

Bob Clark
University of Missouri – St. Louis Commencement Remarks

Good afternoon, graduates, families, Chancellor Sobolik, and faculty. Thank you for having me here on such a milestone day in your lives.

I've had an interesting life and business career — full of twists, turns, painful setbacks, and incredible, sometimes over-my-skis, successes. It's been an *adventure* in the truest sense.

I grew up just down the road in Bridgeton, Missouri. The house I was raised in was eventually torn down to make way for a new runway at the airport. It wasn't a privileged upbringing, but it was a privilege for me. I was lucky to have an amazing mom and a scrappy, entrepreneurial father who had both high highs and very low lows.

My dad started an industrial painting company from scratch that ended up working on projects all over the world. He was gone a lot, but when he was around, I absorbed everything I could. My mom taught me about love, faith, compassion, and family. My dad taught me grit, determination, independence, and optimism. Most of all, he taught me to live by the **Golden Rule**: *Treat people the way you want to be treated*. It's simple. It spreads kindness. And it doesn't mean you can't be tough or have high expectations — for yourself and the people around you.

My father led by example — sometimes a bad example, but mostly a great one. He was a visionary. He taught through stories and ideas. And if there's one thing I encourage all of you to learn, it's the art of storytelling. Learn how to talk about your goals, your dreams, your vision. People will follow a story. That's how you lead.

My dad once told me life comes down to two essential ingredients — and one without the other is useless:

1. **A dream** — a vision on the horizon.
2. **The will** — to push that dream into reality through consistent, focused effort.

Sir Lawrence of Arabia once wrote:

“All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find it was vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men — for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible.”

So yes — follow the Golden Rule, have a vision, and apply relentless willpower. But more than anything, **surround yourself with amazing people**. That's the secret to everything.

In the last 40 years, I've built Clayco from nothing into an \$8 billion company with over 4,000 employees. The single biggest reason for that success? People. Exceptional people. People who believed in the mission, believed in each other, and made each other better.

A big part of leadership is **selecting** the right people — and just as important, **de-selecting** the wrong ones. I've been very intentional about removing people from my orbit who don't share my values, who aren't rowing in the same direction, or who hold me back. It's not easy to make those judgments — especially about friends, family, or co-workers — but I've never regretted focusing on my champions and reciprocating that loyalty.

Life is too short for cynics, takers, or bullies. You deserve to be surrounded by people who challenge you, uplift you, and believe in your story — even on the days when you don't.

That principle extends to your time and energy. Be **ruthlessly selective** about where you put your focus. I have ADD, so for me, this has been critical: **Focus, focus, focus — and lose the hocus pocus**. Finish what you start. Whether it's a task, a project, a book, a commitment to your family or your business — follow through.

And take care of yourself. That's not selfish — it's *essential*. Exercise, hike, protect your mental and physical health. Make yourself strong so you can be strong for others. When you're grounded and clear-headed, that's when you can best show up for your loved ones, your community, your calling, and your God.

Make your story one of progress. A story of values. Of paving a smoother road for those coming behind you.

Don't fear risk — fear **regret**.

Don't fear failure — fear **standing still**.

I have climbed some amazing mountains around the world. In Colorado, one of the most dangerous is Capitol Peak, and after training for a year, I recently made the summit. My family was worried about me but supportive. Right before I started the hike, my son Shawn called and gave me great advice. He said, "Dad, if you think the NEXT STEP will kill you ... DON'T take it... but otherwise GO FOR IT!"

SO CLASS of 2025 GO FOR IT! And remember— a lot of people, including me, are rooting for you, praying for you, and cheering you on to create the best story ever told.

Thank you for letting me be part of this moment in your journey. Best of luck — and remember: **every minute counts, so HURRY UP every chance you get!**