

# **UMSL Schools of Nursing and Education**

## **Commencement Address – Lee Fetter**

**May 15, 2016**

Dean Basile, thank you for those kind words of introduction, and for inviting me to be a part of today's commencement proceedings.

To the 2016 graduates of the University of Missouri–St. Louis's School of Nursing and the School of Education – please accept my heartfelt congratulations.

Very soon, in a manner of just minutes, Dr. Dean-Baar or Dr. Basile will confer upon all of you, the degrees that represent, the culmination of years of hard work, many hours of study, and a whole lot of learning.

And soon thereafter, you will join those of us who are working in the health and education professions, helping to relieve human illness and suffering, or to nurture intellectual development across all ages. Thank you for choosing careers that serve our fellow human beings.

Graduates, pause for a moment – right now, look around you and find the eyes of somebody who is here today to celebrate with you. Your mom or dad, a brother or sister, a wife or husband, a friend or classmate, a grandparent or a child, a professor or advisor. These are the people who have been cheering for you all the years that you have known them. And while today is your day, think about how much more special this day is because of those with whom you share it. All of these people you are looking at right now - take them along with you on life's journey. .

Speaking on life's journey, Apple Co-Founder Steve Jobs once said: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living somebody else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the

results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.”

My own journey has afforded me the distinct privilege of serving for 33 years in the leadership of two of the nation’s largest and most prestigious health care organizations – Washington University School of Medicine and BJC HealthCare.

As I reflect on my career in education and health care, there are several lifelong lessons that I’d like to pass along to all of you.

Life-Long Lesson #1: You are working with people. Know their names. Know their stories. It is the best way to get things done. Not working over them, not working under them, working alongside of them.

Life-Long Lesson #2: Everybody is important and everybody adds value to our work in service to others. Whether it is the janitor, the food service worker, the nurse, the teacher, the doctor or the principal, we all have important roles to play. We all make a valuable contribution. None of us is more important or less important, more valuable or less valuable. We all need to do what we do and to do it to the best of our ability. Our very best *teamwork* produces the best possible outcome for everyone. .

Life-Long Lesson #3: Nursing and teaching professions are high callings. You wake up each and every day and serve people who typically do not want to see you if you are a nurse or, if you are a teacher, require a level of personal attention that is impossible to provide to an entire classroom. But, with professionalism, compassion, understanding and competence you serve the whole patient and the whole student. Being a nurse or teacher is a high calling to human service.

From my 10 years as President of St. Louis Children’s Hospital, I learned that parents will travel many, many miles from all 50 states and over 70 countries to St. Louis to see a physician who specializes in their child’s disease. Often, there were multiple specialists who are consulted in

their child's case. But by the time their child is discharged, the parents are raving about how wonderful the staff is – the nurses at the bedside, the physical and music therapists, the housekeepers, the teachers who ran our hospital classroom. This reinforces my lesson about the importance of teamwork. I was a regular at monthly orientation for new employees, so I could be the first to welcome them and tell them how important they are to our mission.

Life-Long Lesson #4: Keep learning. Your school days may be behind you, but your learning curve is never ending. Your diploma doesn't tell us what you know; it tells us that you have been trained to learn the art and the science of nursing and teaching, and that you are now able to keep on learning during a career that will surely bring new information, and advances in your professions.

In preparation for this commencement, I also asked several experienced nurses at Children's and other BJC hospitals for their advice on what it takes to successfully transition from academia to the real world. I was impressed, but not surprised, by their eagerness to deliver such advice. It is their nature, after all, to provide help wherever needed. The following life-long lessons represent the best of what they had to say...and are equally applicable to both nurses and education school graduates.

Life-long lesson .....

Number 5: Always listen to your gut. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

Number 6: Stay positive. Nursing and teaching are tough jobs. With great heart, commitment to excellence, and a positive attitude you will excel.

Number 7: Ask questions. Ask more questions. Never stop asking questions. It's okay not to know all the answers. No one expects you to.

Number 8: Take care of yourself outside of work. Exercise. Dance. Sing. Or pray. You will be great taking care of others but only if you take care of yourself first. Learn to cope with stress in a healthy way.

Number 9: Find a buddy or mentor and pay attention. Listen to those who have been around for years. They have great stories to tell and, besides being entertained, you'll learn a lot.

And, number 10: Know that the "real world" is very different from the "academic" world. Nursing school is tough, but the transition to being a "real" nurse is even tougher. The same could be said about being a "real" teacher. Apply what you have learned to improve the lives of your patients and students.

Congratulations on being part of one of the world's most respected professions. I wish you much success and happiness as you go forward to serve your fellow human beings. Thank you.

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