

Thank you for that kind introduction and thank you for inviting me to speak today. I'm very pleased to be here to join you in celebrating this wonderful occasion.

First of all, congratulations to all of you. You should be very, very proud of yourselves for accomplishing this goal. Well done. I know you must all be excited to get your hands on your diplomas and run out into the world. But as cartoonist Garry Trudeau said, "Commencement speeches were invented largely in the belief that outgoing college students should never be released into the world until they have been properly sedated."

That's where I come in as the key note speaker. I'll try not to sedate you too badly.

To the families of those graduating and earning certifications, congratulations to you and you should know that your support through this process made an enormous impact. I'm sure you're very proud of your graduates as they close this portion of their lives and prepare for their next steps into a new career.

Graduation is one of those steps in life that defines a coming of age - the ending of one era of life, as a student or the one being shown the ropes, and moving on to a new stage in which you are a leader, a do-er and an achiever in the wider world. I'm sure many of you have firm plans and have a good idea of what's coming next, some of you have a pretty good idea of what you want to do next, a dream and a lot of hope to get you there, and some of you are just amazed that you got to this graduation point at all! Well the coming times will be exciting, they will be trying but they will be all dependent on you and your determination.

It's been ## years since I graduated from college and things have changed just a bit since then.

It was year you graduated: On TV, the popular shows were (fill in your own info), the top movies were (Fill in your info), the radio was playing (Fill in your own info and a stamp cost (Fill in your own info) cents. In the news, (Add a few well known news items or add tidbits that identify the era, such as the Cold War, disco, poodle skirts, hippies, the Vietnam war, the First Gulf War, etc.)

I had big plans for myself. I was a graduate of (Fill in your college name), and I was going to fill in your info here with the idea of being humorous - for instance: be single for life, never have kids, drive a corvette, be a millionaire in 5 years, travel the world in my yacht, get elected to Congress in a year or so, wear my hair long, live in a big house, play quarterback for the Broncos/or input local team).

You see, I planned to take it easy, not work too hard and enjoy life.

And here I find myself at a graduation once again but number of years later, my life didn't turn out quite the way I planned. Input information here that mirrors what you said above. For instance, I've been married for ## years, I have 4 kids, 2 cats and a dog, I drive a beat up car and I'm far from a millionaire. Instead of traveling the world I spend my vacations at (name a local amusement park or mall) with my kids and I

don't play football - I watch it on TV. And though life didn't turn out the way I thought it would, I don't regret a bit of it - I haven't failed - I've adapted found what makes me happy and fulfills me and so will you.

Life doesn't usually follow the plans you lay out for yourself. You will all experience the highs and lows of life, the difficult and the easy and unfortunately, there may sometimes be times of too many difficulties and just not enough smooth sailing. Your true success will be defined by how you handle both of these times.

As you graduate and take on new challenges, chances are you won't be making a million bucks at your first job. In fact you might not get the first or second or third job you interview for. You may never become a CEO of a fortune 500 company in your life, but that's OK. The important thing is you have already taken the initial steps needed to build a more promising future. Every class you've taken, every lab, every essay written and every certification you've earned, they have all been preparing you to adapt to change and challenges. Especially 8 am and Saturday classes - I know those were tough! But as you know, it's a tough world out there- nothing will be handed to you - you have to earn it - and it will mean more to you because you will earn it.

To give you an example of how perseverance can pay off, let's me talk about (Here talk about a personal hero or a story of someone who inspired you with their work ethic.

You have taken a key step towards your successful future and also the betterment of your family and your community. You've worked hard, spending months learning new skill sets. Our complex and technical world today requires education and skills that were not needed in the past. Ultimately - your well educated generation will benefit us all in the future.

Let me leave you with this thought from Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail."

You're now armed with one of the most important tools needed to forge your path ahead. It's not the diploma itself that counts - it's about what you've learned along the way and what you do with the education you've gotten in your journey to graduation today. Your future is in your hands - no one else's. Seize this opportunity.

Best of luck in all your future endeavors.