

Graduation Speech

Lake Land College

May 11, 2018

Many moons ago, I was sitting in your chair about ready to receive my first college diploma. I remember feeling a **myriad of emotions**. I was excited. I was nervous about the next step. I felt proud. I was a bit scared about adulthood. I was feeling grateful for my experiences here and the friends that I made. I felt relief that it was over yet wondering how two years passed so quickly. I may or may not have been crushing on a boy in the John Deere program. (Anyone else?)

Lake Land College runs in my blood. **I am a daughter of a Lake Land instructor**. I have memories as a child helping my father run the slide show projector in class, playing school with my brother down the hallway and listening to the livestock judging team give oral reasons. I also grew up watching my father go above and beyond for his students -- whether it was a letter of recommendation or spending extra time with students answering questions, discussing their career path or educational opportunities.

I look up to my father very much and he is on a short list of people that I admire most both personally and professionally. I would love to say that he is the exception and not the rule - but here at Lake Land, it was really quite the opposite. He was the rule. When I look back at my educational career, some of my favorite instructors were right here at Lake Land-- teachers with intellectual horsepower who took the extra time and attention for their students. But tonight isn't about them - it's about you. I tell you this because no matter what your next step, be proud of your educational experience here and confident that you have been given the requisite tools to accomplish whatever you want to in life.

I would like to take this opportunity to bestow a few words of wisdom upon you as you propel to the next chapter:

- First, **embrace your own path in life**. It's natural to see successful people and want to emulate them. But what is best for them might not be best for you. Please do not be afraid to think outside the box and go your own direction in life. When I started my own food and agriculture law practice in the heart of the most densely populated city in the country, there were many people who thought I was a little crazy. In fact, I got a few jokes about tractors in Central Park. But you know what? It worked for me. It ended up being the perfect next step for me in that stage of my life. And besides, from a business standpoint, I didn't have much competition as I was the **ONLY** agriculture lawyer in New York City.
- Second, **fail fast and fail forward**. As cliché as it sounds, I really truly have learned more from my failures than from my successes. Embrace those moments wisely. In those moments of failure, it's how you react that really matters.
- Finally, I am oftentimes asked what my key to success is. It is really very simple-- **hard work**, the kind I learned growing up on my family farm spending summers bailing hay and showing cattle through 4-H and FFA. No matter what it has been in my career - whether it was organizing the Annual Meeting for New York Agri-Women, planning a webinar for the American Bar Association, or prepping for a trial, it was that good ol' work ethic that got me through it. We all have different God given talents and abilities. You will never hear me say that I'm the smartest or most knowledgeable person in the room but I do know how to work hard. I want to challenge each of you, no matter the direction you go, to not be afraid to roll-up your sleeves and get your hands dirty. That may just be the key to your success.

I hope that each of you will leave here tonight with pride knowing that you the skillset to accomplish whatever you want to in life with the education you received here at Lake Land. You have been given the tools to carve out your own path. I also hope that each of you will have the courage to fail and learn deeply from those experiences while not being afraid to work hard and give that little extra.

And remember, in the words of Cory Booker, "**Life is about purpose, not position.**" Live a life with purpose to go out and be leaders and servants in your communities.