The "Be a Goldfish" Commencement Speech

Good evening. In just two short years, I have developed such a love and admiration for these brilliant, beautiful people sitting before us tonight. To the families and friends here this evening—thank you. Thank you for standing beside these graduates, for lifting them up, and for loving them to this point in their journey.

Graduates, as you head into what may be your last summer of true freedom before life starts asking you to make those "adult decisions," I want to share a few lessons I've learned—and honestly, lessons I'm still practicing every single day.

Lesson 1: Success is All About Relationships

If there is one thing I know for sure, it's that no one is better than anyone else. Negativity and judgment don't just drain the sparkle from the people around you—they drain it from you, too. Life becomes so much richer when we choose connection over comparison.

Building people up often starts with the smallest gestures:

- **Learn names.** In a world where everyone is distracted by their own schedules and screens, being present enough to remember someone's name makes them feel valued.
- **Choose kindness over wit.** We often think a quick-witted comment or a sarcastic joke is harmless, but in a world where we're all already comparing ourselves to the "perfect" people on our screens, those words can cut deeper than we realize.
- **Show up.** Get up and go see people. Share experiences, create memories, and keep showing up—to laugh, to cry, or to offer a little tough love when it's needed.
- **Just listen.** Listening allows you to become more curious and less judgmental. Someone having a different perspective doesn't mean you need to refute them, you don't need to snap back, and you don't nee to blindly agree with them either. When you listen and consider their point of view, it just means you are strengthening your heart to empathize with a journey different from your own.

Lesson 2: Be Resilience

Social media has convinced us we need to "keep up with the Joneses," chasing trends and filters. But that's not you. People are going to talk about you, and they are going to judge you. One hard truth is that their negativity is almost never about you—it's about them.

Some of you may know that I am a fan of the show Ted Lasso. In one episode Ted takes his team on a tour of the sewer system and teaches them a lesson that all that negativity you hear, well, **"It's all just poopy."** It's sewer water; just let it flow on by. Don't waste your time on hate, fear, or jealousy. Be your genuine self! Be weird, be quirky, be loud, and quit worrying about the judgment. You don't have time for that.

You may also face something we call **Imposter Syndrome**—that nagging feeling that you don't belong or aren't capable. Being out in the world at your new school, in your new job, meeting new people and experiencing new things. When you feel that discomfort, remember: growth is supposed to feel that way. In those moments of uncertainty, you are exactly where you are supposed to be.

Lesson 3: Be a Goldfish

You are going to make mistakes. I certainly have. I have been hurtful, I have lost friends, and I have waited too long to say "I'm sorry." Despite how hard it may be, one of the most rewarding things you will ever do is admit when you are wrong. When you mess up, apologize sincerely, own your mistakes, offer to make it right, and try not to repeat the action.

And just as importantly: **Forgive.** When someone wrongs you, Don't dwell on the hurt. Have empathy for the person who hurt you, because holding onto that weight only slows you down.

When things don't go right, I want you to remember the happiest animal on earth: **The Goldfish.** They have a ten-second memory. When you fail, be a goldfish. Adapt, adjust, and move on. Don't let a mistake fester into resentment. Learn the lesson, then let it go.

Lesson 4: Prioritize the "Important"

As life gets serious, please don't forget to have fun. Play music loudly, dress up like a Christmas tree, and dance like nobody is watching. Turn everything into a game (though maybe skip the game of tag in the college cafeteria).

Practice **optimism**. It doesn't mean being happy 100% of the time; it means believing you'll get through the hard parts better than you were before. Finally, learn to prioritize what truly matters:

- Your snap streaks and TikTok views? **Not important.**
- Going grocery shopping with your mom just because she wants to spend time with you? **Important.**
- Helping Grandpa stack wood for the winter? Or hanging out with grandma to learn her famous cookie recipe. **Important.**
- FaceTiming your siblings or eating good food with good friends? **That is the important stuff.**

Closing

Graduates, tonight marks the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. You are stepping into a world that can sometimes feel overwhelming, competitive, and uncertain. But it is also a world full of opportunities, connection, laughter, growth, and purpose.

Be kind. Be curious. Be resilient. Show up for people. Forgive often. Learn constantly. And never lose yourself trying to become who the world expects you to be.

The world does not need another copy of someone else.

It needs you.

Congratulations, Class of 2026. We are so proud of you, and we cannot wait to see where life takes you next.