

University of Tampa

Commencement Address

May 7, 2016

Thank you Griffin, for the kind and very flattering, introduction. If my mother was alive today and heard that, even she would be proud of me.

Let me start by saying thanks to President Vaughn and the Board of Trustees for granting me this opportunity. There is no single honor greater than being invited back to your alma mater to deliver the Commencement Address—and I am humbled to be standing before you today.

More importantly, I want to congratulate each one of you in The University of Tampa Class of 2016 on the successful completion of your journey here at UT. What you have learned and experienced during the course of completing your degree, whether Bachelors or Masters, will

forever be well-earned achievements as you move on into the next chapter of your life.

Over the past 9 years of serving as a Trustee of The University of Tampa, I have had the opportunity to listen to some memorable Commencement Addresses. I heard Helen Johnson Sirleaf tell us about being a “Desperate Housewife” when she was a teenager mother who overcame extraordinary challenges to become the first female President of the previously war-torn African nation of Liberia--and became a Nobel Peace Prize winner. I listened to John Sykes tell us how families are the “air beneath our wings.” I was moved when Kristen Price, another UT alum and Professor and Chair of the Critical Care Department at Houston’s famed MD Anderson Cancer Center, advised us to “call your mother----call your mother often.” And some of you may have been here when Ariel Acosta-Rubio urged the 2014 graduates not to be afraid to fail, because life’s lessons can be learned best by trying and failing--and then trying again.

So--as a rather unremarkable University of Tampa economics major who collected his share of mediocre grades during my years here, I wondered what I might say that you can take away from this special gathering today to use in the years ahead. (PAUSE) Here is my suggestion: With hard work and a commitment to do their best, “ordinary people can do extraordinary things.”

O.K. How do we go about doing that?

One important element is perseverance. “Perseverance” is defined as “being steadfast in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success”. With perseverance, we can often move past naysayers and inevitable hurdles and overcome incredible odds. As a good example of perseverance, I have to tell you that The University of Tampa Class of 2016 has a special place in my heart because a very special woman whom I met on this campus in 1967 and married in

1970—Liz MacLeod--is one of your fellow graduates. (PAUSE) Liz was a Junior when I graduated, but we married and left UT so I could start my career and later attend graduate school, but she has been a critical element in my life. I am so proud of her today as she finishes the journey she started 49 years ago.

A second element of how ordinary people can sometimes achieve extraordinary things can be found in the words of country music singer Tim McGraw. Tim tells us: “Always be humble and kind”. Yes, all of us here today—whether as a 2016 graduate or as a parent or spouse or partner of a graduate--can be justly proud of what we have accomplished in life. But real life successes come more often when we possess a humble spirit. So, as you gain knowledge and experience and, perhaps, riches, remember to share them with others.

It’s not hard to find some good examples. As I look around our beautiful campus, I see buildings named for some of the most

successful-- and humble-- members of the UT community. People such as David Straz, Howard and Patricia Jenkins, John and Susan Sykes, the Dickies, Governor Bob Martinez, President Ron Vaughn, Maureen Daly and many others. These are folks who supported UT in special ways, not just to get their name on a building, but to give back in order to help young men and women such as those of you who are graduating today, and to make our University, our Tampa community, our state and our nation, all better places.

So if you remember nothing else about this address, remember that country song that implores all of us to be “humble and kind”. Remember to give back to your community and your University as you seek your personal success. By giving your time, your knowledge, your experience and—yes, your riches--to the generations who follow you, your personal returns will be multiplied and your lives will be enriched.

Nearly all of you sitting in the graduate section in front of me are members of what has been called the “Millennial” generation. Interestingly, Millennials are now the largest demographic group today in America. And Millennials have the potential to have an enormous and positive impact on our future! Your generational group is perceived by most of us older guys as having some commendable common values--values of service, a desire to have a reasonable balance between your work and your personal lives, a healthy financial conservatism, and a disposition to demand more from our private and public institutions in our common search for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But, interestingly, those are the same core values that are often used to describe the “Greatest Generation”, the men and women who came of age during the “Great Depression” and the cataclysm of World War II—your grandparents or great-grandparents. Just look at what that “Greatest Generation” accomplished:

- A World War won and threats of genocide and fascism defeated
- Europe and Japan rebuilt as healthy, productive and largely democratic nations
- The longest period of economic growth in US history

Millennials, you also have the potential to reshape the world. You may ask: But how?

- By leveraging for good the technology that seems such a normal part of your lives, but which was not available to prior generations
- By emphasizing the core values most of you share:
 - A balance between your work and your personal lives
 - A spirit of service

- A global view that recognizes that the common ties among people are more important than focusing on the differences that tear us apart.
- By demanding that both public and private institutions recognize their “duty to serve” all of society, not just special interests.

If you do those things, you and your Millennial colleagues will play an important and positive role in deciding our future.

Finally, I want to share 6 “H’s” that I believe are the basic values needed to live a full life as a contributor to society:

1. Honesty. First be honest with yourself, be honest when dealing with others, and demand honesty from all with whom you associate.

2. Health. Live a healthy life; take good care of your God-given body. Unfortunately, you can't order a new one from Amazon.
3. Humor. Be quick to laugh--both "at" yourself and "with" others.
4. Remain Humble. As good as you are, it can never be about you – it is about the team.
5. Happy. Be happy. Recognize that the glass is usually at least "half full."
6. Hope. Keep your "Hope". If you give up on your dream, it's unlikely it will ever occur. And if we don't hope for a better, more peaceful and caring world, it will never happen.

As you venture forth into the next stages of your life, feel confident that you are prepared to take on the challenges of a new job, continuing your education, caring for a family, or for some of you, serving your community or serving in our Armed Forces. Sure, you still

have much to learn. But try to be a lifelong learner, like Liz, your classmate and my Best Friend and Wife of 46 years. PAUSE

Don't ever become content with your skill set.

I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to spend so much time in recent years with you here on The University of Tampa campus. Like you, I treasure those years.

I leave you with the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who declared, "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Congratulations--and God Speed on life's journey. **Try to leave that trail.**