

“The Worst of Times, The Best of Times”

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Commencement Address
Rochester Institute of Technology
May 22, 2009

President Destler ... Trustees of the Institute ...
members of the faculty ... graduates and your families ...
friends of the RIT community ... thank you so much for this
honor and for your warm reception.

I can't begin to describe to you how thrilled I am to be
your commencement speaker ... and to have the opportunity
to participate in RIT's 124th commencement.

Although the Xerox-RIT partnership isn't quite that old,
it has spanned five decades. This has been not only a long
partnership but an enduring one as well.

I believe that's in large measure because RIT and
Xerox share so many values - - a deep belief in the power of
education to transform lives ... a passion for diversity and
inclusion in all their forms ... an assumption that technology
is our servant and not our master ... and an eagerness to
shoulder the challenges of environmental stewardship.

The RIT-Xerox partnership is also so strong and
enduring because we both benefit so much from one
another. You've sent us thousands of your graduates down
through the years and provided us access to the amazing
pool of intellectual capital that resides on this campus. And
we've provided financial resources to RIT as well as access
to the intellectual capital within our company.

A testimony to the strength of the partnership is that a
Xerox person has served on RIT's Board of Trustees for as
long as any of us can remember. Currently that role is filled
by Wim Appelo, one of our most senior executives and a
passionate friend and advocate of the University.

So for a whole lot of reasons, Xerox is proud to be one of your partners - - and you can count on us to continue to be with you far into the future.

Just yesterday - - as President Destler has mentioned - - I was privileged to be named the seventh Chief Executive Officer of Xerox. Now that got me thinking. President Destler is your 9th President in your 180-year history. That's an average tenure of 20 years. I'm the 7th CEO of Xerox in a 60-year history. That's an average tenure of 10 years. So I'm thinking that you have a much better gig than I do.

In preparing for my visit today, I did a little "Googling" of President Destler. You would be surprised by what you find out. He has an enviable? reputation as an authority on "high-power microwave sources and advanced accelerator concepts," My guess is you shouldn't ask him what that means unless you really want to know. He's married to a psychologist which is probably a really good thing for a university President. And he's one of the world's foremost collectors of banjos.

If I had only know that when President Destler invited me to be your commencement speaker. I would have agreed only on the condition that he play a little banjo for us. Maybe next time.

In all seriousness, we are just thrilled with your vision for RIT and for your leadership. And we're looking forward to doing great things together.

When I was at my own commencement back in 1980, being CEO of Xerox was probably the farthest thing from my mind. And I can assure you that no one at my commencement was pointing at me and predicting that I would become a CEO. Women Presidents of large global companies were non-existent. Black women Presidents of large companies were unimaginable.

The possibilities for each of you are also unimaginable!! You are looking at all the proof you need that we really do live in the greatest country on earth. So dream big. Work hard. And all things are possible.

When you leave here today, you'll be headed into conditions that are totally unfamiliar to this nation. The economic picture is cloudy at best, stormy at worst, and there's no shortage of contradictory information about just what sort of recession we're in and how long it will last.

And when you look beyond the economy and all of its fall-out, you see war ... global warming ... genocide ... hunger ... stark inequality around the world and here at home. It's a wonder that you've elected to graduate at all and that you haven't opted for another year on campus!

Despite the tremendous challenges you face, I implore you to embrace them. Although you are about to put your toes in "the worst of times", Charles Dickens would also say that these are the "best of times".

The truth is the world needs you as perhaps never before. We need passion, creativity and drive. We need the spirit of exploration and the thirst for knowledge that you embraced here. And we need your questions and your challenges and your insights as we journey through these trying times. We're finding that some of our old assumptions and ideas don't work any more, and we can use people who are willing to ask "why do we do it that way?" and "how can we do it better?" Build the right new roads in addition to fixing the ones in existence.

Yes, it's a challenge, but it's also an opportunity. That is precisely what is rolled up in your diplomas. It's all yours. You earned it. You deserve it. And, no one can take it away.

I have two children of my own - - a sophomore at MIT and a junior in high school. When I thought of what advice I would give you, I thought what advice I would give them.

Well, for openers, I would encourage all of you to follow the example of RIT and embrace change willingly and with a sense of excitement and wonder. This institution is 180 years old. And think about that. This institution has survived and excelled for nearly two centuries because it has evolved and changed. The only thing I can predict about your lives with any certainty is that change will be a constant in your lives as well.

Back in 1980 when I sat where you are sitting today, there were no cell phones. The Internet, let alone the BlackBerry, was not even the stuff of dreams. Chinese capitalism and the fall of the Soviet Union were unimaginable. Kabul and Darfur conjured up only the vaguest recognition of places in some distant corner of the world. Genetics was in its infancy. Even as recently as a few years ago, the thought of a global economic melt-down was beyond comprehension.

I can't pretend to know how your world will change - - but I know it will and at a pace that will continue to increase exponentially. You can't stop it. Learn to love it. Make it your ally.

You should also have fun. Enjoy life. Choose a career that gives you pleasure and fulfillment. Surround yourselves with people who make you laugh.

This old notion that work is drudgery is nonsense. Most days - - even back when Xerox was under siege - - I could not wait to get to the office. I love my work - - and you should too. I learned this from one of my mentors - - Vernon Jordan. He was a civil rights leader during the 1960s and has become a confidant to Presidents of the United States and a long list of global leaders. Google him and you'll find 200,000 entries. He is a mover and shaker and he always has a ready smile, a good story and the time to chat. He has fun doing what he does and so should you.

I know that people are more likely to be successful if they have a passion for what they do. Make yourself a promise today. If down the road, you find that your career is not fun, revert to my first piece of advice - - change!

Change but be true to yourself in the process. Your family ... RIT ... your church or synagogue or mosque or mountaintop ... have given you a set of core values - - a moral compass. Hang on to it.

A predecessor of mine at Xerox used to say he tried to live his life as though any piece of it might end up in his obituary. Would he be proud of it? That's not a bad test. I have an even better one. It hangs on the wall of my office.

“Don’t do anything that wouldn’t make your Mom proud!”

My Mom’s been gone for some time, gone but not forgotten. She is perched on my shoulder whispering encouragement and keeping me honest, keeping me humble.

Your life's journey will include some turbulent waters. You will face difficult choices. You will be challenged and tested. The values you have developed through family and RIT will hold you in good stead.

Set your sights on changing the world - - in leaving this planet we call earth a little better than you found it. That need not be as grandiose as it sounds. It can take the form of getting involved with one of the big ideas of our time ... or working for an organization that creates decent jobs for its workers ... or raising a family that will carry good values into the future.

Believe in something larger than yourself. Make a difference. Live your life so that at the end of your journey, you will know that your time here was well spent.

In the process, don't ever, ever forget your family and friends. Cherish and nurture your friends and family. During the past few years, you have learned the importance of hard work, dedication and commitment. This is true, of course.

But as important as your career is, we are all human beings first. Our connections - - with families and partners and friends - - are the most important connections any of us will ever make. My guess is that the vast majority of our graduates haven't yet found your life's partners. Here is another quote that hangs in my office.

“Find the right person to spend your life with. This decision will determine 90 percent of your happiness or misery!”

At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not getting one more promotion, not closing one more deal. These are all transitory victories. What you will regret if you're not careful is that you didn't spend more time with a spouse, a friend, a child, a parent.

I hope you will take a few moments today to reflect on how fortunate you are and how much RIT has given you. And I hope that in the distant future you will remember how you feel this day:

- Proud that an important phase of your life's journey is ending and anxious about the one that is just beginning.
- Proud of the friendships you've made here and hopeful that some of them will endure far into the future.

- Proud that you've earned a degree and cognizant of how much more you still have to learn.
- Proud that you have achieved an important milestone but aware that you have much to do and miles to go before you rest.

Allow yourself to bask in the glory of what you've accomplished. And pledge to yourself that you will cherish what you have learned here - - and use it as a foundation to build a wonderful life.

Remember that today's ceremony is a "Commencement" - - not an ending but a beginning. Most of the chapters of your life are still to be written. Most of the pages are blank. In that sense, too, these are "the best of times."

My congratulations to all of you. You've worked long and hard to arrive at this weekend. And my congratulations also to all the parents, grandparents, spouses, family members and faculty that helped push you across the finish line. All of you should feel very, very proud.

I wish you all the very best. May all your dreams come true.