

University of Tampa - Commencement speech 2022

Thank you for that warm and gracious introduction.

President Vaughn, members of the board of trustees, faculty, and, most importantly, graduates, family, and friends, it is indeed an extraordinary honor and a privilege for me to address the 2022 graduating class of my alma mater, the University of Tampa.

It is particularly special given that we can do this in person and really celebrate your achievement. The experience of the last few years reinforces the vital nature of this kind of ceremony whereby we are able to come together to truly enjoy this significant milestone in each of your lives with your classmates, family and friends.

For me, it would be hard to imagine a class that would embody the school motto of “Esse quam videri” “To be rather than to seem” better than this class. You and your families were able to overcome and persevere to “be” a University of Tampa graduate. Again, I am humbled to be part of this day for you.

Unfortunately, in life, we don't always get the opportunity to pause and really cherish the moment and this is definitely a moment to cherish. To that end and at the risk of being a bit awkward, I am going to stop talking and give you, your classmates, family, and friends a brief moment to take this all in.

The next word is Poker. Now, you are probably thinking to yourself how did he come up with this list but just stay with me.

Many people in the business world, refer to those who play checkers as thinking tactically and those who play chess as thinking strategically.

Now, I would suggest that business and life are more like poker. The reason being you never see all the pieces and there is a lot more uncertainty that pervades our lives. So, while we may talk or think like we are absolutely sure about things, it might be good particularly on big things to ask ourselves are we really that sure.

There is always more that we don't know than we know so tempering how sure we are will help to judge options better and set expectations with others more clearly.

The added benefit is that it will help you to adapt as inevitably circumstances change allowing you to see opportunities where others won't.

The next word is textbook. Many of you will never use a textbook again but I can assure you that your learning is going to expand significantly over the next few years.

There will be topics that you are unaware of now that you will be an expert in in a few years. I say that because the circumstances of your life will force you to drill into topics out of necessity. Though you are graduating with a specific degree, this entire process was really about learning how to learn. That is the skill that prepares you for the rest of your life.

Learning is fueled by curiosity. Give it a rich menu of subjects. Go broad across many subjects or go deep in a specific subject. Just make sure that you are constantly learning.

In an interesting twist, being curious is the best way to learn about yourself which is the ultimate goal for all of us. Again, nobody can teach you about you. There is no manual, book, podcast, or YouTube video about who you are. But, by being curious you can figure out what makes you, you.

My final word is Relationships. You are not on this journey alone and that is what makes it rewarding.

I am a big fan of Pixar movies and have always been amazed by their ability to tell stories in simple ways but with incredible human depth. To me, the movie that best describes depth of relationships is "Inside Out". The story is about a teenage girl, and it goes inside her mind, showing how her emotions of anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and joy pilot her through the interactions in life.

The director, Peter Hans Docter, in his struggle to find the essence of the story, highlights this insightful quote "the people that mean something deeply to me are those that I have cried with, that I experienced fear with, it is all of the aspects of emotions that bond us together".

My personal take away from this is that while sharing a particular emotion deeply with someone can create a bond, the strength of a bond is better correlated to the spectrum of emotions that we share together. The broader the spectrum of emotions the stronger the relationship.

The nurturing of relationships provides the community that will keep you grounded and will pick you up when you fall. For me, it is what adds the richness to our lives and makes it priceless.

So, you may ask how do these four words impact you, as you stand ready to receive your diploma?

Your journey will take you places you would have never expected. Appreciating uncertainty better, will help you adapt as circumstances change. Staying curious will help you learn about others and yourself. The relationships you foster will help you along your way.

Or put another way by Mark Twain: "Life is short. Break the rules. Forgive quickly, kiss slowly. Love truly. Laugh uncontrollably and never regret anything that makes you smile."

Congratulations again to the 2022 graduating class on a job well done.