

**Speaker Jo Ann Davidson
Commencement Address
The Ohio State University
Friday, December 8, 2000**

President Kirwan and Board Chairman Skestos, members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, alumni, family members, friends and, most importantly, graduates of The Ohio State University in the class of 2000:

I am really honored to participate in this commencement and to be among those who will be receiving honorary degrees. While long an enthusiastic supporter of this University, it will be even more special to me in the future. Indeed, The Ohio State University is special to Ohio. It is our flagship state institution and understands its mission to provide a quality education to its students, but also to be part of the engine which drives the economy of our state.

Shortly after it was announced that I would be today's commencement speaker, a reporter for the *Lantern* called to ask the title of my speech. Frankly, at that time, I was just beginning to think of what message I might share that would make a difference to those of you who are graduating. I asked some of my staff for ideas and some of them suggested some good OSU/Michigan jokes that might draw some laughter, but a while ago I realized that I am not good at jokes – so I discarded that idea.

Perhaps as you do when you are looking for the topic for an assignment to write a report, I wrote down a number of suggested titles – perhaps the typical ones. The first was "Success – Reality or Illusion," in line with questions some people raise about what is real success – money, possessions, a nice title, or is it something deeper – a commitment and time belief in what you are doing and basic quality of life issues. Perhaps now is a good time for you each to spend some time reflecting on how you view success and what goals will help you attain that success.

Then I considered "Change: Challenges and Opportunities." I recently attended a meeting where one of the speakers' presentations was entitled "It's a Jungle Out There: The Survival of the Fittest." In the background information promoting the presentation was a quote from Charles Darwin. The quote is "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent, but rather the one most responsive to change."

This title interested me because I have read and reread "Who Moved My Cheese?" as I prepare for a major change in my life.

For those of you who have not read the book, the story is told to a group of young people, much like yourselves, who might be gathering for a high school reunion and each of whom is struggling to understand and accept the changes which they were experiencing in their lives and careers.

The story involves two mice and two little people who try to find their way through a maze to find their cheese – whatever their cheese might be – personal, professional, or spiritual. The story helps to understand that change can be about gaining something, rather than losing something.

Even before the current explosion of technology or the expansion of our horizons to consider things globally, you were faced with change. But now you face change on a much shorter timetable – an almost daily or hourly timetable.

Then, I thought of "If only..." This is a phrase that most of us have used when we look back on mistakes we've made or opportunities we've turned away from because we were afraid we would fail. I want to caution against being too careful about taking risks and taking advantage of new opportunities. You don't want too many "If onlys" in your life. There is so much to discover and I must confess to advising some of my young staff to pack their backpack and travel abroad.

My final thought for a title was "Commitment to Community" – something I obviously feel very strongly about. By commitment, I don't just mean public service – but commitment to participate in some way in your community.

It troubles me that there is such a big disconnect between so many people, especially young people, with our system of government. The record of college-age and post-college-age persons in exercising their vote is dismal. In the 2000 presidential primaries, only one in 10 voted. There has been a lot of discussion in this presidential election about the candidates ignoring the young voter and in turn the young voter doesn't vote. My experience has been that young voters do vote when an issue really interests them. For example, the story I will mention in a minute about the young state representative or when the drinking age was on the ballot. The problem is that every election affects you in one way or another and, until you vote in greater numbers, the candidate may continue to ignore you.

You can fight city hall, your vote does make a difference, and a candidate can win against all odds. One of the newest members of the Ohio legislature voted for the first time in this year's election and voted for himself. Vastly outnumbered in registered voters for his party, he registered and turned out the votes of the young voters and was elected. This is a wonderful example of how one young man, who believed he could make a difference, worked to be elected and convinced other young voters to support him.

I have an opportunity to work with many talented people from OSU – pages as well as interns from the College of Law and John Glenn Institute. Hopefully they leave that work experience with the belief, as John Glenn has best expressed it, "that I still believe public service is an honorable profession." One of the missions of the Institute, established on this campus with his leadership, is to "inspire the next generation of citizens by introducing students to the ideals of civic commitment and encouraging them to consider public service as a career."

As a woman in politics, long before many women were running for public office, I faced many obstacles. There were many times I wasn't sure I wanted to try to overcome these obstacles. Being a little competitive helps, but I felt so strongly that everyone should have a chance and that women's voices need to be heard in the halls of government at all levels that I kept trying to overcome the obstacles. While many of these obstacles do not exist today, there are still many barriers for women. I hope the women in the audience will share my belief that women's voices need to be heard and will continue to try to overcome the barriers.

Obviously, I never really picked a title for my comments today. But, in retrospect, if I would have chosen one, it would be "Keep Trying."

You have come so far to get to this day. I know I couldn't possibly appreciate the sacrifices that have been made by you and your family, the discouragement you must have faced numerous times, the hard work and dedication you've put into getting your degree. But I do know you kept trying and you deserve all of our congratulations for achieving your goal.

Keep trying to determine what successes you want in your life – success in your career, in your personal life, financially. And always try to determine if those successes are what you really want and what will really bring you happiness.

Keep trying to have only a few "If onlys" in your life. Take the challenges, the risks. Be confident in your own talents and abilities.

Keep trying to embrace changes – to not be like the little people Hem and Haw in "Who Moved My Cheese" who felt they were entitled to their "cheese," took it for granted, and complained about what was happening to them.

Keep trying to understand how important it is to make a contribution to your community in some way. So many have done so much to give you this great country to live in and the great opportunities that lie ahead. You need to do the same for the next generations.

Intelligence and education take their rightful place at the top of the list of qualifications being considered by prospective employers. An ability to work well with other people and to be a self-starter are also important. But most of all, the pure willingness to work hard and to keep trying have always been a determining factor to many employers – the one most people look for, recognize, and reward.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with you. As we go forward into the world of challenges and change together, let's all keep trying.

Good luck and God bless.