

IAU/ACM Commencement Speech
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We are here today to celebrate your achievement. I know first-hand the discipline required to obtain a degree. In addition, you should know that your degree is enhanced because you obtained it abroad. All studies have found that students who study abroad are more successful than their peers. Why?

- First, it takes courage to put yourself into a new culture- so you are more likely to take risks.
- You also have to discern the nuances of a different culture and language so your problem solving skills are enhanced.
- While abroad your emotional intelligence is challenged since language can be a barrier and you need to intuit and read body language.

So WELL DONE Graduates: you are book smart, emotional intelligence smart, and fearless.

To Family: How proud you must be!!! - Graduates give your family a hug (and kiss) because this is a day of celebration for them as well.

I also want to take a moment to thank the faculty and leadership of IAU. Each one of them here today is a sterling example of intellect and wisdom. I have seen year after year the passion they have for this school and for teaching. It is thanks to them that so many of our graduates have done so well.

As you know, my job as your commencement speaker is to send you forth with advice. I have five points to make.

1. Have Confidence
2. Welcome Failure;
3. Network;
4. Have a Sense of Humor and
5. Live a Life of Gratitude.

So let me speak to each of these points:

Have Confidence

How do I define confidence?

- A confident person is self-aware and they know their strengths.
- A confident person does not dwell on their weakness since it is their talents (not weakness) that is relevant to their life.

Remember: Focus on your talents; don't dwell on what you are not.

Welcome Failure

My favorite saying is: *It is not the fall that matters but how you get up.* I was lucky enough to be born with a disability. The only way I was going to be able to walk as a young child was if I was willing to fall. Because of this experience I learned the following things:

- It doesn't matter if you fall. Just get up and carry on with grace *not* defeat. How you react to failure defines your character.
- Always use the fall as an opportunity to improve—Ask - What did I learn?
- If you are not failing—then you are not trying hard enough and “life alert” alarm bells should be going off!! Question whether you are limiting yourself.
- By failing, you meet the most wonderful souls when they hold out their hand to help you up. These people teach you empathy, kindness and how someone with character responds to others.

So Remember: Don't see failure as a defeat but a powerful tool to help you succeed.

Network

People discount networking as a waste of time. In fact networking is a key component to success. Why?

- Social interaction establishes a bond. It creates trust and a community of support which you will need for all of life's challenges and joys.
- For me, if a teacher, peer or leader in a profession impressed me I would ask them how they did it. In law school, I asked the Chief Justice of the 4th circuit if he had a few minutes to talk about how to become a judge — within 30 minutes he offered me an internship. He was a mentor and a person I honored throughout my career.

So Network! You will find that people are eager to help you, and you will have the benefit of someone else's experiences and support as you find your own path

Have a Sense of Humor

Have you ever been in a situation where tension is so thick that everyone is uncomfortable? Humor is a powerful weapon of goodwill.

President Reagan was a master at using humor to turn the tide. During his second Presidential campaign, the issue of his age was the single factor being successfully used against him. During his debate with the Democratic candidate Walter Mondale he addressed the elephant in the room with humor. He said “I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience.” The age issue was now off the table. Everyone laughed, including Mondale.

When I was a young attorney men would sometimes say inappropriate things. In theory you could complain but at the time it was usually unsuccessful. Instead, when something particularly offensive was directed my way, I would say, “Just a minute do you mind if I get my tape recorder out of my purse?” It always made everyone laugh, gave the

offender pause, and established respect.

So you see *Humor can be a powerful tool.*

Live a Life in Gratitude and Give Back

This might be the most important advice I give you. There is an entire science devoted to the subject of “happiness.” The studies find that, regardless of your life’s circumstances, you will be happy if you:

- a. Are grateful for all you have and;
- b. Give to others.

I assume everyone in this audience wants to be happy!!

So live in gratitude and give back. And remember the great saying: **Of those to whom much is given (THAT'S YOU) much is required.**

Go forth, celebrate AND BE HAPPY. You deserve it!!

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