

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Commencement Address  
Thomas M. Siebel  
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President White, Chancellor Herman, members of the faculty, graduates, ladies and gentlemen,

I'm profoundly grateful and touched by the distinction and honor and great compliment accorded me by the University of Illinois. I am overwhelmed, as a matter of fact.

In this important place, on this important day, and in this very wonderful assembly, it is a tremendously impressive thing to an individual in my position.

I want to join with your families in congratulations for your accomplishments. And I want to talk about what happens next.

I want to talk to you about some decisions that you will have to make. I want to talk to you about what you can expect and opportunities that you are likely to encounter. I want to talk about making a difference. About leaving the world a better place than you found it.

There is a story attributed to the notorious oil magnate, John Paul Getty, Sr. When asked about the keys to success by a young intern, he explained that there were three such essential elements.

First, get a great education. Attend the best schools. Study hard. Be prepared. Become an honor roll student.

Secondly, work hard. Be the first to show up for work. Be the last to leave. Work weekends. Nights. Always do your best. Be a top performer.

The third key to success --- and most importantly -- find oil.

There is some truth in this story.

Think for a moment about the immense opportunities that are before each and every one of you. Your productive careers will span the next six decades. Six decades. Think about it. Six decades.

In the next six decades the body of scientific knowledge as we know it will increase by a factor of three or more. You will have the privilege of participating in that phenomenon. Many of you will participate significantly in some of the most exciting developments in the history of mankind.

Some of you will discover cures for cancer. Some will perfect the hydrogen fuel cell. Some of you will control influenza pandemic. Some will lead the colonization of outer space. Some will create new companies. Make new products. Create Jobs. Develop new food sources. Foster Prosperity. Husband Peace.

The world will be a better, healthier, happier place for what you will do.

Those of you who take this route will make sacrifices. Lots of sacrifices.

You have all studied history. Think back upon those individuals who have made a difference. Really made a difference.

Think about it. Think about Winston Churchill, Michelangelo, Louis Pasteur. Think about Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, Isaac Newton, Johannes Gutenberg, Steve Jobs. Think about Sally Ride and Margaret Thatcher. Think about Martin Luther and Martin Luther King

You have all studied these people. These great leaders are representative of that group who collectively articulated those concepts and principles, the sum of which constitute our perception of the universe, as we know it.

Those great people brought us gravity, electricity, germ theory. They invented the printing press, movable type, the Internet, the Basilica, the public library, the modern university. They created nations, our religions, and democracy. They discovered outer space. And they brought us the very concepts of individual liberty and human dignity.

These people changed the world, each of them. Collectively, they, and their like, conceived of the world, as we understand it today. Let's look upon this group and see what they had in the way of common traits.

How about education? Some were exceptionally well educated. Some were mediocre students. Many were uneducated.

Work ethic. In general, these people were driven. They were focused. They got up earlier. They worked longer. They were tireless. Some were out there. Eccentric. Almost maniacal. Some were troubled.

They *all* achieved – and they all achieved at great personal cost.

In addition to amazing work ethics, it seems that these people were unusually sensitive to what was going on around them. They heard things that other people could not hear. They saw things that others could not see. You might call it vision. A moment of clarity. Insight. Inspiration.

Whatever you call it, at one or more moments in their lives, they saw something. Something different. And they were able to recognize that it was different. That is was potentially important. And they did not let the moment go unnoticed. They did something with it.

Be sensitive to that moment. It will happen to you. Do not let it go unnoticed.

So we have a group of mixed education. Tireless work ethic. Great vision. Perhaps most importantly however, they also were very, very lucky – each and every one.

Now don't discount luck. It will be a critical component of your success. Some people say you make your own luck. There is clearly some truth to that. These concepts of work ethic, vision, and luck seem to be interrelated.

Take Tiger Woods, for example.

Work ethic. He is arguably one of the hardest working, best-prepared athletes in sport. His physical conditioning and practice regimens are second to none.

How about vision? Well, Tiger Woods can see every shot before he takes it. He can see the launch angle. The trajectory. The landing, the bounce, and the roll. He can literally see it every time before he takes a swing. Think about that.

And luck? Well, let's just say it might not be entirely a coincidence that he seems to get more lucky bounces than any person in golf.

There is most certainly truth to the idea that you make your own luck. I encourage you to be very alert to what is going on around you. Let's explore this luck thing a little bit further.

There will be some moments in your life when the stars simply seem to align. You will flip a coin 10 times in a row – and it will come up heads every time. You will look up and you will notice that the wind has been at your back every day for a week.

Be ready for that moment. It will happen to you. Some of you will recognize it and know it for what it is...great, good fortune.

Some of you will be preoccupied with matters of the moment to notice. Perhaps stress or simply the distractions of daily life will get in the way. Others will see it for what it is.

There will be such moments in your life. Seize that moment. That is the start of the next company. The cure for cancer. The hydrogen fuel cell. The next great thing.

There is clearly a non-rational process at the heart of such ideas. It's an idea. It's a vision. It's a feeling. It is something that you know to be true. Take it and run with it.

Take it. When it happens, take it and run with it. Run with it. Don't listen to all the naysayers. The experts. The authority figures. They will stand in line to tell you your idea is impractical, impossible, unrealistic. Don't listen to them. You know it to be true.

This is the opportunity you have been waiting for. This is what you are here to do. Don't take no for an answer. Make it happen

Let's switch gears for a moment from the sublime to the mundane and talk about getting started. How do you get started? What do you do now?

Many of you have not yet figured out what you want to do for a living. Don't feel bad. Most people don't. I had no idea what I wanted to do when I left college. My first job out of undergraduate school was working as a cowboy on a ranch in Idaho. From there, I became a laborer on a construction site in Sun Valley. I managed a shovel.

How do you get started? First thing, you need to get a job. How do you do that? I guess there are a couple of ways. A common route is to get as many interviews as you can, until someone offers you a job. And then you take it and make the best of it. I do not recommend that route.

My suggestion to you is that you find an industry that you find interesting. Say biotech. Or travel. Perhaps entertainment. Communications. Aerospace. Automotives. Within that industry identify a high quality company that you would like to work for. Located in a place that you would like to live.

And then get hired there. Learn everything you can about the company. Study it on the Internet. Read its annual reports. Become an expert. And then figure out how to get a job there. Any job. It doesn't matter.

Write the CEO. Write the VP of Engineering.

Get yourself an interview and explain that you want to work for that company – no other company -- and you are willing to take any job to get started.

Get a job in the mailroom. The help desk. The front desk. Customer service. Don't worry about the salary or the title. Just get a job. After you get in the door, then the rest is up to you. Make it happen.

One closing thought. I want to talk about ethics. Today is Mother's Day -- a most appropriate day to talk about ethics.

Ethics. You will have the opportunity to cross the line every day of your lives, every day of your professional careers. In little ways. In big ways.

Some opportunities will be more tempting than others. Some will seem inconsequential. Some will appear common practice.

Here's a litmus test that you can use. What would your mother think? What would she say if you told her about it? If you use that test to gauge your behavior, you will do the right thing.

That's it. Thank you, merciful God; we've reached the end of the speech!

But for you, it is just the beginning. Work Hard. Be attentive. Always be watching for that lucky moment.

Good luck to you all. And, most importantly, have fun. Make it look easy. Smile a lot. I thank you for your kind attention.