

Southern Methodist University
University Commencement Convocation
9 a.m., Saturday, May 14, 2016
Moody Coliseum

“Life Changes”

Prepared Remarks by
Rich and Mary Templeton

Rich Templeton:

President Turner called me a while back to ask if Mary and I would speak at today's commencement. So I did as any decisive CEO would do; I said “let me check with my wife.” She said yes, so here we are.

Seriously, it's not only an honor to share what will be one of the most important days in your life, but it's fun because Mary and I get to do this together.

Now, you may be wondering how Mary and I will be sharing the speaking roles today, so I want to make sure that nobody is confused. My job is not to offer profound advice as the CEO of Texas Instruments. In fact I believe the best term of art to describe my role today is that I am the *setup man*. For those familiar with baseball, the setup man is the pitcher who gets through a few innings before handing things over to the *closer*, the most important pitcher, who would be Mary.

So with that, I'll get the game started with a little background information. Until 2½ years ago, my and Mary's lives had played out better than we could ever have dreamed: 3 great kids, great work at TI for me and at GE for her, great opportunities to make a difference in education and in our communities, and great friends. But in December 2013, we were thrown an interesting curve ball. While on family vacation at the beach, Mary waded into the waves, and in an image I still see in my mind today, a giant, rogue wave tossed her on her back and slammed her to the ocean floor. She was instantly paralyzed.

The early part of the process was pretty straightforward: get Mary to a hospital, review the MRI, and understand the significance of her injuries.

After we had an initial assessment, I gathered the kids together that evening and told them Mom was badly hurt and most likely wouldn't walk again. But in hindsight, the most important thing I told them was that “Life has not ended, it has only changed.” That thought would become the compelling foundation for how we would move forward.

Fast forward to today: For those who know Mary it is no great surprise that her internal drive, her determination, her faith, and of course the tremendous outreach from our friends and the community, have been instrumental in her remarkable recovery and her ability to get life going again. In fact, she has a proven formula for moving on with things, which you'll get a minor dose of in just a moment.

For me, as the CEO of a big technology company, I've always lived with change. In business, there is no better formula for failure than to be tethered to the past. We learn from it, but if we cling to it, the future passes us by. In fact the more we embrace change the stronger we tend to get as a business and as business leaders.

So while Mary's accident struck at my very heart, it was nonetheless *change*, something I knew a little bit about.

I pledged to myself that first Sunday night in the hospital after Mary was hurt that I would use this experience to make myself better: a better husband, a better father, a better CEO, and a better supporter of our community. It is my enduring belief that you can let things either strengthen you, or weaken you; it is entirely your choice. I've found out just how true this is.

Needless to say, if you asked for the list of personal characteristics that I believe are critical must-haves, resiliency is now among the top few. I learned that from my wife. Her resiliency reinforced mine and our kids'. It made us more aware, and even more appreciative; it made us stronger; and I think it made us better. Without a doubt, it put things in perspective – quickly and with certainty.

Mary, consistent with my job as the setup man, it's now your ball.

Mary Templeton:

I'll warn you all that I really don't like public speaking, especially when it means I have to speak about myself! So I'm not sure why I said yes to this in the first place... except that it's a really good way for me to publicly say "thank you" to President Turner and the professors and administrators at SMU. As the Mom of a recent SMU engineering graduate, I want you to know that everyone who touched my son during his time here at SMU did outstanding work; he had a great experience. And I've got proof... he is two years into a real-life with a self-supporting, adult job that is looking like it will become a career he loves! It's hard for Mom to ask for more than that.

When I told friends and family that I would be speaking here today, I got a lot of advice, most of it unsolicited, about how I could offer a unique perspective on rebounding from a serious, life-changing experience. So that's what I'll try to do today, and be quick about it. I'll start by echoing what Rich said: resilience is really important.

There are lots of things I could tell you about my life over the past couple of years, because when you realize you won't walk again, there is a lot of stuff to work through: tough things, sad things, confusing things, funny things. But I think the most helpful thing for me to tell you is that when life throws you a really big curveball, as often happens, there is a way – a process if you will – to work through it and get life going again, even if life has changed from what it used to be.

As I look back over the last 2½ years, I can see that there clearly are three phases to getting life back on track:

1. First of all, give yourself some time to emotionally **“deal with it.”** This includes recognizing what has happened and facing head-on how it will impact life. For me, the process went like this: I first spent time thinking about how I screwed up other people’s lives -- my husband’s and my children’s. Then, (and moms in the audience, you’ll understand this), I spent time being glad it happened to me and not to my husband or children whom were all swimming in that same wave with me. Now, I will point out that I was on some heavy duty pain medication while I was thinking these things; in fact, Rich thinks that instead of describing this as the “dealing with it phase” we should call it the “hallucinogenic phase”. Regardless, these were thoughts and feelings that were important to me in getting my head and my heart emotionally wrapped around how life had changed.
2. The second phase, which needs to come pretty soon after the first, is the **“small-step phase.”** This is when you actually start to move forward, and for me it couldn’t happen soon enough. These were the small steps in rehab as I tried to physically rebuild strength ... or meeting with all of your friends and family even though every first visit cycled me back through the emotion because I had to re-tell the story. The truth is that small and steady steps can be quite big and spectacular because they move you to a different place.

For me, the biggest “small step” was simply going to a fund-raising dinner 3 weeks after I got out of the hospital. The dinner was on the calendar long before I was hurt, and the cause was one that was very dear to me. Of course, the dinner would have gone just fine without me, but it was an especially important milestone for me because it got me back to doing things I cared about and had planned to do, even if my dinner chair now had wheels on it.

3. And then finally is the **“get on with it phase.”** There is a quote from the great golfer Bobby Jones that goes like this:

Golf is the closest game to the game we call life. You get bad breaks from good shots; you get good breaks from bad shots - but you have to play the ball where it lies.

I was not a big golfer before my accident, and I play even less now! (That’s a classic paralyzed person’s joke, which I am now allowed to tell!) But seriously, this idea of *play it where it lies* really helps me explain what getting on with life means. Life is going to deal you some surprises – some good and some bad. But life *is* going to go on, and if you want to be involved, which I do... and if you want to make an impact, which I do... then you have to move life forward even after big setbacks. Besides, nobody really cares about that darn wave anyhow. What they care about, and what I care about, is what I do now and what I do next.

I’ll leave you with this thought. I’ve heard it described that the ultimate challenge for each of us is to leave everything we touch and every person we meet a little better than we found them.

When I first graduated from college I certainly didn’t have a profound or strategic understanding of this concept. I just saw opportunities to make a difference and I jumped in. And with people, I found it rewarding and satisfying to be positive and try to help them.

As each of you heads off into the next phase of your life, I encourage you to think about this challenge of ***leaving everything you touch or every person you meet a little better than you found them.*** We each have opportunities every day in things both small and large: a word of encouragement on a down day; a raucous laugh with friends; or confronting a hard truth when avoidance would be so much easier.

It's a tough challenge, but if you try it, I will make these predictions:

First, you will be busy and engaged in things you really care about, and you will have a wider range of friends than you ever imagined. Truth is, you'll be pretty happy.

Second, over the long run, you will receive back 10 times more than you ever invest in terms of friendships, appreciation, and personal satisfaction.

And finally, if and when life throws you a curve ball, you'll be well-prepared to dig deep into the depths of your own personal resiliency. You'll understand that life doesn't end, but it does change. And sometimes, those changes make you better in ways you never imagined.

Gerald, thank you again for letting Rich and me be part of this most special day.

And to all of you graduates: congratulations and good luck. I hope you'll take a moment to thank your parents and families, your professors and others at SMU who helped you get here today. This is a day when it's OK to be a little mushy. As a mom, I promise you it will mean a great deal to those who care so deeply for you.