

Rotman Commerce Class of 2017, family, friends, faculty, and guests-
I want to thank you for the honour of addressing this Class today.

Today I have the chance to speak to you as you take your first steps into your new lives as U of T graduates and Rotman Commerce alumni.

You may not remember this, but I had the chance four years ago—when I was the Director of Rotman Commerce—to speak to you as you took your first steps into what was then a new adventure, but now seems like old hat—your time as Rotman Commerce students.

Thanks to the genius of my iPhone, I can look these things up. On September 14, 2013, I welcomed the Class of 2017 in our Rotman Commerce orientation conference at the 89 Chestnut ballroom.

I remember that particular event well because my then 4-year-old daughter joined me and watched from the back as I spoke to you. She asked afterwards: “Daddy, why were all those kids so interested in what you were saying?” I assured her: “Don’t worry; it won’t last.”

But here we are again, and I hope I can hold your attention for a few brief minutes before you walk across this stage.

Graduates- Congratulations! This program is hard. We made it that way on purpose. Have no doubt that you are equipped with the very best commerce education you can get.

Faculty- Thank you! You have given enormously of your time and expertise to see these students through to this happy day.

Family and friends- Congratulations AND thank you! Your love, support, and encouragement make this day possible for each and every student who will walk across this stage, and you share in their accomplishment.

One of the great privileges I had as Director of this storied program was to meet many of our most distinguished alumni, all of whom once sat right where you are sitting today. As you begin your own journey as graduates, I thought there might be some words of wisdom I could pass on to you from my encounters with this accomplished group.

As I thought about those alumni, I tried to distill themes from their lives, lessons they shared with me, that I might convey to you. But themes are elusive in such a diverse group:

- for every CA who made partner at a big firm, there's a former CA who's running a non-accounting business
- for every finance executive, there's a public servant
- for everyone at the top of a big organization, there's someone working in their one-room apartment on the next big idea
- for every globe-trotting jet-setter, there's someone working in the neighborhood where they grew up
- for everyone who took a straight line to the top, there's someone who took a twisty path that never could have been predicted
- for every hard-charging warrior, there is a reflective academic (and even a religious leader or two)
- for every person who followed the path they set out in university, there's someone who took a detour to follow a passion or a quirky opportunity
- for every big deal closed, there's a big gift given
- for every big promotion, there's a volunteer role taken on
- for every firm founded, there's a social cause championed

Lest you think I am taking excessive poetic license, let me highlight some of the more memorable Commerce alumni I met, who illustrate this diversity:

- The CEO of one of Canada's largest financial institutions who is leading a national call for gender parity in Canada's boardrooms
- A one-time mayor, member of parliament, and federal cabinet minister who has built his post-political career in anti-poverty work and as an advocate for affordable housing
- An accomplished real estate developer who left the family business to establish a venture capital fund that invests exclusively in transformative green technologies
- An entrepreneur and technologist whose work on the smart phone literally changed the world
- At the other end of the technology spectrum, a CEO whose innovations have taken his firm to a world-leading position in developing cutting-edge water slides and water parks
- An IT consultant who left his job at a tech giant to become a serial entrepreneur, who eventually became a well-loved adjunct professor and mentor to aspiring entrepreneurs at Rotman Commerce—and who led the procession in today
- A one-time CA who left accounting and became the President of a professional football team
- An investment banker whose tenure in Japan led him back to Canada to become a sushi magnate and later an artisanal sake brewer
- A former investment banker who became federal finance minister, ambassador to the United States, a passionate advocate for mental health, and eventually Chancellor of the University of Toronto—who happens to be sitting on the stage behind me today as your fellow U of T Commerce alumnus...

As I search for themes among all these stories, all these characters, all these seeming contradictions, I find one paradox that runs among them as a theme. One pair of traits that coexist, despite the tension, throughout so many of these stories.

These graduates shared, and my wish for you is that you too will find, the happy coexistence of pride and humility.

Pride:

- the pride to have limitless ambition
- the pride to always expect the very best of yourself
- the pride to pursue all you do to the highest standards of excellence
- the pride to always act with integrity, leaving a legacy you can be proud of

But pride is not the same as arrogance. Unlike arrogance, pride can co-exist with humility.

Humility:

- the humility to work hard
- the humility to persevere and acknowledge it won't all be easy
- the humility to embrace serendipity; to be open to giving up control when opportunity strikes
- the humility to recognize you are but part of a greater whole, a part of all humanity, and to recognize the value in contributing to the creation of a more just, equitable, and inclusive society

This juxtaposition of pride and humility I have seen again and again in our most celebrated and our most satisfied alumni.

Back in 1930, another director of the Commerce program, Gilbert Jackson, offered some words of advice to his fledgling graduates. When we uncovered this in the archives several years ago, it really spoke to me across the decades, and it emphasizes some of these same themes I've touched on.

I'd like to close with his message, which I've edited just lightly to update the language.

...go forth into the world with a light heart.

On the whole, and for most of us, it is a kind world.

It is not a world that gives us for the asking soft beds on which to lie.

It is not a world that offers, except to the very few, ease without work.

But it is a world which gives you a chance,

if you remain alert,

and if you are ready, when it comes, to seize it.

...To go out into the world;

to bear oneself humbly, because one is carrying on a great tradition;

to learn something from every person whom one encounters;

to share the loyalties that inspire one's associates; and with those associates to share good and evil fortune;

to watch the problems of the coming generation and to play some small part in finding the solutions;

and to have the knowledge that, whether publicly recognized or not, the work which one does is worthwhile;

these things together constitute an adventure enough for anyone

Congratulations and best wishes. We'll be following your adventure.