

Members of the Graduating Class; Mr. President; Members of the Board;  
Members of the Faculty; Administration and Staff; Honorary Degree Recipients;  
Parents, Relatives and Friends.

This is a splendid occasion for me. Why? Because you are the kind of audience I crave. Nobody can leave until the graduates receive their diplomas. Therefore, you are a classic "captive audience:" you have to listen to my thoughts, no matter how dull, puerile, and even depraved those thoughts might be. Has anybody here ever seen a commencement speaker forcibly hauled away from the podium? Although I do recognize that a precedent in that regard could be set today.

Nevertheless, having participated in a number of graduations, I believe that I can plant myself firmly in the graduates' shoes—that because of my empathy for them, I can immediately address their foremost concern on this very important and this very august occasion.

What is that concern? What thought dominates the minds of graduating students?

Is it trepidation about getting good marks in graduate school? No!

Is it anxiety about getting a job? No!

Instead, the wary, the canny, and the knowledgeable college graduate—a being who has been trained to focus intently upon the essence and not the periphery of life's problems—that graduate is mulling over, and is ruminating upon, the central issue of this day and the core issue of this particular moment:

And that core issue, in your lively minds, is properly defined and appropriately framed as follows: how long is this old poof's commencement speech going to last?

Don't worry! My own college commencement speaker spoke for one and one-half hours. I still remember the excruciating pain. And I also remember the little girl's essay about Socrates. She wrote in her essay:

1. Socrates was a philosopher;
2. He talked a lot;
3. They poisoned him.

I will be relatively brief because Wild Turkey, not hemlock, is my favorite beverage. I say "relatively" because there are dangers in being too brief. A former British Prime Minister, upon hearing a speech by a rival politician, was asked to describe the speech. She said, "Well, it was a very short speech, but, then again, he said everything that was on his mind."

So, if I might, I'd like to talk about "Leadership." And, I'll try to do so using the right number of words. Why "Leadership"? Because Leaders (in the home, in the workplace, and in public life) are always in short supply. Because the world needs Leadership. And because I hope that each and every graduate today will want to be a Leader.

Why would you want to be a Leader? Well, if you're not a Leader, then, I guess, you are a follower. How do you wish to be remembered by your children and grandchildren—as a Leader or as a follower? A long time ago, there was a beer commercial with the signature line: "You only go around once!" The implication of that commercial was that, since we all die, we should respond to our mortality by drinking a lot of beer. But is that all there is? I don't think so. Instead, to my mind, our mortality signifies that we have one earthly chance to make a mark—to be remembered—as a Leader—who accomplished something constructive for humankind.

To be an effective, positive Leader, I believe that you need, at a minimum, the following characteristics:

1. You have to be genuinely interested in, and like, people. Show them tolerance, patience, respect, and empathy. Drown them in a tsunami of gratitude for their marvelous works. Show them that you admire, value, and love them as individuals, rather than just as "producers." Through word and by deed, join in their every personal exaltation and their every personal mishap and grief. People will respond with an

esprit de corps—a desire to perform—because they want to, not because they have to. An organization bound by love is far more powerful than one bound by fear.

2. You have to have respect for the worth of every job, and task, and for the person doing it—in essence, respect for excellent performance. I have known dumb rich people and smart poor people. I have known dishonest civic Leaders and gamblers who are the soul of integrity. Position and title, in and for themselves alone, signify nothing.
3. You have to work harder than anyone working with you. How can you convince people that accomplishment is important to them if you don't demonstrate, by your actions, that it is important to you?
4. You must pay meticulous attention to detail—delegating everything makes you a “know nothing.” As Louis B. Mayer (founder of MGM Studios) said: “How can you teach the cook to make soup if you don't know how to make soup?”
5. You must have a sense of humor—which is a sense of proportion. Don't sweat the small stuff—fun relieves strain and promotes enjoyment, harmony, and efficiency. Robert Frost said: “Isn't it a shame that people's minds work furiously until they get to work—and then they stop.” Allow people to be themselves in the work place—to have fun at what they're doing—and their bodies will show up early,



while their minds stay late. You don't have to look and act like a "brick" to be a successful Leader.

6. You must maintain a real open door policy—check your calendar to see if you're really doing it. One of our Officers said to me years ago: "Herb, it's harder for me to get into to see you than it is for a Mechanic, a Pilot, a Flight Attendant, or a Reservations Agent." I said: "I can explain that to you very easily—they're more important than you are!"
7. You must make decisions quickly. There is no perfect knowledge. Do not endlessly plan, discuss, and study in an effort to avoid the risk involved in actually making a decision. Focus on the externalities, the world outside your navel or your institution; speedily gather the available facts; quickly do the analysis and discuss it with the appropriate people; and go with it. Damon Runyon, the author and humorist best known for "Guys & Dolls" wrote: "It may be that the race is not always to the swift—but, that's the way to bet!"
8. You must know your Core Values and be able to communicate those values and your goals—with frequency and passion. If you don't communicate what you value, and where you're going, with passion—why would anyone else choose to go with you?

9. You must value diversity in organizations. A multitude of People with the same looks, origins, backgrounds, thoughts, and philosophies will lead you to a harmonious, placid, contented, and self-satisfied organizational end result: disaster.
10. You must emphasize substance over form. Rules, organizational manuals, computers, and such, are servants, not masters; they are the means to achieve an end, not ends in and of themselves. And always remember what you ultimately have in your hand when something is printed out: not action, but merely little black marks on a white sheet of paper.
11. You must be “jazzed” by problem solving, the same way that a Fireman gets a “buzz” out of extinguishing fires. And the worst problem you’ll ever have is the problem you won’t acknowledge and address.
12. You must have foresight, an exceptional attention span (therein lies genius), relational, synergistic thinking and be prepared to adjust, for there is security only in readiness to change direction (not principles).
13. You must set your goals as achievement and excellence—for your self-satisfaction. Money and happiness are byproducts only—byproducts of achievement and of excellence. Someone will always have more money than you do and someone will always be giddier

than you are—but they may not have the same feeling of self-satisfaction and self worth that you do—if you have been excellent at whatever you do.

14. With respect to the value of Leadership, a United Technologies ad of some years ago sums it up pretty well, in my estimation. Its title is: “Let’s Get Rid of Management!” This is what it says (attached).

I will leave you with four thoughts:

1. Either Bianca Jagger or Calvin Coolidge stated that: The business of business is business.” That’s wrong. The business of business is people—yesterday, today, and forever;
2. That you can do really well for yourself by doing good for others;
3. That an illustration of the most proven, tested, and consummate Leader you can find is someone who has successfully led a PTA; and
4. That the most effective Leader of all is one who leads by personal example.

You have just proved that you are great Leaders by exhibiting great Leadership traits: patience and kindness. You have demonstrated incredible

patience and incredible kindness by politely listening to a bunch of homilies from a perennial student like me.

I have never been more honored than to be—with you.