To begin, we need to give credit where credit is due. You are here because of the love of your family and the guidance of your faculty. They’re all looking down from the stands right now trying to get your attention or get a photo of you. So I’d like you each to look around for a moment, catch the eye of that special someone, wave to them and as loud as you can, say, “Thank you.”

Next, I know each of you is dying to take a selfie, so let’s take a moment to let you take your selfie to get that out of the way.

Now on to the work at hand… transitioning you from your place in your seat to your place up here on this stage and then on to your place in life.

You have been labeled as Millennials… the generation of the new Millennium. But today I’m going to give you a new name. I’m going to proclaim you the MM Generation… the Mobile Millennials.

For more than half of your life, you’ve been wired to a mobile device and a variety of mobile apps.

For all of the promise granted to you by your mobile devices, there seems to be just as many evils. Instagram, SnapChat, Twitter, YouTube and all of your other mobile apps can be a pathway to sharing joy. Yet so often people use them as a pathway for hate and meanness. I’m dismayed every day when an anonymous hater feels compelled to spread misery instead of encouragement or smiles. I’m dismayed when they fail to use the option to simply keep their opinion to themselves.

In an effort to restore our faith in social media today’s MM Generation commencement address to you is being crowd sourced **from social media**. For 30 days I’ve used social media to reached out to some of the brightest minds on the planet, as well as to ordinary folks who wish to share just a tiny bit of wisdom with you as you embark on the next chapter of your life.

So here are few of the observations shared with you through social media…

CNN Anchor Brook Baldwin says, “Check your ego at the door.”

Public relations expert Gerard Corbett says, “It’s not about you. It’s about the effect you have on society and the greater good.”

Georgia Tech Assistant Athletic Director Chris Yandle says, “Every day is a job interview. You never know who is watching.”

Damon Gross – A communications executive at Arizona Public Service says,

“Be independent of your parents as soon as possible. The struggle is important.”

Photographer extraordinaire, and my first boss, Tom Morris, says, “You are about to learn how smart your parents really are.

Les Guice – President La Tech says,

“Have a plan for where you are headed, pursue what you love and pursue it with passion, but prepare for change.”

Sarah Kocian Alzamora – a corporate executive and mother of a special needs child says,

“Your life might turn out differently than you planned, but that doesn’t mean you aren’t right were you are supposed to be.”

Michele Norris – Radio Host with NPR says, “Plan your future in pencil.”

Lynn Smith – News Anchor at HLN says, “You aren’t going to be CEO next year. Enjoy paying your dues and be as humble on the way up as you would on the way down.”

Leadership expert Phillip Van Hooser says, “Strive to become so good at something that it will be impossible for you to be overlooked or ignored.”

Communications Consultant Nancy Painter says, “Look for how you can help others instead of how they can help you – it will come back to you ten-fold.”

Security Expert Jordan Frankel says, “No dream is unattainable or too big.”

NBC News & Today Show Host Savannah Guthrie says, “Be willing,” as in be willing to say yes, be willing to help, be willing to try new things.

Best Selling Author Joe Callow says, “The quality of the work you do today, no matter what the job, determines the path of your future. Go all in.”

Chris Rossetti says, “No job is too small for excellence and do everything with a sense of ownership.”

Self-proclaimed Marketing nerd Reid Stone says, “You may not make 6 figures immediately, but whatever role you land, even menial, go above and beyond.”

British Journalist and television personality Piers Morgan says you should, “Work hard and play hard.”

Marketing Manager Lorrell Walter says this wisdom from her dad, who taught her to, “Find a job you love and don’t worry about the money. If you enjoy going to work every day you will be much happier than if you have a job you hate, even if it pays well.”

That is the very same advice that my wife and I gave to both of our daughters…

Producer and filmmaker Gary Hackney says, “Have a lot of coffee meetings with people who are already where you want to be in 10 years.”

Communications Professor Cindy Schmieg adds that you should, “Get involved in a professional association in your field and build relationships with mentors who can provide advice and help create connections.”

Airline pilot Brian Braud, brother of yours truly, says, “Always be willing to give something back to your community. Join a charitable organization like the Lion’s Club.”

Sales coach Lois Creamer says, “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.”

Personal trainer Lisa Oglesby Sudbury says, “Don’t listen to anyone who tells you what you can’t do.”

Production Manager Bill Koskie says, “Life is unfair so be ready, willing and able to overcome.”

Doctor Mike Truppo says, “Trust your instincts, stay true to yourself and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. People innately love helping others.”

Super mom and super volunteer Deborah Terribile Stewart says, “Follow your dreams, have faith in yourself and in God and don’t give up.”

Radio Host Paul Ladd says, “Believe in yourself. Don’t put much stock in the nay-sayers.”

Hamilton Mixon – Global Security Expert says, “Trust your gut. It is seldom wrong.”

On the humorous side:

Global Business Consultant Robert Bradford says, “Get a pre-nup.”

Comedian and the world’s only professional summarizer Dale Irvin says, “Buy lottery tickets and cozy up to rich relatives.”

Entrepreneur Vic Bourgoyne says, “Stay.”

Retired Naval officer Ned Lundquist says, “You will never look better than you do right now.”

**My own advice would be this…**

Be happy. Find happiness. Spread happiness.

A smile is one of the most powerful tools at your disposal. Like your phone and your apps, smiles are mobile. You can take them everywhere you go. They still work even when the power goes out. Like your phone, from time to time you need to recharge your smile and you need to help others recharge their smiles.

Don’t be so caught up looking down at your mobile device that you fail to look up and smile at someone.

Each of us is given an unlimited supply of smiles. We can give away as many as we want. And when we give them away freely, even more come back to us. Test it… smile at the person beside you. Chances are they smile back. In a single moment we created approximately 5,000 smiles.

For those of you with degrees in the sciences who need proof, researchers tell us smiling activates the release of neuropeptides that work toward fighting off stress. For those of you in liberal arts, neuropeptides are tiny molecules that allow neurons to communicate. (Don’t worry, that’s not going to be on the test.) Furthermore, scientific research in Scotland confirms that people who smile more are perceived as being more attractive.

Don’t be the person in life who takes away another person’s smile. Don’t take away their smile with words of judgment or hate.

From the time we awake each day the choice is ours to face the day with anger, hostility and frustration… or to face the day with a smile. When you are in a stressful commute to work and someone needs to merge, remember that it is better smile at them and to gesture to them with five fingers than to scream at them and gesturing with just one finger.

There will be hard times in your life. Your dream job may become a nightmare. That happened to our daughters in each of their first job. Their mom and I helped them smile again when we taught them how to fire their boss.

In your life you will experience the death of parents and loved ones. Illness will strike. A relationship may sour. My challenge to you is to realize that the single most important tool that you have in order to overcome each of these obstacles is to find that next little thing that can bring a smile to your face and to the face of those with whom you are in conflict.

Human nature tells us to get even when someone harms us. If someone causes pain we want him or her to feel the same pain. But a Godly presence says to forgive. The golden rule says to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

(I don’t want you to think I’m a hypocrite. There are times in my life that I’m not proud of where I was to harsh to judge or where I was mean; where I gestured with one finger instead of five.)

But then I came to a moment of revelation and it came in a rather unconventional way at a rather unconventional time.

It was during the dark days after Hurricane Katrina, when so many had lost so much and had nothing to smile about that I really came to understand the need for and the power of a smile.

A group of us determined we had the ability to restore smiles where smiles had been erased.

We proposed having Mardi Gras parades through the destroyed city. Many serious people said it was neither the time nor the place, that there was much hard work to be done.

My observation was that we needed to do more than just rebuild with brick and mortar. We needed to rebuild the heart, soul and spirit of a saddened community. So I sat and calculated that if I purchased and threw 5,000 beads during a three-hour parade that I could make 5,000 people smile. I could bring smiles to 5,000 random strangers. And if the other 150 people riding with me in the parade did the same, we could generate 750,000 smiles in three hours. That’s a quarter million smiles an hour… or roughly 4,166.66 smiles per minute.

And that’s exactly what we did.

I wish you could have experienced it from my vantage point. It was a life changing experience for me personally, yet more importantly, it gave discouraged people something to smile about; it made discouraged people feel normal again and those smiles marked a turning point in the recovery. It was the beginning of rebuilding the heart, soul and spirit of a community.

And now a few final thoughts:

My dream is that you realize that a lot of money in a stressful job is folly, but finding fulfillment in your vocation and sharing happiness everyday will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams.

My dream for you is that you find the perfect partner in life who makes you smile until death do you part. I was blessed to find just such a person right here on the Louisiana Tech campus on September 24, 1977 at about 2:30 in the afternoon when I met my Cindy, my wife.

My dream is that you realize that as of today, you are in charge of you.

We are launching you.

Discover your authentic self.

Discover who you are really meant to be.

Go forth and smile.

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