

Commencement Address
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College of Business Administration and UMSL/WU Joint Engineering Program

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Thank you Dean Hoffman for the kind introduction and asking me to speak. It is an honor to be a part of this commencement service.

As a fellow alum, I remember the sense of accomplishment and pride I felt waiting to receive my diploma. I also know the excitement as a wife, sister, mother, aunt and a friend waiting to hear your loved one's name called as they approach the stage. What I remember most is wondering just how long this ceremony would last. I promise to keep my speech short.

Thanks in no small part to the knowledge and experience I gained while at UMSL, I am proud to stand here today as the co-founder of a digital agency, Spry Digital. And I am particularly proud that two of our associates are graduating today, congratulations to Dominic Lafata, a Product Manager at Spry Digital and Sara Graham who interned with us this fall. To Dominic, Sara and to each of you I say: Enjoy this moment and celebrate completing your degree.

Next week your journey continues. I want to share three core values I feel have helped me navigate my career and personal life and I hope will help you as you navigate yours.

First: continue to learn. This doesn't mean you have to go back to school, but always be willing to learn something new. The key is to gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of topics that may advance your career, open doors to new opportunities or expand your views on the world. Throughout my career, I found opportunities to learn new skills so that I could get promoted or start a new business. One example was when I left my 20 year career at Edward Jones to become an entrepreneur. I had to learn about social media, setting up an ecommerce store, running Google Ads and website development. I used those skills in my first entrepreneur adventure in a business with my husband building race cars, selling race fuel and leasing garage space.

Those skills ultimately led me to co-founding Spry Digital. Each day I am faced with learning new concepts, developing new skills and honing those that are critical as a CEO.

Being a lifetime learner does not mean everything you learn has to be related to your profession or industry. When I learned to drive a race car, it wasn't to advance my career. I did it for me. It gave me experience facing my fears and helped me learn a little more about cars. Imagine the excitement being in a group of 30 race cars and the green flag is thrown. It took everything I had to stay in the pack as I was being bumped from behind and fought to move up.

Albert Einstein once said, "Once you stop learning, you start dying". Stay curious and explore new things!

Second: Give to others and to the community. While at UMSL, I became a Delta Zeta. As a Delta Zeta, I discovered how rewarding it was to give of my time, talent and money. The mentoring I received there spurred me to pass on my knowledge to others. I enjoy mentoring people and connecting my network with those who need my help. As a female leader in technology for over 30 years and the leader of a business, I know the importance of being a visible role model to other women. I treasured the time others (men and women) gave me as I moved through my career. They gave me the courage to pursue roles I wasn't 100% ready to take on and provided me guidance as I navigated through the maze of life.

I love to help organizations by sharing my knowledge in technology or business strategy. I stay motivated by focusing on organizations doing good work in areas that I am passionate about, such as scholarship, the arts or women in technology. The joy I feel helping others, keeps me centered and creates balance in my life.

So to each of you, I say this. Find a young person who you can encourage, mentor and guide through their life journey. Connect with your passion and share your talents with them. This will give you perspective and purpose beyond your job.

Finally: Continue to learn more about yourself and how you can grow as a person. Knowing our strengths is easy. Identifying and acknowledging our weaknesses is the hard part. Becoming self-aware and understanding how you impact the world will help you grow as a person. After reading Daniel Goleman's book, Emotional Intelligence, self and social-awareness became a goal of mine. I took many personality tests. I am an ENFJ (Myers-Briggs), a Maverick (Predictive Index) and a Dominant Influencer (DISC)). I look carefully at myself and how I react to people and situations. I learned I have to slow down and give more background to help people trust my decisions. Being an active listener goes a long way when working in a team.

Reflecting on your emotions and feelings, identifying triggers and being able to control yourself in those situations is empowering. Insightfulness leads to becoming aware of how you are communicating with others. Don't get me wrong. People can still push my buttons and some days it isn't easy to control my reactions. We are human and that happens. But by increasing my Emotional Intelligence, I feel like I have become a compassionate leader, wife, mother, friend and person. Becoming self-aware will help you in your career and your personal relationships too.

Let me thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today as you celebrate this great milestone in your life. As you ask yourself "what can I do to make my journey a little smoother?" I hope these suggestions will be of value to you. Embrace being a lifelong learner. Find a way to give of your time, talents and money. Look within yourself and grow as a person. May these three values help you have a long, successful career and rewarding life. Congratulations on this fantastic achievement. Good night and happy holidays!