**Commencement Address**

**Sunday, May 14, 2023**

**Ceremony VI: College of Business Administration**

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Happy Mother’s Day!

If you’re the mother of a graduate, the world now recognizes for sure that your child is smart, hardworking, and accomplished; just like you always have. Congratulations.

To the graduates here today: by earning this diploma, you’ve accomplished something very significant that most adults haven’t. You have a lot to be proud of and look forward to.

And to the graduates today who are also mothers: the mountain you just climbed was of the steepest. Thank you for being fantastic role models.

My graduation from UMSL was also on Mother’s Day. I remember feeling excited, grateful, and nervous. Today, I feel the same: still excited to make it here, grateful for what UMSL has given me, and a little nervous because I stilldon’t have it all figured out.

In your career, you may only have five other days that rival the excitement and pride you feel today. Ten if you’re really lucky. A job offer you’ve been striving for. A promotion that felt barely in reach. Earning another degree. A bonus much bigger than you expected. The vast majority of our days won’t be full of adrenaline or major accomplishments.

So how do you find the energy to push through all the stress, tedium, nerves, and other hurdles that are before those handful of days you pray for? How do you really meet, and maybe exceed, your ambitions? How do you remain fully engaged as a professional and enjoy what hopefully will be a long journey?

I’m going to share some soundbites that have helped me address those questions. You’ll also see how these concepts work together.

1. Leave Your Comfort Zone. Be ok not having the answers, but know how to find them, quickly. This is where you develop new relationships, skills, knowledge, interests, and other resources. These resources are how you become more valuable to employers and create new opportunities that excite you. It keeps the journey interesting. Push your boundaries; leave your comfort zone.
2. ABCD to ABCD. Always be *collecting* dots to always be *connecting* dots. People, skills, knowledge, and ambitions are some of the dots. Your ability to create these dots, and the line you then draw connecting them, are your opportunities. The lack of dots, or the inability to connect your dots, are your limitations. You learned the magic of compound interest in business school; relationships, skills, and knowledge mixed together compound your opportunities. Sometimes we see the dots, but we won’t connect them because of fear, insecurity, or other limits. Remember what I said before about leaving your comfort zone? Having all the dots, or opportunities, in the world still requires you to get it going, which is sometimes uncomfortable. Always be *collecting* dots to always be *connecting* dots. ABCD to ABCD.
3. Be a Difference Maker. Our former dean, Charlie Hoffman, really made an impression on me with his leadership edict simply of “make something happen for your employer.” Employers want someone that does their job well, but also takes initiative to makes something else happen. You’ll be amazed how you standout by being reliable *and* looking to take on additional challenges. Those additional tasks will give you more dots and enhance your reputation. It usually requires you to leave your comfort zone.
4. The Harder You Work, the Luckier You Get. Work to be really good at your job. Work to learn about other areas outside your direct job, function, company, and industry. Work to build relationships with quality people. You can do this through volunteer opportunities at non-profits and trade associations. Get out there and make something happen for someone. You’ll be better for it and make a positive difference.
5. Be Curious. We’ve all heard about the importance of finding our passion. I agree, but sometimes that’s easier said than done. To help see the forest through the trees, be thoughtful once and a while about what captures your attention, or gives you energy. What are you curious about? Is it the rush you get working with a team to meet a deadline. Is it quietly and methodically working through reems of data, knowing the answer is buried in there somewhere? Is it making a difference for a certain group of people? Knowing what gives you energy, and also what takes your energy, is really important. Be curious about yourself and things around you. It will help find your sweet spot.

In sum, to get where you want to go, it’ll take relationships, knowledge, and skills, which you get through sustained effort. To have the energy for all of that effort, be curious as to what gets you going and slows you down. You have what it takes to work these principles well. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be here, today.

So, to end how I started: congratulations; you have a lot to be proud of and look forward to. Thank you.