

Kettering University Commencement Speech

June 13, 2009

President Liberty, Doctor Harris, Trustees

Faculty, alumni, parents and friends, and the class of 2009

I want to congratulate each of you on this great day – Graduation day.

I know it's a cliché – but it is true --- today represents the beginning of your professional life. Now it's time to take advantage of what the world has to offer you as a graduate of Kettering University.

So I ask you “What are you waiting for?”

As a Kettering graduate, you are now a member of a very elite group – a group of men and women that have graduated before you. You join a group of more than 30,000 Kettering and General Motors Institute alumni around the world. Being an active member of such an elite group sets you apart from others – it makes you stand out – it makes you special.

Kettering graduates have gone on to become accomplished Leaders in business and industry; they are among the best in engineering and innovation; and are globally recognized as experts in their fields. Today, as a graduate of Kettering, you now become a leader – you have the opportunity to lead - to set an example - for those students that will graduate in 2010 and many years to come . . .

So I ask you “What are you waiting for?”

As President of the Alumni Board of Directors, it gives me great pride to be associated with the talented, passionate and professional men and women who have graduated from Kettering. I am impressed by each individual's strong sense of responsibility; the responsibility to their local communities, and to the greater community at large. I am extremely proud to be an alumnus of Kettering. I hope you carry that same sense of pride as you leave these hallowed halls and begin your professional lives.

So as I thought about what I wanted to share with you today – I thought I would talk about statistics. Yes – statistics – so just consider this your last math lesson. But don't worry; there won't be any testing at the end. So depending upon how you feel about statistics - you may find the following either very surprising or very believable.

First statistic - when it comes to changing jobs - 52% of those that are employed feel that they will change jobs every few years. Another statistics says that workers currently between the ages of 18 and 38 will change jobs an average of 10 times in their career. 10 times – and some of you will be a part of those statistics. And some of you will hope to spend your entire career at only one or two companies. Regardless of which statistic you fall under, each of you has the potential to do something great. But many of us are held back by the limitations and boundaries we put on ourselves.

So I ask you, what are you waiting for?

Why are you waiting to pursue your most burning desire? When will you go after the dream that has always been your life ambition? I hope my advice will help motivate you on your journey.

First, I want you to take control of your life and don't make excuses as to why you can't do something. You can achieve greatness in anything you choose. Instead of saying "No, it can't be done" ask yourself "How do I make it happen?" Separate yourself from the negative opinions of others and stay focused on what you want. Find all the reasons why it CAN be done and never consider anything else.

Next, create a list of all of all the things you love to do. What have you always wanted to do but were too afraid to take the first step? What goal have you always wanted to achieve? Maybe develop a great product? Design a valuable program? Offer an important service? Write a book? Or whatever stirs that excitement inside of you? Create that list and then pay attention to what you keep coming back to.

Now, Select your true passion from that list and start visualizing. Start visualizing your success in that particular endeavor. See your first product being marketed and purchased. See yourself autographing your new book. Or see your lecture series highly acclaimed and in high demand. Visualize often and keep yourself focused on what you want to accomplish.

Shake off the fear of failure. Fear of failure sometimes comes from being afraid of what other people will think. Sometimes it comes from fear of the unknown. I know. I wasted a lot of time in my life fearing failure. I didn't have the fear of failure when I graduated from Kettering, but it happened somewhere along the way.

What I eventually learned was that failure was really nothing more than another opportunity; an opportunity that has come my way; an opportunity to re-invent myself. Take advantage of your failures and make yourself better on the other side. Learn from your mistakes. Take advantage of the opportunity and let it help you shed the past and create a new future. Don't be afraid of failure; seize that new found prospect and change direction in your life. Change direction.... Become an airline pilot, a doctor, an artist, a musician, or whatever you want.

Finally, maintain your enthusiasm. Remember the enthusiasm you have today. Take time to celebrate – especially the milestones in your life – like today – your graduation day. Never lose sight of all of the wonderful things that have happened so far in your life and the ones yet to come.

Kettering is known for having one of the premier engineering programs in the country. No one can ever deny you of your first class education. But with your education comes a responsibility, a responsibility to lead and serve. So as you surround yourself with positive supporters; family, close friends, and the great professors and faculty at Kettering; Let their desire to help and serve others finds its way into your heart. Let it burn as brightly in the future as it does today.

So what does it take to light your fire, to spark your life into overdrive, and to propel you into the future? What does it take to for you to earn the respect and gratitude reserved for the best? What does it take to gain the admiration saved for those who think big, dream grand dreams, and then work honestly to make it all a reality.

So as you start your “30-year work term” - remember the only life worth living is the one you are really passionate about.

I truly wish each of you a blessed future, a future that is a shining example of what life can be; I hope that you can become shining influence for all those whose lives you touch; I wish for you a life that illustrates the greatness of having possibilities, and a life of amazing potential.

Please stay connected with this great university - Kettering - and the people who helped to make you the person you are today.

Let me leave you with this final thought

The great Chinese philosopher and social thinker, Confucius, was believed to have said “Chose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life”.

So again – I ask you “what are you waiting for?”