends
Distinguished Guests*

Thank you Amita G Rajuru for that generous introduction.

Thank you to the Board of Trustees, faculty, parents and friends, and especially my fellow Spartans, the Class of 2014. How are my Spartans FEELING?

I am so proud to be an alumnus of this great University. Like many colleges, this fine institution is a melting pot of different cultures united by the same objective --- (pause) to prepare those that are gathered here today to enter a world that WILL appreciate YOUR talent and knowledge.

I am SO excited to share in all your academic achievements and celebrate your accomplishments, alongside this renowned university.

- I want to know how many of you were born in the United States? Please raise your hands!
- How many of you are International Students?
- How many of you are Hispanic?
- Well, I think that's everyone. CONGRATULATIONS!

I want you to know that I am the son of a Cuban father and a Puerto Rican mother. I was born and raised in Venezuela and I came to the University of Tampa as an International Exchange Student without speaking or writing any English. (I still struggle with the English language as you will learn today.)

I have to confess when The University of Tampa reached out and informed me that I would be delivering the commencement speech... the first word that entered my mind was --- **FINALLY!!!** I was not able to contain my emotion. You see, I did not attend my own college graduation due to work demands and LIVE this unforgettable moment. My degree arrived in the mail.

At that time, I thought that it was more important to start a job then attend my graduation. It's amazing how the universe works in mysterious ways and life always has a surprise in store.

Thirty years later, I am wearing my cap & gown and celebrating this IMPORTANT day with you.

I thank the committee for this invitation.

Today, I hold the honor of being the first international Hispanic graduate who is speaking at the 138th commencement of this fine institution.

While today is graduation day, tomorrow is another important day. We celebrate Mother's Day. Class of 2014, please give a *round of applause* to your Moms. Know that you owe them everything. My mother is here today, Zelma. She thought she had seen it all at 85 years-old. She came here especially today to see me wear my cap & gown.

So, I have wrapped my heart and mind about what I want to say to you. I have wondered why The University of Tampa **chose me**. All I have to share is my OWN story, but how do I keep you entertained?

I don't want you to remember me as the speaker who is finally wearing his cap & gown. I want you to remember this speech through a message, what I share with you today to serve as inspiration.

What I am... is a mere mortal. Just like you. I have flaws. I am not perfect. At the same time though, I do have three ideas I want you to remember:

Here is the first one:

1. LESSON ONE: Failure - You will FAIL and likely hit rock bottom (once or over and over)

Did you know that I failed second grade?

I'm not kidding. The same teacher who failed me in second grade also failed me in fourth grade. I remember that this teacher also taught Geography, a subject I had a lot of trouble with.

However, after opening more than 140 CHURROMANIA stores in 7 countries, in more than 50 cities around the world ... I finally learned MY Geography lesson. I sometimes think my Geography teacher is in heaven sighing and excited that I finally learned.

The great thing about failing is that you LEARN. Don't ever take FAILURE for granted. Know that it is not FOREVER.

When you fail, you may discover a hidden skill inside you that will make you more resilient, resourceful and a stronger person.

How ironic that years later, after failing second and fourth grade, my classmates chose me to give the graduation speech at our ceremony.

When I arrived on campus at the University of Tampa as an International Exchange Student,

I had BIG dreams and many ideas. I decided that I would graduate early so I did not take any summer breaks, which allowed me to graduate in three and a half years. I did this to be able to return to work in Venezuela.

After I received my degree in a Bachelor's of Business Management with a minor in Economics,

I went to work for several companies and sought the advice of many mentors along the way; my most important mentor was -- my father. I always knew I wanted to create my own path and be an Entrepreneur just like my father. Many "careers" came and went and then at the age of 33, I found myself UNEMPLOYED.

I could not find a job in Venezuela and I decided to come to Miami in search of a job.

I worked on my resume, met with MANY headhunters and NO-ONE ever called me. I felt like a FAILURE! I was desperate and I felt USELESS. I felt as if I hit rock bottom. I stopped feeling bad for myself and decided I would create my own job opportunity.

I painted houses, cleaned buildings and looked for other opportunities to make ends meet.

Until one day, I had the opportunity to make an investment purchase and buy a tiny retail space in a mall.

I partnered with my wife, Maria Alejandra Bravo and her cousin, Miguel Bravo. Miguel suggested that we open a Churro & Coffee store in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela.

This is when my story started to change.

From rock bottom, I began to DREAM again and my second opportunity (adventure) was just starting.

2. Lesson Two – Dream.

The moment: "when we dare to dream."

Or, also when IMAGINATION meets ATTRACTION, too.

When Miguel, came to me with this idea to open up a Churro & Coffee store, I thought why not?

Our team began to dream and visualize the future. We set a clear goal --- TAKE CHURROMANIA to every corner in Venezuela and the rest of the world.

We used the power of visualization to imagine and to dream our future. To do this, you have to set aside time to be in silence with your thoughts. We were dedicated and were persistent in our practice. After we opened our first store in late 1997, a close friend of ours saw the potential in our tiny shop and gave me a book that would help establish CHURROMANIA to the next level.

The book told the story of how McDonald's came to be.

I read this book every night; it became my bedtime story. I was transported into the future and I could actually visualize our small business growing. *I wondered if McDonald's can do it, so can we!*

In 2001, CHURROMANIA had opened several stores in Miami and our headquarters were located in Brickell, Florida. It's funny how I found myself having our corporate office stationed on the same avenue in which years prior, I desperately looked for a job.

Now, I provide jobs for individuals in the United States and in seven other countries.

The CHURROMANIA story continues... we have grown so much that here in Tampa, my dream is a reality.

Near this University, there are three happy entrepreneurs creating jobs for others, sharing in our vision, and helping us bring our store to every corner in the world.

As John T. Edge stated in his book: 'Donuts an American Passion.'

"By the time you read this, CHURROMANIA ® may have opened a store in your local mall. Already there are whispers in the Hispanic community that this could be the Hispanic Krispy Kreme. "

We keep dreaming and believing in what's to come. However, when you dream you should seek stability and balance.

3. Lesson Three: SEEKING BALANCE:

Choose wisely the people with whom you share your life with. This may sound like **mom advice** but it's true.

If you choose the right individuals and partner, they will help you execute your dreams.

They become the balance that you seek when pursuing your dreams.

Who is the person I credit? My wife, Maria Alejandra.

She is an architect and a lawyer and she prefers to be called Laly.

The success I have accomplished as an entrepreneur and a family man—I own in part to her.

Together, we made our dreams a reality. We have a beautiful family, two children, Tadeo and Mateo. We worked together from scratch (ZERO) to build the world's largest Churro franchise, generating jobs to more than 1,000 people in seven countries in which we have operated in the last 17 years.

Our new DREAM is to open 200 new stores in the next five years within the United States.

We have formed partnerships with Walmart and Pepsi, who are betting on our success.

In the end, we are responsible for making our dreams come true.

So, hitting rock bottom at 33 (being unemployed, rejected) was part of the story. In the end it ACTUALLY prompted me to DREAM of a new POSSIBILITY and strike a balance for moving forward.

My dear Spartans, it is you who NOW has the opportunity to shape the FUTURE and provide growth for your communities and your countries. You are RESPONSIBLE for living your dream and becoming the LEADERS of TODAY and TOMORROW.

We believed that our dreams have come true. I helped make popular a new food category that competes with larger chains. We bring joy to children and adults who crave the nostalgia of a sweet churro.

I hope this story (my speech) inspires you to go after what you want, believe in your dream, set a path that will enable you to change the world.

Revel and absorb in the day's energy. I wish you much success and wonderful lives.

If you do not recall any of the words I shared with you, I will leave you with the following quote:

***“The world needs dreamers and
The world needs doers. But above all,
The world needs dreamers who do”.***
Sarah Ban Breathnach.

But I do hope that when you encounter a CHURROMANIA store anywhere in the world, you will recall the story heard today.

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