

**Commencement Address  
Saturday, May 18, 2019  
College of Arts and Sciences**

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Good afternoon graduates, families and everyone else who is here to support a graduate.

And, to the graduates – Congratulations! If you're anything like me when I was sitting in your seat at graduation, you're proud of what you've accomplished, you're happy to have one less thing on your to-do list (and for me that was homework!) and you're thinking about your next steps in life.

For some, you've already created a very defined plan on what you'll do next. Whether it's starting a new job you've already been offered or starting on additional education programs that will get you to the next step in your career, you have a plan. For others, you're still thinking about that next move, maybe going on interviews and starting to build your plan. Some of you may be trying to figure out how you'll juggle work and home as you move on in your career.

And, no matter what stage of planning you're in, I'd tell you that you're going to be just fine. We all approach life differently. And we all look at opportunity differently. I'd also tell you that one of the best things you can do as you go through life is to keep an open mind about what opportunity and success look like - I would tell you that it pays to be curious. And, by curious I mean really considering what you can learn with each new assignment, how things work, why someone else might have a different perspective than you do or what makes sense for you at different points in your life. Staying curious in life will help you make better decisions.

My story at graduation started with a very simple goal – I just wanted to get a job and to just work one job. After years of working multiple jobs plus an internship while going to school, success to me was having no homework and one full-time job. I wasn't terribly picky about that job either, because I just wanted a start in life.

So, I started my full-time job at a company I'd been with on a part time basis during college. My big dream might have included something new at a different company, but, I graduated in 1983 and the jobs were scarce, and the choices were limited. And, again, I just wanted a job.

This job led to another job at that same company where I was able to gain additional skills. And the funny thing is that while I was in my first job someone noticed something in me that I hadn't noticed myself – a skill that I had that apparently worked well for me. I was asked to consider a job that I would have never considered on my own and that at first didn't sound appealing at all. But, after considering what I could learn in that new role and how it would help me better balance my home life, I took it and learned as much as I could and realized that those new skills had now become a career. That move led me to my current company.

I've been with my current employer for over 30 years now and have had lots of different opportunities along the way. None of those opportunities were what I envisioned on graduation day. And a lot of those opportunities didn't really strike me as great opportunities at the time they were offered! But, I

learned something new with each step I took, and I developed friends and mentors along the way. I would also add that most of the opportunities that I considered unappealing at the time, were the ones that help me grow the most. So, staying curious in those situations really helped me.

And, I know I'm not telling you anything new when I say that where ever you go in life, whatever you do, you will not do it alone. As evidenced by the large crowd that's here to support you today, and undoubtedly supported you as you were earning your degree, we all need a strong support system to get through life.

Like many of us, my parents were my first support system. They moved our family to St. Louis from a small town in Missouri when I was three. They did this because they dreamed of a different life not just for themselves, but for their kids. And, like many UMSL students they began their education while also working full time. After years of working by day and studying by night they graduated, they became teachers, they returned to UMSL for more education, they earned more degrees and continued to learn their whole lives. The power of my early support system shaped so much in my life – the way I view the world, the way I view opportunity, the way I view work, loyalty and learning.

I bet you have your own unique experiences with powerful support systems – whether it's your family, your friends or maybe professors, you've all developed powerful relationships and life experiences that will serve you well for years to come. It's important that you build on this as you go through life.

And, the funny thing about life experiences is that you never really comprehend the impact that some experiences and some people will have on you until many years later. I can recall influential teachers during grade school and high school that taught me things that live with me till this day. I can remember powerful feedback I've received from co-workers that has helped me grow to be a better person. I can remember when a friend has helped me through a tough time and, also, the times when my kids told me something that helped me better understand a tough situation. I bet you all have similar memories as well.

Another thing you don't totally comprehend until years later, is the impact YOU make on other people. But, with every interaction you have, every choice you make and with each step you take in life, you are making an impact on someone. It's important to cast a positive shadow and be the person you want others to remember.

Remember this as you go forward from graduation. Know that without the love and support you've received so far in life, you would not be the person you are today.... The person who is sitting here, ready to graduate and ready do great things in this world.

Keeping this in mind will also make you grateful. And the power of gratitude is amazing. Both giving and receiving gratitude will improve your life.

And, now I'm going to go a little geeky on you for a minute, because there's powerful science behind the power of gratitude. When we express gratitude, the circuitry in our brain releases dopamine. Dopamine makes us feel good and triggers other positive emotions like contentment and joy. In addition, when we identify the positives in our life, our brain also releases serotonin. Serotonin is a natural anti-depressant that enhances our happiness and motivation. If you choose to focus on good things, and be grateful for what you DO have, it will make you a happier person who will bring out the best in others and yourselves.

So, with that thought, I have a simple request. I'd ask that you express gratitude to someone today. You'll feel good, the other person will feel good and your day will be that much better.

You should all be very proud, you have accomplished a lot, and will do so much more in the future, but remember that you cannot do it alone. Stay connected to your support systems, build powerful new relationships and take time to celebrate and be grateful.

Congratulations to everyone!!!