

William Danforth was a successful businessman who founded the Purina Mills company in 1894. Born in 1870, he grew up in a rural area surrounded by swamp lands, and as a child, he often suffered from the fever and chills of malaria. One day, a teacher pulled him aside and presented him with a challenge that seemed almost completely beyond his control. He dared him to be the healthiest boy in school. Young William was raised to meet challenges head on, and this one was no different. He built up his strength and resilience and almost miraculously developed good health that, later in life, allowed him to never miss a day of work due to sickness. It was this experience that taught him the power of a dare. He went on to use this same tactic to encourage employees of his business, as well as participants in the American Youth Foundation, which he co-founded. He also outlined the concept in his book, *I Dare You*.

Today, friends and classmates, as we close the door on one chapter of our lives and prepare to take on the next, I'd like to present you with some similar challenges:

I dare you to never stop learning. Enroll in vocational school or college. Find an apprenticeship or another type of training. Learn a discipline or trade. Learn it well. Strive to be the best at your craft and, just when you think you've mastered it, find something else to learn. Become an invaluable resource to your employer, to your field, and to society. You will never experience unemployment. Learn about things that interest you. Learn how to paint, play tennis, or speak Russian. You will never suffer from boredom. I dare you to never stop learning.

I dare you to change someone's life for the better. There are needs all over the world. You can send money to organizations that assist people you will never meet. Those people need our help, but so do our neighbors, people in our communities, and maybe even some of you here in this auditorium. Find someone who needs a skill or a resource you possess and give it freely. Do the yard work of the single mom down the street so she can use her only off day to spend time with her children. Be a friend to the elderly widow with no family of her own, and invite her to spend holidays with yours. These gestures, which might seem small to you, could mean the world to the person on the receiving end.

Finally, I dare you to challenge others. Expect much of yourself, and expect the same of those around you. Challenge your classmates, your coworkers, and your children. Look for those who need a little nudge, and encourage them. Remind them of their potential. If a mere pep talk isn't enough, then dare them. Most of all, lead them by your example. Let them be inspired by what you've dared to become.

So, fellow graduates, you leave here with all the knowledge you've gathered in these halls. Put it to good use, but don't rely solely on it. Add to it. Expand and maximize it. Apply it. Grow from it. Give it, and share it. Use it to make a difference. Be changed by it, and let it change the way you look at the world. Invest in it, profit from its returns, and, above all, pay it forward. I dare you.