

Hall Commencement Remarks

Spring 2005

- Thank you President Holbrook and congratulations to the Class of 2005.
- I know that some of you are disappointed that I am not Oprah Winfrey, or some famous politician.
- I also know there are a few others who really don't mind who gives the commencement speech as long as it is brief.
- While I can't do anything about my lack of celebrity status, rest assured I understand your collective expectation for brevity.
- This is truly a great honor for me because a number of you, the graduates, initiated the invitation for me to speak. That's what makes this day extra special.
- You will be happy to know that I'm not going to lecture you this afternoon. I've had four years to do that.
- The undergraduates especially, have heard much of my advice several times over. I mean, really, how many times do I have to remind you to "party responsibly"? But on second thought, given today's celebratory mood, perhaps it is appropriate!
- I feel a special bond with the Class of 2005 since I have shared a number of experiences with you. Of course, there were the standard vice presidential appearances at events like Welcome Week, student government meetings, and

visits to regional campuses, but I also put dignity aside to join in some less formal student experiences.

- We painted a scarlet O on my head for Block O. We danced at BuckeyeThon, and engaged in Mortar Board's pillow fight in the rain.
- We went to the Chris Rock comedy show—and let me tell you that Chris Rock can out-cuss any drill sergeant I ever encountered in my 30 years in the military.
- We put on our poker faces for a few games of Texas Hold Em, and picked up a hammer to help Habitat for Humanity build a house last year.
- I was there with you when the Buckeyes won the National Championship at the Fiesta Bowl,
- and I was out on the streets weekend after weekend looking for the same house parties that many of you were—but with slightly different motives.
- There were some activities I avoided altogether and so relied on second-hand reports of Senior Crawl and your various dips into Mirror Lake.
- Many of you entered Ohio State in September 2001 just a few days after the 9/11 attacks, and were the first freshman class I welcomed as vice president. It was a time of great uncertainty about the future, and a particularly difficult time to move away from your family. It was a time of tremendous change.
- National events have continued to influence your lives and our university community.
- We have had members of our own families and our university family called to active military service.

- **Many of our international students have faced obstacles to continuing their educations in the United States and in traveling to and from their home countries.**
- **We have lived in the epicenter of a very contested presidential election that brought the candidates to Columbus, over and over and over again!**
- **We have also shared the never-ending cycle of campus construction. In years to come, the beep-beep-beep of a dump truck backing up will evoke images of Ohio State as much as hearing “Carmen Ohio”, and you will be able to say with a straight face that, in your day, watching grass grow was a major Oval activity.**
- **Given our exclusive beverage contract, I expect that most of you have consumed enough Coca-Cola to last a lifetime, and a good number of you have consumed an equal amount of that beverage brewed up the road a bit.**
- **But I don’t want to imply that your tenure was all fun and games. Your diploma tells the world about all the work you did. The classes, reading, studying, hours in the lab, meetings with professors, field trips and Study Abroad experiences, group projects and many late nights.**
- **Many of you conducted original research or worked closely with faculty on research projects.**
- **As a class, you contributed tens of thousands of hours of community service, much of it here in Columbus and Central Ohio, but also as far away as Central America, Europe, and Africa.**

- **There is one other experience that many of you have shared with me, and that is my fight with cancer. As many of you know, in December I was diagnosed with pancreatic and liver cancer.**
- **I'd like to share some of my personal experience fighting this disease; my hope in sharing is that my lessons learned may help you to deal with the inevitable changes and challenges that you will face during the coming months and years.**
- **Since being diagnosed I have realized more than ever that attitude affects outcome. I am determined that regardless of the diagnosis, irrespective of the challenge or degree of adversity, I will continue to choose to live each day to the fullest.**
- **With the support of our loved ones, friends and family, we are capable of amazing things if we set our mind to it. Therefore, I urge you to maintain that positive attitude, grab every minute of living out of each and every day.**
- **I have come to realize that it is not money, possessions, power, or fame that makes one happy. Instead, it is the good times you share with your loved ones, the joy you take in living each day to its fullest, it is your attitude that will determine how happy, and in many cases how successful, you are.**
- **I encourage you to make the most of the tremendous opportunities college offered you, and I hope that as graduates you continue to look for the positives in each day.**

- **Of course, a positive attitude alone is not enough. As you prepare to leave here it is important that you know, deep down, who you are and what principles are going to guide your life. I ask you to reflect on what are those principles or values that will guide and sustain you through the good times and bad times. A set of core values is our link to the past and a guide to the future.**
- **Some, like your faith and your love of family, are pretty obvious. Others are more elusive.**
- **I am convinced that the value that may provide the foundation for leading a decent and full life is one's integrity. What do I mean when I talk about integrity?**
- **I believe integrity means doing the “right thing” even if it is unpopular, deliver what we promise, admit mistakes . . . Learn! Speak positively . . . talk to instead of about.**
- **Just before I got my cancer diagnosis I was visiting Ohio State students serving in the military in Kosovo. Believe me, most of them would rather have been back at Ohio State studying or at home with their families. But they had made a commitment to serve, and I was struck by how hard they were working to do their assignments to the utmost of their ability. They honored all who had gone before with their commitment to duty, honor, and country.**
- **I encourage you always to listen to your heart and do the right thing, act with integrity!**
- **My personal fight with cancer has made me acutely aware of the importance of our research agenda here at Ohio State.**

- **Not all of you will go out and do research to find cures for deadly diseases but you can all contribute to making the world a better place.**
- **There is potential to do good things in every profession and countless ways to contribute to your community and the world, such as tutoring a child, getting involved in local politics or civic associations, advocating for causes important to you, reaching out to your neighbors, taking care of your family.**
- **Doing the right thing or “doing good” does not stop when you walk out of this stadium with your diploma. Living a life of integrity means taking the research, critical thinking and communications skills you have acquired at Ohio State and putting them into practice each and every day, in your family life, your community and your profession.**
- **Finally, I believe in valuing people. Through my brief experience with cancer, I have come to value more than ever the kindness of my friends, colleagues, and family. I have also gained a new appreciation for human diversity.**
- **I trust that we have reinforced the importance of respecting others and valuing diversity to the point where many of you have grown weary of hearing about it, but I want to tell you that there is always more to learn.**
- **Until my illness I am not sure I ever really appreciated the tremendous diversity in how humans can express caring. I have received hundreds of letters and e-mails of support, many from those of you graduating today – you have no idea how much these small expressions mean to me. Every one is wonderful in its own way – some are humorous, others quite serious, some express cultural and religious traditions, others are standard Hallmark greetings. But each message is a unique**

expression of compassion, love, and caring. Each e-mail and each card is someone taking a little piece of their heart and sharing it with me.

- Today I want to encourage you to share little pieces of your heart with all those who have helped make this day possible for you. And as you leave Ohio State I hope you will make a habit of valuing people throughout all your life.

- So there you have it -- my last pieces of advice to you.
- I have been blessed to spend my career working with some of the best people in the world—students of the Ohio State University. Being surrounded day after day, year after year by bright, energetic, thoughtful and caring young people, it is impossible not to be an optimist. I'm optimistic about all of you.
- You are prepared academically for your chosen professions and careers, and you have had opportunities to develop your personal leadership skills. Your education is not over—there is something new to learn every day—but you have a firm foundation on which to build.
- Tomorrow, you begin the next chapter in your life. I hope you will take three messages with you.
 - One, keep a positive attitude,
 - two, make integrity a cornerstone of your life
 - and three, value people

- Congratulations to each of you and Go Bucks!