

Lesson 5 Map Your Way to the Future

Inspiring Words for Moving Forward

A commencement address is a speech given at a school graduation ceremony. It is usually given by a notable or famous person who is invited to address the graduating class, offering advice or inspiration to the students as they begin their new lives. As you approach graduation from high school, it is natural to start thinking about your future career. Starting a new job or a career path can be an exciting opportunity, but it can also be a challenge. To prepare for your future job, it is important to explore the experiences of role models and assess your own attitudes toward success. In this regard, the commencement address not only reminds young people of the challenges they may face, but also offers insights for their career paths. The following speeches will guide you to develop qualities to adapt to new or changing situations.

1. This is an extract from the commencement address given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie at Wellesley College in 2015.

When I was growing up in Nigeria, I was expected to become a doctor. Deep down I knew that what I really wanted to do was to write stories. But I did what I was supposed to do and went into medical school. I told myself that I would hang in there. But it was after one year of medical school that I quit. I realized I would be a very unhappy doctor, and I really did not want to be responsible for the unintentional deaths of my patients. Leaving medical school was a very unusual decision, especially in Nigeria, where it is very difficult to get into medical school.

Later, people told me that it had been very courageous of me to give up such an opportunity, but I did not feel courageous at all. I felt desire. The desire to study something I love, rather than something I did just to please others. I took exams and got a scholarship to go to the U.S., where I could study something else, not related to medicine.

I had no idea whether I would succeed, and there was no guarantee I would get the scholarship to begin with. And my writing just might not have been good enough. But the point is, I tried. We cannot always bend the world into the shape we want, but we can make a concerted effort to do the best with the lot we have been given.

And as you graduate today, I urge you to think about that a little more. Think about what really matters to you. Think about what you want to really matter to you. I would like to give you some advice as your big sister: All over the world, people are raised to make themselves likeable and to twist themselves into shapes that suit other people. Please do not twist yourself into shapes to please others. Don't do it. Someone may like that version of you and hold you back from finding what you truly want. Then they actually just like that twisted shape, and not you. And the world is such a gloriously multifaceted, diverse place that there are people in the world who will like you, the real you, as you are.

2. This is an extract from the commencement address given by Tim Cook at MIT in 2017.

When you work towards something greater than yourself, you find meaning, you find purpose. So the question I hope you will carry forward from here is "How will you serve humanity?" You've learned how much science and technology have changed the world for the better. Thanks to discoveries made right here, billions of people are leading healthier, more productive, more fulfilling lives. And if we are ever going to solve some of the hardest problems still facing the world today, everything from cancer to climate change to educational inequality, then technology will help us do it. But technology alone isn't the solution, and sometimes it's even part of the problem.

Technology today is essential to almost all aspects of our lives, and most of the time it's a force for good. And yet the potential adverse consequences are spreading faster and cutting deeper. There are threats to security, threats to privacy, fake news, and social media that becomes antisocial. Sometimes the very technology that is meant to connect us divides us. Technology is capable of doing great things. But it doesn't want to do great things.

It doesn't want anything. That part takes all of us. It takes our values, our commitment to our families and our neighbors and our communities, our decency and kindness, our love of beauty, and belief that all of our faiths are interconnected.

I'm not worried about artificial intelligence giving computers the ability to think like humans. I'm more concerned about people thinking like computers, without values or compassion, without concern for consequences. That is what we need you to help us guard against, because if science is a search in the darkness, then the humanities are a candle that shows us where we've been and the danger that lies ahead.

Technology alone is not enough. It is technology married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities, that makes our hearts sing. When you keep people at the center of what you do, it can have an enormous impact. It means a technology that allows the blind person to run a marathon and catches a heart condition before it becomes a heart attack. In short, it means technology infused with the humanities, making progress possible for everyone.