

**University of Missouri – St. Louis Commencement  
Address  
Denny Reagan  
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Chancellor George, distinguished faculty, family and friends; we have a fine looking class of graduates to celebrate today.

I want to thank Jim Richards for inviting me here today. He called me a few months ago and asked if I believed in free speech. I said, “Of course I do!” He said, “Good! Because we would like you to give one at UMSL in August!”

But, seriously Jim, thank you for asking me. I am deeply honored.

Graduates -- believe it or not it wasn't that long ago that I was in your seat – I remember being proud...and excited...and I also remember hoping the commencement speaker would keep it short.

But unlike you, I didn't have a smart phone in my hands to keep me entertained. So let's take a quick poll -- whom here has texted, posted, tweeted, searched, scrolled, scanned or played since the ceremony began

I'm guessing there's even more out there too shy to admit to it...so, being fully aware that I'm likely competing against Olympic coverage or your latest game of Draw

Something or Angry Birds, I'll do my best to keep things moving.

I'll start by stating the obvious; this university is a special place. I'm a South city kid who was the first in my family to graduate college – and the University of Missouri, St. Louis made that possible.

And while UMSL presents the opportunity, it's your effort that transforms that opportunity into a college degree -- a critical first step in achieving your goals. And we applaud your efforts today.

You can feel the collective joy in this room. In your professors, so happy to see you achieve your goals -- in your parents and families who have watched you grow and seen the sacrifices you've made – in those of us who represent the St. Louis community, where we hope most of you will spend your careers...

*...because we need you.* We need your leadership in our schools, businesses and government agencies – we need your caring expertise in the fields of health care, public policy and social work – and we need your spirit and creativity to bring the arts to life in our communities.

Being here with you reminds me of the mix of emotions that were running through my mind on graduation day.

- I was proud of what I'd accomplished -- as I'm sure you are today.

- I was excited to celebrate – family and friends were already beginning to gather in my parents’ backyard where there was beer on ice and burgers on the grill.
- But more than anything, I recall being overwhelmed by the big question now looking you square in the eye...*What happens next?*

Up until now there has always been a clear path to follow.

1. Don’t get in too much trouble,
2. Get decent grades, and
3. Finish school

But now it is time to move from the academic path to the career path.

And as you take your first steps, there are three thoughts I want to leave with you. The first is that nice guys finish--*first*. I realize the old saying says the opposite, but I am here to tell you that nothing is more important, than the attitude you show up with every morning.

I have had the good fortune of working with many of the corporate leaders in St. Louis, and without exception, they are considerate and will go out of their way to be helpful.

The belief that you need to be ruthless and feared is just not true. What is necessary is that you have to be respected, and that is true whether you are in an entry level position or the President of the company.

Jack Buck, the Cardinal's broadcaster for more than 40 years, who definitely finished first when he was inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame, was a nice guy.

His longtime broadcast partner Mike Shannon said, "The thing that was so special to me was to see how he treated people from ticket takers to guys pumping gas to dignitaries, there was only one Jack, and that was someone very special".

And just think about how you like to be treated.

So be courteous, kind and willing to go out of your way to help those around you. It will set you apart.

The second thought I want you to take away is you are constantly surrounded by valuable messages, and when you take those messages to heart, you allow yourself to grow and change for the better.

I am incredibly lucky – I spend my days in the world of musical theatre where the messages are woven into some of the best songs and stories ever written.

A key message in so many shows is the importance of believing in yourself...

At a pivotal point in *Wicked*, the story of Oz before Dorothy arrived, a teenaged witch named Elpheba tells us,

“I’m through accepting limits, ‘cuz someone says they’re so. Some things I cannot change, but till I try I’ll never know.”

And in *Oklahoma*, a slightly less eloquent but endlessly entertaining Aunt Eller reminds the feuding cowmen and farmers,

“I don't say I'm better than anybody else, but I'll be damned if I ain't just as good!”

There's a valuable message in both those songs. Be confident -- and be willing to try, even when you might fail.

What I am telling you is this. YES, inspiration can be found in scriptures or in church. But it can also be found in the lyrics of pop tunes, on billboards and bumper stickers. Or even in a child's show tune that proclaims “The sun'll come out tomorrow”. What you have to do is keep your eyes and your mind open.

Something else the theatre reminds us is that time is precious. A song from *Rent* asks the question,

“Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes, how do you measure, measure a year?”

That is how many minutes we have every year.

To break it down even further, every morning, you get a bank of 1440 minutes; just like every other man, woman and child on the planet. What you don't use well today is gone tomorrow. The smartest scientist in the world can't make more of it, and the richest billionaire can't buy more of it. The true value of time remains in how you use it.

Which brings me to the final thought I want you to take away: **allow time**.

Start simply – **allow time** to be on time.

The difference between being five minutes early or five minutes late is a punch of the snooze button. And those five minutes indicate a state of mind -- an attitude focused on success.

How frustrating is it to be running late and sitting at a red light or in a traffic jam. Just think about the stress you will eliminate from your life if you arrive at your destination a few minutes early. You walk into your appointment without an apology, without being frazzled, and having already checked your twitter and facebook accounts.

**Allow time** to prepare (I started on this speech a month ago)

It will help you present yourself in the best possible light. And seek out guidance from mentors to help you prepare.

**Allow time** for others.

Never let your pursuit of career status overwhelm the relationships that matter most. Dedicate time to support family and friends. Give of yourself to make our community stronger. Support charities and causes you believe in. Striking a healthy work/life balance is critical to your long-term success.

And most importantly, **allow time** for yourself.

Relax -- Enjoy -- Laugh.

And you don't have to be extravagant.

Every year my brothers and I head to a little cabin with some lawn chairs, a few bags of groceries and a deck of cards. It's just a couple of days with my toes in the water, but it is a major highlight of my year.

As I turn the podium back over to Chancellor George I'm reminded again of the pride I felt when I graduated. And that pride is multiplied today.

We should all be proud to be connected to the University of Missouri-St. Louis, an institution that provides so many an opportunity to succeed.

So, as you move through your career, I challenge you to always work hard, but do so with balance, allowing the time necessary to succeed professionally and in your life at home.

As you experience the world around you, I encourage you to be open to the valuable messages that present themselves every day.

And each night when your head hits the pillow, measure yourself by how you treated the people in your life. Be the nice guy -- because nice guys do finish first.