

Dare to Dream
Commencement Address
North Central Michigan College
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Thank you so much for the opportunity to be with you today. It is very special to be able to share this moment with you, when we celebrate your success and achievement. As graduates you represent the collective hopes and dreams of this institution. Each of the faculty, staff, administration, and yes, fellow students, looks to you as the result of their collective efforts.

In some ways for me this occasion feels similar to the emotion one sometimes experiences as a parent at graduations, weddings, and when someone is leaving home to set out on their own. These are major crossroads that help define life. As a parent, friend, colleague, and yes, as teacher, you look at someone that you've tried to help guide, grow, and evolve and wonder if you've done enough, if there is some last piece of information or advice that you might give that might make a difference. Is there something that you've forgotten to say or do that will help?

My experience in those situations is that one looks into the eyes of that student and discovers that they've changed and that a relationship that has been defined as teacher and student has become one of friend or colleague. I want to share with you these thoughts that may be useful for your future.

Dare to Dream

There was a time when man had not walked on the moon, when men could fly, and people believed the world was flat. Each of these realities came to change as people dared to dream, to go beyond what was possible and to accomplish what many considered impossible.

I want to encourage you to go beyond the possible, to dream and do great things. Perhaps you are saying to yourself, "How is this possible for me?" I'd ask you to consider these four teacher reports -

“...as a seven year school boy this young man is hopeless. His brain is addled and it is useless for him to attend school.”

“...although he has had only four months of school, he is very good with studies, but is a daydreamer and asks foolish questions.”

“...is a unique member of the class. He is ten years old and is only just beginning to read and write. He shows signs of improving, but you must not set your sights too high on him.”

“...is a very poor student. He is mentally slow, unsociable, and is always daydreaming. He is spoiling it for the rest of the class. It would be best if he were removed from the school at once.”

Who was that hopeless seven year old boy? - Thomas Edison, inventor of the phonograph, the light bulb, motion pictures, and the holder of 1,093 patents.

Who was doing well with studies after four months of school, but daydreamed and asked foolish questions? - None other than the 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

Who was ten years old and only just beginning to show signs of improvement? - The 28th President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson and also President of Princeton University.

And who should have been removed from class because he was mentally slow, unsociable, and a very poor student? - Albert Einstein, the father of relativity and winner of the 1921 Nobel Prize.

It would stand to reason that each of you has received far better classroom reports than this. If each of these individuals went on to such great success, what is possible for you?

Make a Difference

I often find inspiration in these words of Martin Luther King, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

I suggest you begin not just by treating everyone as equal, but believing that they are. Adopt the Golden Rule, to treat others as you would have them treat you. Instead of telling people what to do, consider asking more often, “How may I help you?” Learn to encourage and trust others. In trusting, think of the gardener who plants a seed, trusting that it will grow. What would be their success if they dug it up every few days to see how it was growing?

It is my fervent hope that you have learned more than just your academic studies here in college. I want each of you to have learned about the meaning of engagement, the need for volunteers, and the importance of service. The goal here is not just that you will make a difference in your community because of your academic education, but that you can make a true difference for humanity by truly caring about others. You should be the leaders for your community, helping others who are less fortunate.

Ultimately a life spent making a difference is much more than just your career, community and professional success. A measure of your personal effectiveness will be found in the relationships you create and sustain. Achieving a balance among your career, your family, and your friends is one of the keys to happiness. Helping others is a shallow existence if it is only an approach for the workplace and does not extend to those you love and cherish.

Don't give up

Over my career I have worked with many students, but I remember particularly the story of one student determined to find that first position after college. Although his resume stretched several pages in length, in reality this spoke of potential rather than experience. This student received rejection letter after rejection letter, and in the job search process met with disappointment and discouragement. Fifty-six letters of application were rejected, sometimes the treatment was brutal. Finally his persistence did pay off. That 57th application was for a teaching position at a small state university in Alabama. Seeking to get his foot in the door, he called the dean there, said he would be nearby and wanted to interview for the job. While this might never happen today, the dean agreed and hired the student on the spot, who finally found success after 56 failures.

I know that story well because 31 years ago almost to this day, I was that student. The dean was a legendary Alabama educator, John M. Long. I had the opportunity to work for him for 15 years and he influenced my life in ways I could never have imagined. And for me the ultimate honor was that he and his wife, Mary Lynn, drove to Big Rapids and attended my inauguration as president at Ferris State University.

One of life's realities is that we learn and remember much more from failure than from success. Each of us never knows when it is the next effort that will meet with success.

Closing Thoughts

As each of you sets out on the next step on your life and career you will face time of challenge, heartbreak, and disappointment. I would encourage you to keep these thoughts in mind -

- Dare to Dream
- Make a Difference
- Don't Give Up

I like to think of things this way...

**Once in a while, something comes along
That marks a moment we remember as having forever changed our life**

**... a door opens, we walk through and look back for that same opening
It no longer exists**

**We become different...
Indeed, you are different!!**

Congratulations and best wishes to you - the Class of 2006!!