

Commencement Speech May 2009

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Today is a special day for all of the graduates and their families and friends, and to all of you I offer my warmest congratulations on reaching this point in your life's journey. And today is a special day for Rebecca and me, since today is only our second commencement day since our arrival on the RIT campus almost two years ago. In addition, it is a special day because I will attempt to sign this speech as I give it, so, happily for all of you, this speech will also be short.

In very real ways, the journey that Rebecca and I embarked upon two years ago is similar to the one that all of our graduates embark upon today. After many years in Maryland, we moved away from our comfortable community of family and friends to a new community, and we took on the challenges of new responsibilities. We were anxious, excited, happy, and depressed all at the same time. We were filled with hope for what the future might hold, but we did not even know if we had made the right decision in moving to Rochester.

For many of you, those are the same emotions that you confront today. The world is waiting for you out there, but you don't know what the future holds. The RIT campus, once as unknown to you as your future, has become a home away from home. You have found friends and mentors here, and you have set upon a career path. But now the "real world" beckons, and you are both nervous and excited about the future. In addition, you are graduating in a deep economic downturn, and finding a job for many of you will be more difficult than it was for previous graduates.

Perhaps, therefore, some of the lessons we have learned over the last two years might be helpful to you as you begin this great new adventure. So here's some of the many lessons we have learned since our move almost a year ago:

1. It is impossible to make such a move without learning and growing, and this is a good thing. Every day we have woken up to learn new things and meet new people. Change is almost always a good thing.
2. You do not have to give up your family and friends while you undertake this new adventure. In fact, they will be your greatest source of support. The friends you keep, however, will be the ones you continue to reach out to.
3. Make new friends both inside and outside of your work environment. You will need both.
4. Come back and see your family, friends, and RIT often. All of them will be a source of support for you in good times and bad.
5. In terms of finding a job, I cannot by myself change the global economic climate, but I can tell you that many years ago I finished my education in a similar economic downturn. I sent out 100 resumes to potential employers, and received not one encouraging response. I persevered, however, and eventually found a job, as I'm sure all of you will. In this climate, the best I can suggest is to make the point to potential employers that you can add real value to the company, and as RIT graduates, you are in a better position to make this point than almost any other new college graduate.

Finally, keep track of the goings-on at your alma mater, RIT. I can assure you that RIT will continue to grow and prosper along with all of you. Congratulations and to all of you best wishes for a wonderful future.