

EMBRY-RIDDLE AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY SPRING 2017 COMMENCEMENT
05/06/17

Thank you, President Butler, and good morning, Eagles!

To all of the faculty, students, family, friends, and of course... 2017 Embry Riddle Graduates...CONGRATULATIONS on arriving at such a monumental moment.

While you're still living in it, I encourage each of you to savor this moment in time. Soak it in... Cherish it... Because it signifies the closing of a very significant chapter in each of your lives... and the opening of the next chapter where boundless opportunity awaits you.

Believe it or not...I was a college student once too. But I didn't study aviation or space physics like some of you. I mean....I'm good with math....but not that good... So I studied finance.

Nevertheless, I sat in a seat very similar to the one you're sitting in right now... wondering what the world had in store for me.

The year was 1986- probably before many of you were born.

Yet I still remember the feelings of joy and excitement...

...And I also remember wondering when our commencement speakers would finally stop talking so we could get on with the celebration...

And if you're feeling that way today...I certainly don't blame you.

After all- if your college experience was anything like mine, you've put in countless hours of hard work. You've had more than a few all-night study sessions powered by sheer determination... and maybe more than a little caffeine.

You've plowed through one pile of challenging coursework after another, often feeling like you were learning things so complex that only an Aerospace Engineer would use them someday...

...and then some of you remembered that you actually signed up to become an Aerospace Engineer.

Some of you may have met the love of your life while at this school, just like I met my wife Angela as an undergraduate at ASU.

I still remember the first date we went on. I took her to a "mock-rock" party. We all dressed up like the coolest bands...you know...the big names like Kiss, Def Leppard, and Motley Crue....

....OK...maybe you don't think those bands are as cool as I did...and maybe you haven't found the love of your life yet... but you get the idea... this past several years has been full of challenges, triumphs, and fun for each of you.

Graduating from a prestigious university like Embry Riddle is no easy feat. In addition to plain hard work, it takes a lot of intelligence, dedication and planning.

So I imagine that some of you have formulated a plan for how you'll apply the knowledge and skills you've acquired and perhaps where you'd like to start your career.

But I know that many of you don't have a clear vision for exactly what you want to do with yourselves just yet...and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

When I first moved to Arizona to attend ASU, I was just a wide-eyed kid from a working-class family in Ohio who heard from my guidance counselor that Arizona was where opportunity could be found.

I didn't know anyone out here. And the only assets I had to my name were my Datsun B210 and some pocket change.

On graduation day, there's no way I could have told you that I'd eventually go on to build a small ice cream company called Cold Stone Creamery. Or that Cold Stone would end up operating in all 50 states and 31 countries around the world.

Even less predictable is that I'd be standing here today as an elected official... speaking to all of you as you embark on your life journey.

It just goes to show that you never really know where you'll end up.

But if you want attain success, it starts with Thinking Big. And Dreaming Bigger.

Then you've got to take action and look all around you.

When you see even a glimmer of opportunity, don't be afraid to take a risk and give it everything you have.

While we were building Cold Stone, we needed every penny we could get. So my wife and I decided that we wouldn't turn on the air conditioner in our house until June, just to save money.

It was uncomfortable at the time, but we saw the potential in our business. And our sacrifice was well worth it.

Life never goes perfectly according to the plans we have in our heads. And you may find yourselves in difficult situations in the years ahead...maybe that dream job ends up feeling more like a dead end... maybe you visualized a certain level of success by a certain age...and you just haven't achieved it.

Some people refer to this as a "mid-life crisis."

My advice whenever you're hit with these thoughts and feelings?

Don't Stop. Make a decision and keep moving.

Today's burdens just may become tomorrow's opportunities. But you'll never know unless you keep moving and power through.

With your degree from this university comes the Embry-Riddle name. A name synonymous with excellence.

But nobody starts out as a CEO on day one. So don't be afraid to start small.

Some jobs may feel "thankless" or "less than," but no job is. There's always something you can learn.

One of my favorite books is called “Good to Great” by Jim Collins. I think he hit the nail on the head when he said “Faith in the endgame helps you live through the months or years of buildup.”

So just remember: Whatever the job, whatever the situation- there’s always a way to grow as a professional and as a person. You just need to believe in your ultimate goals.

You are all very fortunate to be graduating at a time of such great potential and promise. Most of you have access to more technology, more entertainment, and more information in your pockets than I ever dreamed of having in 1986.

But most important to remember is that your future is bright, because you have the privilege of living in the freest...and the most exceptional country on the face of the earth.

In America, if there is something you want to say, you have the freedom to say it. Whatever your faith may be, you have the freedom to believe it.

These and so many other freedoms are incredible gifts that our forefathers fought and died for. And there are billions of people who are not blessed with these freedoms as we are. So I urge to never take them for granted.

Some of you here today will choose to enter careers in defense of our great nation and some of you may have already done so. This is a noble calling and I thank you for your willingness to serve.

Wherever you go next, whatever you do, I encourage each of you to carry out your vocations with the heart of a servant. Serve your employers. Serve your families. Serve your communities. Serve your country. Each and every day of your lives.

Graduates of Embry Riddle... Class of 2017...

CONGRATULATIONS once more. You’ve finally made it to this day and you’ve earned it.

....The future is yours...and you have the power to make history.

NOW GET OUT THERE AND MAKE IT HAPPEN!

God Bless.