

**Commencement Address
University of Missouri – St Louis**

**Patrick Sly, Executive Vice President, Emerson
May 17, 2015 (ceremony V)**

Thank you, Dean Hoffman... and thank you to Chancellor George and the distinguished administration and faculty of the University. Welcome to the families and friends of these soon to-be graduates. And, congratulations to the class of 2015.

It's really an honor to be able to speak to you today. And, knowing that I, along with these esteemed speakers, are coming between you and your diploma...and likely some level of a grand celebration... I genuinely appreciate your time. I am not going to preach to you about the importance of working hard and being responsible. That is the job of your parents. I'm also not going to stand here and talk about how you need a life plan and the answer to the question "what's next?" That's up to you to determine.

What I am going to do in my time with you today is to share something that I have learned about 'making a difference.' And, leave it to you to choose if...and how...you can accomplish social change. Over 40 years ago, I too was faced with "what's next?" as I was wearing a cap and gown at a small private university in Kansas. Following graduate school at St. Louis University, my path took me to Emerson where I am about to mark my 35th anniversary. After 33 years in operations – with the last 15 years leading multi-billion dollar global businesses – I stepped into a new administrative leadership role which included Emerson's Charitable Trust and the company's community-relations activities. During my career, I have always been involved in programs to help give back. In fact, I was on six non-profit boards prior to my current post. This was also part of my upbringing as my parents instilled the importance of giving back time, treasure and talent at a very young age. This latest work assignment, however, pointed me into a new direction. One where I serve as the steward of our corporate dollars that are earmarked to help make a difference in the communities where our employees work and live. Many of the activities focus on making our environment safer, more beautiful, healthier and more culturally enriched. Others truly impact lives.

Case in point...Ferguson. I'm sure you all remember where you were on August 9th, 2014 when the tragedy unfolded in Ferguson. It's a date that transitioned St. Louis into the center of the world's media attention. Not for positive reasons. Not in ways that we are proud of. Immediately upon learning about the events in Ferguson, Emerson took action. Ferguson is our backyard. It's been home to our corporate headquarters for almost 75 years. It's also home to many of our employees. And, it's a North County neighbor to UMSL. We've embarked on a number of initiatives to help the community heal and recover. And, we've developed programs along with others to provide education and job opportunities to the young people in the Ferguson area. We also encouraged our employees to volunteer their time to help this struggling area bounce back and become viable once again.

This effort touched me personally when Governor Nixon appointed me to the Ferguson Commission, whose charter is to help create a new path to a stronger, fairer place for everyone. Reflecting on the nine months since this tragic catalyst inspired movement has made me realize a few things that I hope will have an impact on you.

First...I've learned that leaders are admired as a result of taking action. The decision to 'do' is much harder than sitting back. It takes conviction. It takes commitment. And, it takes passion. Second... we all have a choice. To quote the late Martin Luther King Jr.: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige and even his life for the welfare of others." You can be a passive victim or an active participant. No one can decide that but you. And, third, public policy with personal responsibility must go hand-in-hand. Given the ever-changing world we live in, there will always be economic disparity and perceived inequalities. We can strive for equal opportunities but can't guarantee equal outcomes. Also, it's not realistic to think that our efforts can truly 'change the world.' I am happy that I can make a change in one life or one situation at a time.

My personal hope for each and every one of you is to find your own way to make a difference. Make it something that you are passionate about. An initiative or movement that you are proud to associate your name with. And do it not for the notoriety but to mark change. This may seem lofty with all that you have going on. But the true 'gift' will be the gratification of making something better than it was before you became a part of it. I hope that if our paths cross again...in five years, or ten...you'll share your stories on ways...big or small...that you are proud on how you made a difference.

For now, I'd like to leave you with a quote from Mother Theresa..."At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by 'I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was homeless and you took me in.' Hungry not only for bread — but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing — but naked for human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks — but homeless because of rejection." Go out and conquer this world on your own terms. Do good and feel good.

Congratulations again.

Thank you!

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