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Read remarks given by Jo Ann M. Gora at summer commencement.

Summer 2005 commencement address (7/23/2005)

What an honor to be able to give you your last lecture! Aren't we fortunate that this isn't the dreaded 8:00 class, and your days of being graded are over?

What an accomplishment for you to be here in this arena receiving your respective degrees. Why are you here? How did you get to this day? And most importantly...where are you going from here? This is a good time to stop and think about these questions.

William Jennings Bryan summed it up very well:

"Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice: It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved."

What are the significant events and who are the significant people in your life that have contributed to your destiny?

Let's go on a journey. It may help if you close your eyes. Try to remember the defining moments and especially the defining people who have helped shape you by sharing their wisdom.

Think of the significant people:

Grandparents that have a unique way of sharing stories that enrich our lives;
Your favorite grade school and high school teachers;
The coach or pastor who acted as a mentor and believed in you;
Your friends and roommates;
Your favorite professors who took the extra time to counsel you; and
Your parents (and others who nurtured you) who made sacrifices to see that you made it to this day.

Think of the significant events:

Your first day of kindergarten;
Your first day at high school;
Going to camp;
Driving a car;
Falling in love for the first time;
High school graduation;
Coming to Ball State University;



Distinguished professor Jeffrey Hornsby delivers the summer commencement address in Worthen Arena, July 23, 2005.

Meeting your roommate and those instant friends in the dorm or in class;
For many of you 9/11 occurred during your first month at Ball State.

Last week I asked some of the summer 2005 graduating class to describe to me the important people and events that led them to today.

Kevin Watson, a marketing major and political science minor, talked about three critical individuals in his life. First of all, he thanks his parents for their willingness to let him make his own decisions. Kevin recalled his high school marketing teacher who helped him find his voice when she stressed the need to articulate. He also cites the support of Fran Rippey, a deceased English professor known for her commitment to students. Her philosophy about learning for learning's sake deeply affected his appreciation for his Ball State education.

Jennifer Yencer from Muncie is deeply grateful for the financial support provided by her parents and the help Dr. Leahy from family and consumer sciences gave her throughout her Ball State experience. According to Jennifer, Dr. Leahy was "amazing."

Justin Collins from Fort Wayne thanks his parents and grandparents for their financial support. He is also very appreciative of his two uncles who went to Ball State and serve as role models for him. Justin is also very thankful to Dr. Duncan in the accounting department for his influence on his career decisions.

Ryan Busby, a master's student in accounting from Frankton, quickly cited his parents' support as the most important influence in his life. It was their entrepreneurial activities that also influenced his decision to major in accounting. Ryan feels like Ball State professors are there for the students unlike his experience at IUPUI. He thanks professors Shortridge, Van Alst, and Schmutte for their guidance, especially in his job search.

These are just examples of people and incidents that affected you and others like you. While all may not be positive experiences, there is no such thing as bad experience if you learn from the situation. How will you use this wisdom when you continue on your life's path?

As John Dewey suggests:

"All learning is a continuous reconstruction of experience."

I encourage you to spend time reflecting on these people and experiences. Assess the value of the wisdom. Invest it in your memory and let it pay dividends for your future. This wisdom should center you and allow you to set your own direction for the future.

So, where is your life's path taking you after today? Do you have a plan for your future? While you are all at different places in your lives, this is a good time to think about the direction you want your life to go.

One of the most common mistakes that people make is to give up control of their careers to the organizations they work for, waiting passively for training opportunities, promotions, and rewards. Those of you who will go out and take control of your path will find that the path to your goals will be shorter and less fragmented.

George Bernard Shaw captured this 'own-your-own' mentality in the following quote:

"People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they don't find them, make them."

You need to seek out opportunities and manage your own life plan. How do you maximize performance in all areas of your life? I would like to make a few recommendations based on the wisdom I have gained from significant events and people in my life.

Identify those individuals that are respected for their accomplishments, expertise, and integrity. Seek out their wisdom concerning your own career path.

When I came to Ball State University I was fortunate to be assigned a mentor who took the role

seriously. I knew from the time he and his wife showed up on our doorstep to welcome us with advice and chocolate chip cookies that I had a person who I could trust to help guide me along my career path. He was a person that I could vent my frustrations and share my successes. It was and is still a fortuitous relationship that has yielded a high level of productivity and a great friendship.

Successful leaders find ways to motivate people to their full potential.

Lance Secretan, who writes for *Industry Week*, said it best when he wrote:

"Leadership is not so much about techniques and methods as it is about opening the heart. Leadership is about inspiration—of oneself and of others. Great leadership is about human experiences, not processes. Leadership is not a formula or a program, it is a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the hearts of others. It is an attitude, not a routine."

Secretan goes on to add:

"More than anything else today, followers believe they are part of a system, a process that lacks heart. If there is one thing a leader can do to connect with followers at a human, or better still a spiritual level, it is to become engaged with them fully, to share experiences and emotions, and to set aside the processes of leadership we have learned by rote."

Where is your heart? Leading and motivating people is not a transactional process, where you trade one thing for another, but an inspirational one. Seek to understand each person's humanity before you try to lead them.

Perhaps Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great* sums it up best when he describes the notion of level five leadership. In his research regarding companies who went from good to great, his research team noticed some strikingly consistent characteristics regarding the leaders of these companies. According to Collins a level five leader:

"Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will."

Furthermore he says that:

"Level five leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company."

Collins suggests the analogy of the window and the mirror. He found that transformational leaders look out the window to give credit to factors and individuals other than themselves when things are going well and into the mirror when it is time to take responsibility when things are going poorly. Other leaders simply do the opposite. Where will you look?

One such leader that has influenced me is Muncie's own Wil Davis. He is cofounder and president of Ontario Systems Corporation. He leads by example, eschews titles, and constantly focuses on building a team of individuals. He also wears his principles on his sleeve and makes them the center of all business decisions.

The basic philosophy that drives the organization of Ontario Systems is summarized in the following statements:

Stewardship

We believe that all of life is a gift from God. Our work at Ontario Systems is part of that gift.

Integrity

We believe that good stewardship of this gift is expected of each of us. Our work at Ontario Systems reflects our stewardship of this particular gift.

Service

We believe that the best example of a life of good stewardship is the life of Jesus Christ. It is His example we would follow in making daily decisions.

Tolerance

We believe that each person has responsibility for the stewardship of their own life. It is not the responsibility of Ontario Systems to assume that personal duty. It is our responsibility to encourage each other in thoughtful evaluation of the action that stewardship requires.

Professionalism

We believe these principles are the keys to work that is fulfilling, relationships that are satisfying, and a consistency of purpose that unites all of life.

While driven and hard working, Wil never forgets the reason for the company's success. I have never heard him use the "I" word when discussing any of the blessings and successes experienced by Ontario Systems. I remember a two-hour discussion after an organizational behavior class he was taking from me when I was a new professor and his company had less than 40 employees. In fine detail he outlined his vision for the company and a philosophy for running it. Over sixteen years later, he has not wavered. He passes the window and mirror test.

Take time to connect with the people you work with. Always work to bring out their best by doing your best to lead by example.

Give back in respect to those individuals who shared their time, talents, and treasures with you. Share your gifts with your community. I would be remiss if I did not ask you give back to your alma mater. Ball State University was hopefully part of everything you needed to get to where you are today and where you are going in the future. Besides giving financial support, as you grow in your professional career, look for ways to work with students by speaking in classes, mentoring a student, or offering internships.

Also, seek out ways to be a viable asset to your community. Whether that includes your church, civic organizations, or charities, your education and skills will be an invaluable contribution to their effectiveness if not their survival.

Look around the arena; some of these individuals are here proudly watching you receive one of the greatest honors of your life. In fact, it is probably one of the greatest moments in their lives too! Let me tell you about another individual who contributed to my development.

As an undergraduate psychology major at Miami University I went to my Intro Psych class and discovered a whacky, entertaining, but yet challenging, professor. He made us work extremely hard but still motivated us not to miss one single class even though it met at 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I went on to have him for three more classes, and he became a driving force for my decision to become a professor.

In my early years at Ball State I kept in some contact with him but had not talked to him for several years when I was back for a visit and thought I would stop in to see him. Unfortunately, I came to find out he died suddenly while raking leaves at his house on the east side of Cincinnati. I never really had taken the time to express my thanks to him for his influence on me. The ironic thing was that the following Christmas, I was having a talk with my niece who lived on the east side of Cincinnati and I mentioned this professor to her since she was thinking about majoring in psychology. As I mentioned his name, she paused and responded, "That was one of my best friend's father."

Thank you, Dr. Steve Hinkle.

I would also like to thank my family including my wife Peg and our children Danny, Brigid, and Mick, for their continued love, support, and encouragement. I am grateful to my parents, Rose and Carlo Hornsby, who made education a priority in my life.

Say *thank you* to the significant people in your life before it is too late.

Now, what about a strategic plan for your life's path?

Develop a personal mission statement. Consider what you want to stand for in your life. It is your purpose for existence. It describes your values and beliefs.

According to bestselling business author Stephen Covey:

"It focuses on what you want to be and to do and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based. It is your center that has been influenced by your circle of influence. The wisdom gained through life that creates 'the lens through which we see the world.' "

Take a moment and think about the things you want to stand for. What are the themes that come to mind? Recently, for me, themes such as balance, perspective, and forgiveness are part of my personal statement.

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey also talks about the zone of peak performance where you need to continuously assess the match between your personal mission, your company's mission, and your job responsibilities.

According to Covey, the more these overlap, the larger your zone of peak performance will be. In your career search, look for organizations whose mission parallels your own mission statement. Furthermore, seek out job opportunities that relate to your mission. In the early stages of your career you may need to sacrifice in one area, but you must strive to work to make the zone as large as possible.

Whether or not you make New Year's resolutions, take time at least once a year to revisit your personal mission statement and the goals that reflect it. Assess the amount of overlap between your personal mission and where you are working and what you are doing.

Sometimes you may have to make hard decisions requiring changing your place of work or seeking other responsibilities. While change is never easy, it may be the only way to realize your own potential.

I would like to close with a poem I discovered last year. As I read it I was struck by the symbolism suggested and how it parallels the journey each one of you are embarking on as you leave this arena today. It is called "The Journey" and was written by Mary Oliver.

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was late
enough, and a wild night
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of the clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as you own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do

the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Listen to your inner voice but never forget the wisdom of others. Have a great journey and God bless each of you.

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