

UMSL Commencement Address-12/14/13 at 6:00pm
~ Kirk Richter, BSBA, 1968,

Thank you, Dean Hoffman for that kind introduction and good evening to all of you.

To all of you that are graduates, I offer my congratulations on your achievement. To the families and friends of these graduates, I thank you for joining their celebration tonight and for supporting them during their college years. And, to the faculty and staff at UMSL that helped make this event possible for these graduates, we also say thanks.

This is one of the final events in UMSL's celebration of its 50th anniversary. From somewhat humble beginnings back in 1963, this University has grown up and is now a major contributor to both the local and national economic and social environment. Your fellow alums now work for, and in many cases hold key leadership positions, at organizations in both the public and private sectors. As a freshman in 1964, I know how humble those beginnings were. The Business College Dean's office was in a converted shower room, many of us had classes in a church basement or a laundromat, parking was created by dumping gravel in an open field, and food and drinks were available only in vending machines. So we've come a long way.

But this celebration is also a beginning as the UMSL team will continue to enhance its ability to serve the students that follow you and the broader community, particularly here in St. Louis. That's not unlike what you as graduates will also experience as you pursue your careers. For most of you, the majority of your life is the career you've chosen and that your education will support. But that's also a beginning. UMSL didn't get where it is today without a plan, and that plan has been revised and added to many times over the past 50 years. The working environment you're in will also change. When I began my career, a cloud was something that blocked the sun and produced rain. Now it also makes data available to the multiple

devices we all likely use. Just like the University, you need to begin with a rough strategic plan. But you'll likely revise that plan several times during your career. Decide what you want out of life. If you're just starting your career, or even if you're already employed, you need to build on your strengths. You'll integrate these strengths with your goals, dreams and passions. But you need to couple all of that with drive and commitment. While a working life might be very short in relation to the age of the universe, it's not a sprint for a couple of months or years, but a marathon over several decades.

So what does it take to be successful? Your degree certainly helps, but it's not a guaranty for success. Just as UMSL has grown up in 50 years, I spent the majority of my working life at a company that grew up from somewhat humble beginnings, growing from \$30 million in annual sales when I started some 35 years ago to over \$2.5 billion when I retired last year. And it has plans to continue growing. So, I've got some basis for what I'm offering you today. To progress in your careers, you'll be on a continuous journey of asking why and learning beyond what you've already received. This will enable you to make changes in your field of activity, whether that's business, engineering or nursing. Not only will that provide job satisfaction, but it's also likely to be financially rewarding. Hopefully those changes will lead to improvement. I've learned that all improvement requires change. But I'll also tell you that not all change leads to improvement. That's where curiosity supported by your education and experience comes in. You can tell the losers from the winners here. A loser might say, "Nobody knows", or "It wasn't my fault", or even "That's the way it has always been done around here". A winner on the other hand will say "Let's find out", "I was wrong" or "There must be a better way to do it".

Don't hesitate to ask your coworkers and superiors, or even those in your network, for help in pursuing a solution.

Many times the question, "Has anyone done this before?" provides great insight. And that works both ways. Sometime you'll be asking the question and other times you'll be providing the answer. Effectiveness comes from the ability to lead others

to outcomes they can't see. The people that make a difference aren't always the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones who care. And you're likely not to take that advice in all situations. The growth will come from the discussion, innovation and execution that are initiated in those interactions. And sometimes not getting what you want will be a wonderful stroke of luck.

Curiosity and learning also apply beyond your chosen profession. Extending your cultural horizons and including interests beyond your profession can be rewarding and make you a more well-rounded individual. Many successful people in all walks of life are not only obsessed with their profession, but have other fields of interest. Einstein played the violin very well. Churchill was an accomplished painter. Our own chancellor has a unique combination of skills that include leadership, science and music.

So be passionate about your work, but also be passionate about your relationships and other things in life.

My final point today concerns values. I said earlier that you need to embrace change, but don't let go of your values when you do that. We've all seen the headlines about corporate executives fixing outcomes, investors trying to make a quick buck using less than honorable tactics, politicians' values questioned, technical data manipulated to improve an outcome, employees stealing from their employers in a variety of ways, and many more examples of questionable ethics. Some might believe that it's the role of government to intervene and prevent these activities. Unfortunately that intervention is often too late. Many of you will likely be tested over your career. It's not likely to be you that becomes the headline, but may well be your co-workers. It may be up to you to be the whistle blower. Take that responsibility seriously. Be an example for your organization. A CEO I worked for once said that if you tell the truth, you don't need a good memory. Another value is to treat your organization and coworkers with respect and dignity. How often

have you heard someone say something like” What are they doing” when talking about a company or their superiors? Properly phrased and channeled, questions like that can lead to improvement and enhance your own work experience. When you harbor bitterness, happiness is likely to dock elsewhere.

Looking around, I’m sure that all of you in the graduating class have the capability to be successful. Whatever your degree is, being successful is neither an art nor a science. It’s a mysterious combination of inherited capabilities, education, experience and developed social skills. So go out and unleash your talents and success will find you. Just like UMSL has and will continue to grow, so will you. You can build on the successes of those that have gone before you.

I thank all of you for your attention. Let me again congratulate all the graduates for completing your course of study and wish you every future success.