

University of Missouri–St. Louis
Commencement address – College of Optometry
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Distinguished Platform Party, faculty and our most distinguished almost doctors,

When I thought about what I could say to our newest alumni, I thought about the speakers I've heard over the years. Among the many things that I am *unable* to remember about the speaker from my graduation: topic, name, age, gender, race, physical build, voice, topic ... you get the idea!! The direction I got from the Dean regarding this keynote, he simply noted, "Speak about 10-15 minutes". I remember the speakers who went 20 minutes, I promise not to do that. After I was asked to speak to you, I panicked, wondering what it was that I could say to you, the last class I helped to recruit to our program before I retired. So, I asked the group with whom I went to Haiti in January, and I got some great ideas.

The first thing was from one of your classmates, was to make sure you knew that your student loans are now forgiven. Oh, wait, that was supposed to be, to remind you that your loans are now due!!

Here are the 10 things I was given from the doctors who went, and, of course, from me:

- 10) Don't increase your spending as your income increases...always live below your means. At least one of you remembers me telling you that you needed to live like a student while in school so that you can live like a doctor later. If you did remember this, you will get those student loans paid off! Perhaps not in my lifetime, but in yours!! Now, this advice's corollary: Always spend less than you make. I knew all the times I've given a sermon, one of my stories from those would come in handy! There were some folks moving in next to some Amish families. Only of the Amish women watching the moving company move in a large screen TV, a hot tub, newest washing machine, etc., walked up to the lady of the house and remarked, "If one of those breaks let me know." In amazement, the lady of the house asked, "Do you know how to fix it?" The Amish lady replied, "No, but I can teach you to live without them."
- 9) Understand your education is just beginning. You will learn so much in your residency, your first job, your first duty station, you will continue to learn and are required to continue to learn. Never stop!
- 8) Always invest in yourself. Always take care of your future, so you can retire comfortably and in a time frame that is of *your* choosing. Invest in your education. Invest in what you need, what your practice needs, to be the best. Be intentional, but savvy (as Dr. McGreal noted this past Monday evening [at the Billing and Coding Update CE program]), about these investments.

- 7) Give more of everything than you get. Not only to your family, but also, your patients. It costs nothing to be kind. The cheapest form of marketing yourself and your practice is when a patient tells someone that they love you and your staff, and what you've done for them. When a patient is happy, on average, they tell 4 people, add in the reach of Facebook. When they are unhappy with not just you, but also your staff, they will tell on average 10 people! (**NOW** THINK OF Facebook!)
When something doesn't go exactly the way you think it should have or even suspect that it hasn't, contact the patient or patient's parent, or, considering what Dr. McGreal noted about our aging population, the guardian of the patient, and simply check-in. Remember, kindness costs you nothing but a 2 to 5 minute phone call. Consider what that patient will think, "Wow, Dr. Brown thought enough of me to call and ask!"
- 6) If you believe something is right, do **that**, regardless of what others think. And, its corollary, when you know something is WRONG, DON'T DO THAT. PERIOD. Not only might you lose your license, but the fines might make any change of your career nonexistent. As Dr. McGreal said on Monday, if you hadn't already fallen asleep, it is *your name, your degree, your license to practice* that is on the line. *Do not be THAT* doctor...that one that we talk about behind closed doors at class reunions for losing your license to practice because you have done something wrong.
- 5) I'm not sure where they find textbook cases...no textbook case has presented itself in my chair. Okay, *maybe* one.
- 4) At this point, if you are tied-up in knots, at this point, over your first job, you have time, years, to change it! Unless you are opening cold, typically, the first practice location regardless of practice modality, you go after school, is not where you will stay. When it doesn't work out, change it. Your first 3 months is your honeymoon. If you have bad feelings at that point, use that to propel you to the next place. Evaluate: why it isn't working. Is it them, or is it you? Grow from the experience and use it to make you a better doctor **and** a better person.
- 3) Even if you're one in a million, on a planet of 7.5 billion, that means there are nearly 7,500 people like you. While you're special, you may are not THAT special, as hard as you've worked, you also lucked into plenty, including your parents, your family and this country. With that luck is an obligation. You owe a debt, and not just to your family, but also to this program which has given you the opportunity you need to make an excellent living and life. You also owe a debt to the unlucky. To those who, for whatever reason, didn't make it to this day. Find a way to give back not just to family and friends who supported you along this journey, but also to those who will never be able come behind you **and** to those coming behind you. This class knows more than most the idea of paying it forward.
You knew you would not get to see patients in the new clinic, and yet you voted to increase your own fees and helped those coming behind you to understand why an increase in fees where necessary by talking to them directly helping them understand

the importance of our new patient care center. ***It is a reality because of you!***

So, later, when you can, find a way to say, "Yes!" to help a future optometrist whether through funding or partially funding a VOSH trip for a student or two, or four, or helping with scholarships for future optometrists.

- 2) When you have the opportunity to begin hiring and unless hiring for a skill you don't have, for example, filing insurance, hire for personality and can-do spirit. You can train new staff for knowledge, you can't train someone for empathy, compassion, listening ability, friendliness. I had an office manager who would find a great person with excellent customer service skills, whether out at a restaurant, an auto service location, wherever, and approach that person with, "are you happy working here?"
- 1) And, finally, find some way to make your life fun, every day.

THANK YOU!