

**Commencement Address
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College of Arts and Sciences**

Claire Schenk
Partner
Thompson Coburn LLP

Thank you Dean Kersten, for your kind introduction. Chancellor George, Dean Kersten, Graduating Class of 2019 and all of those who are here to celebrate with us, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today. It is truly an honor and a great privilege to be here on this beautiful campus, for what Dean Kersten has described as the happiest day of the year. Having spent quite a bit of time on campus in recent years, I see that much has changed since the time of my graduation. One thing that has not changed is that each of you are here today celebrating the end of a journey which would not have been completed without a great deal of hard work and determination. Each of you is facing a world full of new and exciting challenges and opportunities. I learned to face these challenges head on here at UMSL. My hope is that as each of you leave our campus today, you will remember this message: If you jump, you may fall, but you also just may fly.

In reflecting upon my years at UMSL, I am grateful that I enjoyed the opportunity for a classic liberal arts education. This education taught me much about the importance of artful communication and the value of research. What I learned from my professors and mentors while at UMSL was instrumental in leading to my career today as a practicing attorney and Partner with Thompson Coburn and as an active volunteer in the St. Louis community. In preparing to speak with you today, I enjoyed thinking about which moments during my years at UMSL played the most pivotal role in my life. Today, I would like to share those thoughts with you.

I recall experiencing “ah ha” moments while studying statistics and realizing that data could be manipulated to achieve results in any number of ways. As a result, I now question many summary conclusions that others may take for granted. During class, I remember studying the great philosophers and realizing the importance of asking questions, engaging in critical discussion and composing a rational argument. I was impressed at the time by the fact that this process was actually far more important than my ultimate conclusion. While studying psychology, I was fascinated by the fact that memory is an imperfect and evolving faculty. This knowledge today colors my view of witnesses and their testimony. Rather than accusing someone of lying, I recognize that witnesses are often telling their perhaps biased, but personal truth.

However, the moment that I would like to describe to you today in some detail began outside of the UMSL classroom. I very vaguely remember a party on a Saturday night with fellow geology students and friends. I do not remember where the party was or who else was there. However, I recall agreeing to some sort of outdoor event to begin the next morning. The city girl in me hoped this event was akin to hiking. However, I realized after jumping into a car with my fellow students that our morning activity was better categorized as rock climbing rather than hiking or exploring.

Since most of you do not know me, I must tell you that I really am basically a city girl. I am energized by being part of a crowd. From time to time I go in the opposite direction from the flow of the crowd, for example, when leaving the metro in D.C. And I want you to understand that this is not something that I do because I am confused, it is because I enjoy moving through the crowd. And, believe it or not, I also

take pleasure in the challenge of catching a cab in the rain in New York right after the theatre ends. That alone should tell you something about me.

Now, I am not completely immune to the charm of the outdoors. However, as I experienced on that Sunday morning outing, at least for me, it was difficult to truly enjoy the outdoors while in fear for my life. Yes, I am being overly dramatic. However, I am not particularly coordinated and attempting to shimmy up the side of a flat bluff while gouging my arms and legs was quite a challenge for me.

On that Sunday morning, I remember slowly, very slowly, making my way up the side of the bluff, with much encouragement from my friends. After what seemed to me to be an eternity, I recall somehow reaching the top of the bluff. I was excited and proud of myself and hoped that at that point we would break open a bottle of champagne and enjoy the view below us. But it wasn't that kind of day. After all, I was with my geology buddies and obviously I did not ask the right questions before signing up for this adventure. I quickly learned that, of course, we were heading back down. While having heard my thoughts about the way up, you might think that I was excited about rappelling down. However, dropping over the edge as I looked at the ground far below was not an exciting proposition for me. To the contrary, I was terrified.

I recall that while I was outfitted with some sort of apparatus involving a halter and ropes, there was no safety net in sight. After a few agonizing moments, I realized that there was no choice other than to just jump backwards over the edge of the bluff. Of course, rather than sailing smoothly down the bluff, one of my feet became tangled in the rope and I recall being stuck hanging upside down. Not a pretty sight or a great feeling. I will tell you that I still have moments like that today and expect that each of you will as well. Moments when you feel stuck, embarrassed, paralyzed by indecision and have no idea what you will do next. Looking back at that moment, I realized that taking a deep breath, looking to others for support and trying to relax while moving forward is a leap worth taking. On that Sunday morning, I recall looking at my friends above and below me and somehow becoming disentangled. Unbelievably enough, I remember enjoying my way rappelling down the bluff.

You might be wondering... why do I see this as an inspirational, pivotal and instructive moment in my life? For one, I tend to be a cautious person, and on that morning, quite literally, I decided to take a leap. And since I am in a reflective mode today and looking back over quite a few years of my life, I must tell you that I don't recall many times that I've regretted taking that jump as opposed to walking away in the other direction.

So as you leave here today, I hope that each of you will often take that leap, realizing that while, if you jump, you could fall, however, you just may fly. You will have your doubts, not know what is coming and often be terrified of the unknown. However, I am confident that you will also revel in your many successes and learn from your mistakes. Sometimes you will get a little (or a lot) tangled up and be left hanging upside down, wondering how to proceed and whether you will find a way down – or out of a given situation. But “getting a little tangled up” will without a doubt be part of your life - so take a look at whoever is above you and below you – and see if they are managing the ropes. Try to let go, see if you can lean on your friends, family and colleagues, untangle yourself and reach for your destination or goal. Finally, try something new, get outside of your comfort zone, stretch yourself and your abilities, take some risks and have fun with all of it.

As Roy T. Bennett stated, “Believe in yourself. You are braver than you think, more talented than you know, and capable of more than you imagine.” Thanks once again for allowing me the privilege of being

here with you today. Have a wonderful day, go get a little tangled up and remember to take some big leaps!