

Commencement Address

Class of 2026

— OPENING —

Hello, Class of 2026! I am truly honored to be standing up here today — and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. So let's start with the most important thing:

You did it!

Relish in this moment. Be proud of yourselves. Celebrate with your family and friends, and give yourself a well deserved pat on the back for this incredible achievement. You made a commitment to yourselves — and you kept it. For that alone, you should be proud.

Every single person in this room has faced their own set of challenges, and through all of them, you stayed true to your goals. **That** is what makes life worthwhile.

— SETTING THE STAGE —

Now — I know some of you are sitting out there feeling a little uncertain about what comes next. Your path isn't quite mapped out yet, and that's okay. And then... there are some of you who already have a fully laminated three to six year plan tucked away somewhere safe.

[Pause — smile — look out at the crowd]

... Not that I would know anything about having a four-year vision board hanging on my bedroom wall. Totally not guilty of that. At all.

[Wait for laughs]

Anywayyyy — this is not a test to see who has the right plan. Instead, my hope is that by the time I'm done up here, you'll understand the importance of being **brave, compassionate, patient**, and — perhaps most importantly — **a little bit ignorant toward your clock.**

Now you're probably wondering... what does she mean by *my clock*?

[Pause — let it land]

Don't worry. I'm getting there.

— MY STORY —

A few years ago, I experienced a life altering incident that left me confined to a hospital bed. I had a wonderful group of nurses by my side, helping me with the simplest daily tasks. There were days when it felt like I was just waiting for the next emergency — another surgery to add to what felt like an already bottomless list of operations.

And then, to top it all off, I was diagnosed with a chronic physical disability and told I might never run — or even walk — again.

[Pause — breathe — look up]

Time is a funny thing. Because if you had told me four years ago that I would be standing in front of all of you — walking across this stage, graduating, taking life by the reins — I would have told you to stop messing around.

— THE CLOCK —

In life, we all come face to face with one common enemy — an enemy that, if we let it, can completely derail our path and rob us of the things we dream of doing.

That enemy is **time**. Or more precisely — the unhealthy relationship we can develop with it.

Your mindset toward time is your ultimate superpower. **You** control what your future looks like.

We make this mistake in one of two ways. **The first:** we push our dreams back because we assume we have unlimited time left, or we dress up our fear of the unknown in the costume of patience and call it ‘waiting for the right moment.’ **The second:** we go the opposite direction — constantly rushing, trying to make up for lost time, never stopping to live in the peace and beauty of the present.

Because here’s the truth: **what is the point of taking risks if you never stop to celebrate the ones that led to your success?** You need to honor your accomplishments just as fiercely as you embrace the failures that push you to grow.

— THE LESSON —

As someone who has lived both extremes, I can tell you this: the key to a life that feels truly fulfilled — on *your* terms — is knowing when to pull a metaphorical blanket over that clock and rest in the present... and knowing when to look that clock dead in the eye and say:

[Pause — put sunglasses on — grin]

Game on.

[Wait for the energy — then continue]

Life was never meant to go our way all the time. It’s meant to be lived — with the adversities, through the detours, and yes, sometimes by creating a little chaos of your own just to see what you’re made of.

— CLOSING —

So, Class of 2026 — take the risks that might cost you some time. Live in the moment. You only get one life, so what the heck — **live it fully**. Tell that inner clock when *it’s* time.

[Smile — own it]

Cheesy? Maybe. But it worked for me — and I think it just might work for you too.

Congratulations, graduates. And a heartfelt thank you to my family, my friends, and to the incredible CCV faculty members who believed in me and gave me this honor today. I hope I did it justice.

End of Speech