

Thank you, Dr. Arenaz for that kind introduction. Ladies and gentlemen of the faculty, distinguished guests and graduates, it is an honor to be here today.

As I sat at my desk and tried to search for words that would inspire the graduates, my thoughts went to other commencements I've attended. Like many of you, I suspect, I have a big extended family. Just on my mother's side we are 15 first cousins. We've tried over the years to attend each other's graduations. That's *a lot* of commencements. I also recalled my own undergraduate commencement in Harvard Yard where the poet and revolutionary, Václav Havel, who had become the first democratically elected president of the Czech Republic after the fall of communism, gave my commencement speech. So, I have some pretty big shoes to fill here. Honestly though, I struggled to remember *anything* these commencement speakers had said. // This troubled me. How could the words surrounding a momentous occasion evaporate as quickly as morning fog with the rising sun? Then I realized it's not about you remembering my words, but perhaps it's for you to remember just *one* thought and adapt it to your own life. That is my true goal today.

To that end, let me share three big learnings from my own experience, in the hope that one may act like a little thread to be woven into your own story. I've been

very lucky to have a privileged and interesting life, and it all started right here in Laredo. Let me share some of this with you today.

The First Big Life Lesson. Plan the *Future You* Today. How do you get someplace you've never been? Well, you plug a destination into the GPS in your car, a path is made, and you go. But what if that destination is not a friend's house in San Antonio, or a beach on the Gulf. Rather, the destination is who *you'll* be in 5 or even 10 years? You may be thinking, 'why, what's the point? I'll get there.' Yes you will, but take it from an old pilot: without a map, you may arrive somewhere indeed, it may just not be where you intended.

My experience -- the building of the Future Me -- started right here in Laredo, actually very close to here on McPherson Road. When I was 15, I started working after school and then during summers with my uncle, who was a certified public accountant. My uncle and his team did the books and taxes for dozens of businesses here in Laredo. I got to learn how numbers flowed. I learned a new language of accounting and business. I learned computer skills. I knew then that a life in business *was for me*. The future me that I was building in my teens and on to college was all around developing as a *business* person. No one told me to be that. I just knew that I loved the idea of creating businesses and making numbers in a

spreadsheet come to life. In later years, I would understand that I loved visioning and planning out businesses. Some of these plans would become substantial businesses and some would fail on their journey, but what made me happy was the building, the sourcing of great people, the sourcing of capital. I understood more and more President Eisenhower's words when he was Supreme Allied Commander, "plans are worthless, but *planning* is everything," he said. To this day, that is what brings me joy professionally -- the planning, the building. But don't limit this view to your professional life, include family, and friends as well. What brings you joy in your personal life? I will share with you that throughout my professional journey, I've also found great joy in hosting and entertaining. My friends and family know that if nothing else, at least the food will be good at my place. // This passion led me to help plan and fund a little restaurant in New York City called Comodo. This was a *passion project*. What do I mean by 'passion project?' Well, to be honest, I didn't think it would lead to big profits, but some things have to exist regardless. I remember the words of a former older colleague, who shared the experience of his very first job in the 1960s. He told me of his first day as a junior publisher at Random House, the large book publisher. He met a distinguished older gentleman, who was one of the founders of this storied publishing house. When asked what he wanted

to publish, my friend said he loved a collection of poems from a young poet at Princeton, *but* he probably wouldn't end up publishing it. The older gentleman, a bit puzzled, asked why not, and my friend said, "it'll likely not make money." The older gentleman smiled and said, "you have to make money as a whole, sir, but not every venture has to. Publish it, or no one will." That is a passion project.

Helping the young chef and his wife at Comodo translate their art into business and cash flows was not a chore, it was fun. Fourteen years later, we own multiple award-winner restaurants in New York and a catering company. Although this is a substantial business now employing about a hundred people, I still see my small part of all this as the joining of two passions – business and hosting and entertaining. And hey, maybe some passion projects do make money after all.

So, what does the Future You look like? Start by finding something you love to do. That will stay with you. It doesn't have to be very specific, but it should be enough for you to craft a path. If it's business – well, you live in the largest land port in America. There is business to be had here. Maybe you learn shipping or customs brokering by working for one of the many companies here, but is that the end or the beginning of the journey for Future You. Maybe getting experience for

2-3 years is a step towards starting your own business. That's mapping out Future You. Remember: the planning is even more important than the plan. //

Second Life Lesson. Read. If you're thinking 'I just finished my degree, I need a break from reading,' let me tell you that this day should mark a new *beginning of learning* not the end of it. Charlie Munger, who was the Vice Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, and long-time business partner to Warren Buffet, probably the most admired investor in the world, said:

"In my whole life, I have known no wise people who didn't read all the time—none. Zero. You'd be amazed at how much Warren reads—and how much I read. My children laugh at me. They think I'm a book with a couple of legs sticking out."

I would share with you that I've had the privilege of hiring some of the best people in the world in the fields of technology, artificial intelligence and business. They have been the engines that have built companies I've started or invested in. But we live in a world where their brilliant creations of software or algorithms may be obsolete in a few years, and then if re-created, obsolete again a few years after that. This is the modern world regardless of industry. In order to compete, you and yes *Future You*, needs to constantly learn. Whether you're in business, medicine, IT

or another field, you need to stay on top of *your* subject matter. I don't mean re-doing your degree constantly, but rather learning what's happening in your field. If you're in IT, how about working towards a Microsoft certification? If you're in medicine, what training path is going to keep you indispensable to patient care. If you're in business, say freight forwarding, learn how technologies are helping (or hurting) shippers? Delve into industry publications. Regardless of your industry or career path, remember the words of Andy Grove, who was the founding CEO of Intel. "Your career is your business *and you are its CEO,*" he would tell employees. // Learning constantly is like investing in a business that *you* happen to own.

Third Life Lesson. Travel. Some of the most memorable times in my life are those gathered from traveling the world. I always remember the words of a dear friend from business school, who is from Brazil. He once told me, "in my country, you can be a king one day and a pauper the next," referring to the instability of the country's economy and governmental policies. "But the memories one makes in travel, those are yours, and no one can take them away," he said. I have a passion for travel and have visited all continents except Antarctica // (that'll come soon). In a few weeks, I'll be in Tanzania climbing Mount Kilimanjaro after a few days on safari

in the foothills. But my first big out-of-state trip was to summer camp in middle school. I went to an all-boys Catholic camp in New Jersey. I was twelve. There were boys from all over New England but also from Mexico and South America. I was fascinated. We were all similar (same age, all similar Catholic upbringing), but yet different enough to make it interesting. I remember not being able to easily understand boys or counselors from Boston with their thick accents. One day, we did a field trip to New York City. I knew then I would live there some day. Dozens of countries later, this is how my travel journey started.

But beyond the memories, why travel? Why bother to leave the comfort of your home and routine? I would share with you that for me it's all about *perspective*. Perspective or point of view is not only about living but about *how* you live, *how* you see those around you. I'm passionate about conservation because I've dove the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia and seen how rising temperatures are quickly killing coral formations. The reef dates back 500,000 years, and the current formations are 6-8 thousand years old -- all gone within a few years. It's not all doom and gloom, certain species of coral have adapted and are coming back. Nature is fighting back. Future generations will see these flourish, hopefully. I've encountered a 3 week old rhino with his mom and 2 year old brother

on horseback in the African bush (the 2 year old weighed as much as an F-150 by the way), and I've wondered if my little godchild's children and grandchildren will see these creatures as their numbers dwindle. // We are only stewards of this world. Our lifetimes are like the blink of an eye relative to the age of our earth. We need to protect it. Travel has also inspired me in the people's goodwill. In London, during Queen Elizabeth's funeral, I saw people of all ages, all races, and all economic backgrounds standing together and suspending petty politics and superficial differences to honor a life of service well lived.

You may be thinking, "are you kidding, I have student loans, travel is expensive." This is true, so plan it out and start small. You live on the border and Mexico is rich with culture, flavors, foods which are quite diverse as you get further south. Have a mini-savings account, funded by maybe \$20 per paycheck. Soon, you'll have a travel fund. Your first trip won't be your last. Trust me, money spent on travel is one of the best investments you'll ever make. It's an investment in You.

I hope one thought from what I've shared resonates and will be that small thread that can be sewn into your life's story and your own journey. Congratulations to you all.

Thank you.