

## FIVE LESSONS FROM THE HEART

Thank you for the introduction, President Ahlburg.

And now to the guests of honor: Students...congratulations! You have worked hard to get to this place at this time, and This Is Your Day! We are all very happy for you.

I'd like to begin with a confession. Giving this commencement speech has me very nervous. It's not that I'm afraid of public speaking. I've been the keynote speaker at several conferences and have spoken to audiences much larger than this. When it comes to speaking about what I teach and what I do, it's a piece of cake. I know all about leadership and change management.

But today I am expected to give you pearls of wisdom that will guide you throughout your life: wisdom that will make you happy, words that will make you rich. And my expectation is that you will remember forever who it was that imparted all that wisdom.

Well, at least that's what I thought. To begin preparing for this talk I asked people, "What was the most profound piece of advice offered to you by your commencement speaker?" Almost everyone said the same thing: "I don't know. I don't even remember who the speaker was." It was the same message from everyone I asked.

Now if that is the truth...that none of you will remember anything I say or even remember my name, then why should I be worried? It sounds good in theory, but I'm still anxious.

What I want to talk to you about today are five things that I think are important to remember about life after graduation. Most are things that come from my own experience, but a few are prompted by other people. I remember them because they are lessons that are very close to my heart...and I hope you will choose to keep these FIVE LESSONS FROM THE HEART close to yours.

Lesson 1 is: TAKE A RISK AND FOLLOW YOUR HEART WHEREVER IT LEADS YOU

As you approach graduation, especially in this economy, I know through conversations that some of you are still experiencing anxiety about what you want to do for the rest of your life. You may still be unsure about whether or not you majored in the right subject or maybe about whether you will be able to get a job that pays enough.

Let me tell you a story about my eldest son, David. When it came time for him to go to college, he did so...for one day. At the end of that day he knew that he had no idea what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. The only thing he did know for sure was that he wasn't ready to go to college.

David then set out to find an answer to the question, "What do I want to do for the rest of my life?" He first got a job as a clerk in a convenience store; then he was promoted to manager of that store, and later as the manager of three stores. It was from these jobs that David found out that he enjoyed serving other people and being a leader.

And then came that one evening when, unarmed, he faced down a robber wielding a gun. He learned from this encounter that he could act calm in tense situations. (His father told him that there might be less risky ways to go about learning something.)

At the tender age of 32, David was still searching for a job that would bring real meaning to his life. It was at this point that he decided to take a course in Emergency Medical Training so that he could get a job as an emergency medical technician aboard an ambulance. By the

time he had finished that course, David was clear that he had found his passion: he wanted to be a nurse in high-risk situations.

Now he was ready for college. He enrolled in Nursing School and immediately after graduation got a job helping emergency room doctors save the lives of heart attack patients. Today he is a nursing supervisor in that area and is contemplating returning to school to get a Masters Degree in Business Administration to hone his leadership skills. He is also thinking about becoming a traveling nurse wherein he and his family can travel to other countries to utilize his skills.

The point of my story is that I want to encourage you to do what my son did—to keep seeking your passion until you have found it—and then pursue it with a vengeance. The road leading there may be a bit bumpy and have some curves in it. But once you reach your destination, you will be happy and well compensated because you will enjoy going to work every single day.

## Lesson 2 is: KEEP YOUR HEART YOUNG.

When preparing for this talk, I asked several people the following question: “If you were in my place as the commencement speaker and could pass on to graduates the most important thing you have learned in life since college, what would that be?”

One of the most profound lessons came from my own beautiful daughter, Noelle Van Eynde, who recently turned 35. She said, “Daddy, I would tell them not to be in a hurry to grow up!

Now that sounds a bit counter intuitive. I mean, after all, isn’t this the reason why you’ve been studying so hard ---to give you the knowledge and skills that will allow you to grow up?

My daughter would agree with that... but her concern is that you will be too much in a hurry to become wedded to your career, to work 75 hour weeks, to become so busy you will forget to have fun. What she means is, while you still have the time, be sure to spice up your life with things like:

- Travel some...see more of the world. If you don’t do it now, you may never get to Hawaii!
- Exercise...find fun ways to do it. It will keep you healthy.
- Learn how to play golf, become a rabid shopper, spend weekends with friends, take a yoga class, learn how to cook.
- When you marry someone, take a few years to get to know each other before you have children.

That’s what she means when she says, “Keep your heart young!” What great advice!

### Lesson 3 is: KEEP YOUR HEART HONEST

If you are like past graduates of Trinity, the majority of you will someday end up in charge of other people in some sort of a profit or non-profit organization. As you go forward in your managerial career, you will be faced with many temptations to do things that are wrong...or at least things that you feel are not quite right...things that bump up against your ethics and morals.

In situations such as these, you must exhibit what I call “managerial courage.” I define this as: the willingness to do what is right in the face of risk. And when I speak of risk, I mean a real or perceived danger to something of value to you, such as a friendship, or a promotion, or maybe even your job.

In practice, managerial courage includes actions such as confronting the status quo, embracing change in the face of resistance, or maybe even speaking out against a popular but unhealthy idea. It means doing what is right, what needs to be done. It does not, however, call for doing something foolhardy or stupid.

If it is true that acting in a gutsy manner can be an unpleasant experience, then why do it? One reason is that if you lack managerial courage, you will have to live with internal anxiety and stress, and you will always be worried that someone might find out about what you did or failed to do.

So how will you know what to do when facing an ethical dilemma? Pay attention to your feelings. If it doesn't feel quite right, it probably isn't. And then do what your heart tells you to do. Said another way, “Follow your heart....It will not lead you astray.”

#### Lesson 4 is: KEEP YOUR HEART FAIR

This lesson refers to how you treat people who are different in some way from you.

As I reflect back on the students I have taught in my 28 years at Trinity, I have seen a profound change. Specifically, I have been able to see clearly how the attitudes and behavior of the students have become increasingly less discriminatory and judgmental.

But I must tell you that the changes have been very slow...which says to me that progress in this area takes a long time...much longer than I had originally thought... or hoped for.

So, Students, what I want to say is that I would be very disappointed to hear that one of you was guilty of treating someone else on an unequal basis.

Remember that when you become a supervisor or manager (as most of you will certainly become), it is your behavior towards others that is the most important. Please, never discriminate against anyone because of their race, or the color of their skin, or their religion, or their gender, or from where they come, or their sexual orientation. The only thing that is really important is their performance on the job.

And so I ask you to treat everyone equally. Please keep the progress in this area going ever forward.

The fifth and last lesson is: DON'T BE HESITANT TO EXPRESS THE LOVE IN YOUR HEART.

This lesson has absolutely nothing to do with business or academics , but it is probably the most profound piece of advice I have to offer you. It was something I already knew but was reinforced at a funeral I attended earlier this year.

The funeral was for my wife's cousin who had died rather unexpectedly. Although it was very difficult for her, the eulogy was given by his daughter, Nikki, who was just about your age. Nikki told everyone what a wonderful man her father was, and how sad she was that he had died.

And then she recalled how a very small part of her was happy about one thing. She said that her father had always told her that it is important to tell people who are dear to your heart that you love them and to do so each and every time you see them.

Nikki then recounted that the last thing she had done when leaving the hospital room one day was to tell him, "I love you very much, Dad." She did not know that was the last time she would see him alive.

"But," she said, "I am at peace now because I had expressed my love for him before leaving—and he did the same. In fact, I know that he is up in heaven right now looking down upon me." And then she looked upward and said, "I love you too, Daddy."

## CONCLUSION

Those are the five lessons from the heart that I have to pass on to you:

1. Take A Risk and Follow Your Heart...keep searching until you discover your real passion and then pursue it with a vengeance.
2. Keep Your Heart Young: Don't be in a hurry to become wedded to your career.
3. Keep Your Heart Honest...Practice Managerial Courage
4. Keep Your Heart Fair: Treat everyone equally
5. Don't be Hesitant to Express the Love in Your Heart: Use often the words, "I love you."

And so my dear students, on behalf of all the faculty, staff, Administration and the Board of Trustees of this great academic institution, it is my honor—

- to invite you to go forth,
- to do your best,
- to make your mark upon the world
- and do great things
- – and most important of all, I say from all of us to all of you, "we love you very much!"