

What a spectacular day! It is truly an honor and a pleasure to be here today.

Chancellor Sobolik, thank you for the trust and confidence...and the opportunity.

Provost Berberich, Curator Krewson, distinguished members of the faculty, administration and alumni association – it's a joy to see you all, and to share this podium with you.

For all those gathered to celebrate these graduates – parents, grandparents, spouses, partners, aunts and uncles, siblings, cousins and friends...you ought to be proud! You ought to be proud of what your loved one has accomplished, and excited about that they're going to do in the future. We are.

And last, but certainly not least...to the UMSL Class of 2024...look at where you are today! Take a moment to soak this all in. Think back on your first day on campus. Remember looking at those signs everywhere that highlight this University's commitment to "Transforming Lives." Reflect on your personal journey...your personal transformation... and take pride in all you accomplished.

Take some time to celebrate...and then commit to continuing forward and to making a difference in this world. A true difference.

Now, this is my first, and by definition, my "best ever" commencement speech. When giving remarks, in the Navy, they always told us to "be brief, be brilliant, and be gone."

I will attempt to be brief...I make no promises about brilliance...but I promise you that at the end of this ceremony, I, you, and all of us will indeed be gone.

Another tip I learned about public speaking from one of my mentors early in my career was to always make just three points...not two, not four, but three...because all great things come in threes.

Think about it for a minute...the Holy Trinity...Earth, Wind and Fire...the Three Musketeers (the swashbucklers, or the delicious candy bar). My mentor could go on and on and on...and often did...but you get the point. In reflection, I think it is indeed important to limit yourself to three points, because as I become

more “mature” I’ve realized that three is about all I can remember...and three is about the extent of any audience’s attention span.

So in keeping with the “theory of three,” I want to share some deep thoughts today, from those who I will dub “The Three Wise Men.” Although it t’is the season, I’m not talking about Balthazar, Caspar and Melchior...the three Magi. The three wisemen I’m talking about today are Dr. Rick Rigsby, Admiral Bill McRaven, and the musical industry phenom, Pharrell Williams.

Wise Man #1 – Dr. Rick Rigsby. Dr. Rigsby was an award-winning journalist, a television newscaster and he spent about 20 years as a professor, most of that time at Texas A&M where he also served as the character coach and chaplain for the Aggies football team. He is now an internationally acclaimed motivational speaker and spends his time inspiring and empowering people worldwide. In 2017, Dr. Rigsby delivered one of the best commencement speeches I’ve ever viewed at Cal Maritime Academy out in Vallejo, California...not too far from where I grew up. That speech went viral. It’s been viewed by over 200 million people (I’m probably about 50 of those viewers), and his thoughts are captured in one of my favorite leadership books – *“Lessons From A Third Grade Dropout.”* I commend that video and this book to you all...yep...homework...bet you weren’t expecting that, right?

In the speech, and in the book, he shares what he terms “common sense wisdom” – common sense wisdom he learned from the wisest man he ever knew...a man that dropped out of school in the third grade to work the family farm...a man that never stopped learning, and teaching...the man that helped raise Rick and his brother...his father. Dr. Rigsby’s father was the cook at Cal Maritime Academy for most of his life, and he and his wife gave their sons the wisdom they needed to truly succeed in life –the wisdom of how to be a good human. Simple lessons that shaped and molded his character, with pearls of wisdom such as:

- Don’t judge. Get to know people as individuals.
- Kind deeds are never lost.
- Make sure your servant’s towel is bigger than your ego.
- If you’re going to do a job...do it right.

- I won't have a problem if you aim high and miss, but I'm going to have a problem if you aim low and hit.
- Good isn't good enough if it can be better, better isn't good enough if it can be best.

Each of you have undoubtedly learned similar lessons from loved ones – many of them here today. Never lose sight of who you are...who you strive to be. The most important character trait of really impactful leaders is first and foremost being a good human. Lesson #1.

Wise Man #2 – Admiral Bill McRaven: Admiral McRaven served in the Navy for over 37 years. He graduated from the University of Texas at Austin, was commissioned in the Navy, and was shipped off to Coronado California to attend Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training – BUDS. Just prior to his retirement, he was invited back to his alma matter to give the commencement speech. Yet again...one of the best speeches I've ever viewed...once again, those thoughts are also captured in a book...once again, homework for you all. Admiral McRaven's speech was turned into a #1 New York Times Bestseller titled "*Make Your Bed*."

As described in the book jacket, Admiral McRaven had taken inspiration from the university's slogan, "What starts here, changes the world," and shared ten principles he learned during Navy SEAL training that helped him overcome challenges not only in his training, but throughout his long and distinguished career. Principles that include gems such as:

- Start your day with a task completed.
- You can't go it alone.
- Life's not fair – drive on!
- Failure can make you stronger.
- You must dare greatly.
- Rise to the occasion.
- Never, ever quit!

BUDS was a formative experience for then Ensign McRaven. You are just completing a formative experience as well. I'm not suggesting that what you went through here compares to SEAL training; however, you've learned and

demonstrate the ability to do things that aren't easy. To accomplish things you likely sometimes doubted you could accomplish. To persevere. Lesson #2. You are leaving here with the knowledge and the tools to succeed.

Wise Man #3 – Pharrell: I'm going to share a secret with you. One of my guilty pleasures is watching the singing competition, The Voice. I have to admit that I've been a big fan of the show since its inception and I applaud its very conception. I love the fact that the coaches choose their teams "in the blind" – backs turned to the stage, listening intently to the talent and the potential on the stage. I watch the show largely for entertainment; however, every moment in life is an opportunity to learn and grow. Pharrell was a coach on The Voice from 2014 to 2017, seasons 7 through 10. Now, I can't remember the specific season, the episode, nor the artist, but I can distinctly remember Pharrell talking to an aspiring contestant...a talented individual with promise...and reminding them that at the end of the competition, everyone goes home. Even the winner. He told them that it's not just about what happens during the competition...it's about what happens next. It's about how you grow from that experience and carry it forward to pursue your dreams.

What? I had to rewind and listen to him again. Here I was, just relaxing and being entertained, and out of nowhere Pharrell comes off the top rope with Truth, with Wisdom, with a beautiful life lesson. As I come close to the end of my remarks, I want to remind you all as well...lesson #3...it's not about what happens here at UMSL...it's about what you do next. Think of the possibilities?

In closing, let me remind you:

1. Remain grounded in the foundational wisdom you've been given – your core values that make you who you are. Be a good human.
2. Hold onto the knowledge you've gained from your spectacular, formative experiences here at university -- your ability to persevere and to get the job done.
3. Remember that your true journey is just beginning.

As Dr. Rigsby often says, the key to success is to combine your knowledge and your wisdom to have an impact. To do great things. To transform lives. To make this world a better place. We have no idea what you all will

accomplish...individually or collectively...but WE have confidence that it will be spectacular!

We congratulate you. We celebrate you. We salute each and every one of you.

And we look forward to watching the amazing things you do in the future!
May God bless each of you and enrich your lives abundantly. Let's hand out some diplomas!