422nd Commencement: Jerome Schottenstein Center 8/4/2019
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1. Dear Graduates and families:

It is a matter of great honor and privilege for me to congratulate you personally for reaching this great landmark in your life and professional career. It is also a matter of great pride for me that I am one of you. Together we are members of the elite club of ~ 750,000 who received diplomas from OSU since 1870. I was in your place exactly 51 years ago.

Since 1968, I have worked on 6 continents, presented 530 lectures in 110 countries, mentored ~400 soil scientists from ~30 countries, presided an international union of ~60,000 soil scientists from around the world, and had an honor and privilege of audiences with several heads of state including their excellencies the emperor and empress of Japan. This is because OSU opened many doors for me and gave me the courage and strength to walk through these doors of opportunities. Graduating from OSU today, you are also deserving of such opportunities. Your success, however, is no accident...It is hard work, perseverance, studying meticulously, sacrificing, and most of all, loving the entire process of learning.

With hard work, perseverance, and commitment to excellence, you are destined to achieve even greater heights in the profession of your choice. You must also have big dreams and work even harder to fulfil these dreams. Because nothing can be achieved without the strongest possible desire to achieve it.

Remember that “The heights by great persons reached and kept were never attained by a sudden flight, but while their companions slept, they were toiling upwards in the night”.

2. Finding a job or the next step to achieving your dream is also a challenge that you must address. Most of the problems in realizing your dream and securing what you want are due to two reasons:
   - Acting without thinking, or
   - Thinking without acting

A proven strategy is that of the Acting-Thinking Nexus. Therefore, let the whole world be your school, nature be your teacher, experience be your text book, and music be the symphony from Mother Earth.... With a new job, It is important to remember that “we make living by what we get, but we make life by what we give.” So said Winston Churchill.

3. I must also congratulate your parents, family, and friends for your success.

Indeed, no language can express the power, heroism, depth and selflessness of parental/maternal love and care. You must give them back by love, respect and care.

4. Next, The Alma Mater

Wherever you go and whatever you do, you must always fulfill the trust reposed in you by your alma mater----a Latin Phrase translated literally as “nourishing mother”.

In my case, as in yours, our common alma mater is the Ohio State University. It is our alma mater’s plentiful blessings from which we have received and continue to receive the intellectual nourishment essential to our professional career. We must give back to OSU by being its ambassadors, by advancing its mission, and by
doing the utmost best in our profession. Dedication to excellence in your profession is the best way to payback your alma mater.

5. Finally, the Mother Earth and Soil

As Nelson Mandela said about his beloved South Africa, I also believe that soil is a rainbow. “A rainbow of soil is under our feet; red as a barn and black as a peat. It’s yellow as a lemon and white as the snow, beautiful gray, so many colors below. Hidden in darkness as thick as night, the only rainbow that can form without light: Dig you a pit or bore you a hole, you will find enough colors to rest your soul” (F.D. Hole, 1985).

Soil is the source of all of the nourishment - it provides food to nourish our bodies, gives rise to knowledge that nourishes our minds and shares a beauty that nourishes our souls. When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use. When diet is correct, medicine is of no need. Here in lies the importance of managing agriculture and soil. Our own bodies are composed from Earth’s three elements ---water, air and soil. Thus, our wellbeing and our ultimate fate ---as individuals and as a species ---is intricately interconnected to that of the Soil. The health of soil, plants, animals, people and the environment is one and indivisible.

During my career as a soil scientist for 51 years and five continents, I have learned to view soil as a living entity. A spoonful of soil may contain millions of bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, and arthropods--- all with irreplaceable roles to play in sustaining life, and in cleaning and maintaining our air and water.

Imagine then how many lives or organisms we disrupt with each tree cut and furrow plowed, each gallon of waste discarded, and with each passage of the bull dozer used for our ever-expanding urbanization. Thus, no-till farming or conservation agriculture, researched at OSU since 1960, is one of the options to protect soil. Indeed, improved agriculture and soil management are solution to the environmental issues and must be on the agenda for any strategy of adaptation and mitigation of climate change. “Rights-of-soil “,as a living entity or the Gaia ,must be respected, because people are mirror images of the soil, and vice versa.

The American poet and a farmer Wendell Berry captured our responsibility and said “The care of Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope. What we do to the land, we do to ourselves”

Unfortunately, we are failing far short of this noble ideal. We are taking food, soil, water and air for granted. For each minute, human kind clears 27 acres of forest, builds on 15 acres of green space, pollutes and degrades 25 acres of soil, and allows 32 souls to perish because of hunger. Despite remarkable improvements in agricultural productivity since the 1960s, 46,000 people die each day because they do not have enough to eat. This is equivalent to 120 jumbo jets crashing daily—yet is not considered newsworthy by any media.

This is not some problem affecting only downtrodden places on the other side of the globe. In the U.S. 41 million people (1 in 8) lack consistent access to healthy food. In Ohio, 1.7 million people go to bed hungry including half a million children. Even one child going to bed hungry is one too many, and it is not acceptable.

As O’ Henry said, “Love and business and family and religion and art and patriotism are nothing but shadows of words when a man’s starving”. A shattered environment and starving people lead only to strife and conflict-within families, across communities and throughout our world. But we have the knowledge and the tools to change course -beginning with our under-appreciated and invaluable soil. The Ohio State University, the college of FAES, SENR, and C-MASC have the capacity, experience and a brilliant track record to address
this issue of sustainable management of national resources at local, regional, national and global scale. We are committed to addressing the problem of sustainability and advancing global peace by restoring soil health and its functionality. The fact is that improved agriculture and soil are integral to addressing global issues.

Take climate change, for instance. Soil can scrub the dirty atmosphere and soak in a lot of carbon dioxide while improving crop production. This is a win-win option and a bridge to the future until no carbon or low-carbon fuel sources take effect.

You too, graduates, are part of the solution. As the next generation of dreamers, leaders and doers, it is incumbent upon you to leave our Mother Earth better off than you found it. I’m proud to say that my generation have made strong progress, but you can and must do even better. You must give back by healing and protecting the Mother Earth.

I used my Ohio State education to help discover how the soil beneath our feet is the foundation and salvation of our entire planet, especially humanity. Regardless of what you studied here or what career you pursue, you too can help build a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful world.

As you embark on this journey, I encourage you to keep the Sanskrit phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – “the world is one family” ---close to the heart. For if we treat each other as we would our parents, siblings or cousins—and focus on the benefits and burdens we share ---surely only good will come of it.

In closing, I would like to leave you with the words of the poet Will Allen Dromgoole, who understood well the obligation we have to those who come after us and for the Mother Earth.

“An old man going down a lone highway,
Came at the evening cold and grey,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream held no fear for him.
But he turned when safe on the other side,
and built a bridge to span the tide.
“Old man ‘- said a friendly pilgrim near
You’re wasting your strength in building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again shall pass this way,
You’ve crossed the chasm deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at even-tide?”
The builder lifted his old gray head;
‘Good friend, in the path I’ve come,’ he said,
There followed after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way,
This chasm that has been a naught to me
To that fair-haired youth might a pitfall be,
He, too must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I’m building this bridge for him.

Good Luck, graduates, and GO BUCKS.