

University of Illinois Department of Chemistry Convocation (May 18, 2014)

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I would like to say thank you to the department for the opportunity to address this year's graduating class and assembled guests. And a warm welcome to the faculty, friends and especially the Class of 2014 who we recognize today. I wish to extend my congratulations to the graduates and to their families. Having supported two through their undergraduate educations, I know firsthand some of the challenges you all have faced to be here today.

Graduates, one might ask what does this degree that you have earned give you? You have received an outstanding education at one of the best schools of chemical sciences in the world. It is something you should be very proud of and I challenge you to continue to build upon the cornerstone that is being conferred to you today. Your degree can be thought of as your "ticket of admission" to the world beyond the University of Illinois. You now get to begin to write the next chapter of your life story. Your degree, however, is no guarantee of success. Nor is it an assurance that the future will be easy or fair. The previous chapters of your life are unknown or will be forgotten in the next challenge you undertake. You will be evaluated, judged and critiqued on what you accomplish from this day forward. Your "reset" button has been pushed. You will have the respect of your new colleagues. They choose you but you will have to prove yourself from day one. Everyone will be watching the new kid on the block and forming their perceptions. Those will be formed by your actions and your words. So, while the slate may be wiped clean, I can tell you that your degree will open doors to all kinds of opportunities, including many you have not yet thought of yet. You may not be doing chemistry for the entirety of your life but the scientific discipline that you have learned, the critical thinking skills that you have acquired and the deductive power you have developed, and will continue to develop, will allow you to successfully pursue any number of career paths. Do not lose your thirst for discovery and knowledge. It will be what helps drive you in any of the paths that you choose. Keep the fire burning for whatever endeavor you are pursuing. If you lose that fire, it may be time for a change. And bring passion to your work. I believe it is one of the things that drives success in a career. People with positive passion are exciting people to be around.

Communication, communication, communication. Face-to-face communication is still important. It is hard and it is easy to ignore in this digital age that we live in but it is necessary. It is hard because the bandwidth of today's job is orders of magnitude greater today because of the digital tools at our disposal. But you have to make time to make in person interactions work. Why? It builds relationships. Good for work, good for life. It builds trust. Good for work, good for life. Communication needs to be directional and it needs to be targeted. Be it concise, detailed or super-detailed. Know your audience and what level of detail they require.

What you communicate is what you project to the world about you and what is important to you. You project energy. It is either positive or negative and you have the choice of which one you bring every day. I can tell you that choosing positive will create more opportunities, create more help for you and make you one people want to be around. When you share your opinions be respectful. Respectful does not mean that you avoid conflict. Constructive, emphasis constructive, conflict is good. It gets all the opinions, the pros and the cons, on the table for discussion and you get to a better decision. Be

effective not just right. What you communicate also speaks to your integrity, your humility, your courage, your thirst for knowledge and your desire to become better than you are today.

From communicating comes networking; you are not the smartest person in the organization in every area. Learn from what others have done before you. Use the knowledge of your colleagues to help you navigate the new organization. Every organization has their own culture. Learn what is valued and what is not, what is considered acceptable and what is not. Leverage their expertise to advance your work. Working smarter not harder is still in fashion. There is so much information today that even with today's tools one can get lost very easily. A guide can help. Do not be afraid to find a guide, a mentor, in your organization. Learn from them the values. Use them to help navigate the labyrinth that is the organization. Get guidance on "who to go to" when you hit a bump in the road. Use them as your sounding board on your ideas before you send up the actual trial balloon for the world to see.

And do not be afraid to give back. When it is your turn to be the guide, the mentor, the coach, be the one who articulates what it is to have high values, courage, humility, being effective not just right, helping others deliver results. Ask yourself on a regular basis "how am I progressing to achieve my dream?" and "what is my legacy going to be?" when I get to the end of the journey. So be honest, be fair and impartial, be respectful and be passionate in all that you do. Again congratulations on your graduation. I wish you success in whatever you choose to do. Go forth as ambassadors of this great institution, this great School of Chemistry and do it and yourselves proud.