

**State Rep. Thomas Tangretti  
ITT Graduation Ceremony  
Thursday, Nov. 29, 2001**

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**Good evening graduates, faculty, family and staff.**

**Graduation speeches are often curious and difficult creatures, not just for those who have to listen but also for the poor guy like me who's invited to give them.**

**Some are easier than others.**

**Everyone knows what to say to a ~~class of high school~~ graduates – make a few witty cultural references, tell them this isn't the end of their education, but the beginning, and encourage them to go out and make themselves and their communities better.**

**I'm betting all of you already have heard that speech.**

**I can't really talk about the specifics of your degrees, either, since I'm not even sure I know what electronic engineering or computer-aided drafting are.**

*I did want to talk about these things but perhaps with a little different ~~some~~ some.*

*Do want to*  
**But I can talk about your future with some certainty.** - *however*

**I can talk about your economic future because, as a lawmaker, I hear from industry leaders all the time in Pennsylvania about the need for more workers with your type of skills and educational background, and I can see clearly that you will play a huge role in the country's – and specifically Pennsylvania's – economic revitalization.**

**Economically, you are in huge demand.**

**I can also talk about your future on a more personal level, too, because my experience *of* living – and not just working – has given me some perspective on how to balance the two.**

**And believe me, balancing the two IS important.**

**First, though, a little bit about what tonight means to you economically.**

**It seems like a day doesn't go by either here (my district) or in Harrisburg when I don't run into someone talking about the need for graduates with specialized training and technical skills.**

**Even in this time of economic retraction, firms are looking for people with vocational and technical training, and they are ready to reward them financially.**

**For instance, the starting salary for an electronic engineer today ranges up to about \$50,000 a year.**

**Now, as I look out at the graduates in this room tonight, I see a good portion of people who are just approaching their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.**

**Let me tell you that \$50,000 is a salary that many people approaching their 61<sup>st</sup> birthday have never dreamed of, let alone seen.**

**You truly have put yourselves in a great position to benefit from the job trends of the future.**

**America's new economy doesn't just want you, it needs you.**

**The U.S. Commerce Department agrees.**

**It says firms across the country, including here in Pennsylvania, will need about one and a half million new people with special vocational and technical training over the next decade.**

**Graduates of traditional four-year colleges will only meet about a quarter of that need.**

**Graduates of ITT and other technical and computer training centers will be filling the rest.**

**In addition, your specialized training has made you, if not recession-proof, then at least recession-protected.**

**Workers with high-tech skills and specialized training like you who have been laid off during the most recent economic downturn are finding new jobs twice as fast as other workers who've lost their jobs.**

**What's more, they are returning to similar work, and not ending up at McDonald's or in the local used-car lot.**

**In short, your economic indicators – to borrow a phrase we've all heard too much of lately – are pretty bright.**

**Of course, achieving economic success and job stability is only half the battle – some would say it isn't even half.**

**There are all those other parts of your life you need to get a handle on, too, and I think it**

**would be a disservice to you not to mention some of those, as well.**

**For these, I can't offer any statistics or government studies, just my own personal experience and hindsight.**

**So if you will indulge me for a few moments, here are some of my rules for life – or at the very least – things to remember while navigating life, that have helped me during the past few decades be much more than just a legislative assistant, a county controller and a state legislator.**

**First, live off of others for as long as you can.**

**While this advice is given literally tongue in cheek, the premise behind it is quite valid.**

**What it really means is that most of you have had to make sacrifices to earn this degree – financial sacrifices, time away from your families, trips and other activities postponed.**

**That's commendable, but there is such a thing as too much diligence.**

**A lifetime is a pretty long time when you're not doing what you enjoy or never making time for things outside of work.**

**When you're first starting out, it's important to find that job that you like, not just the one that pays the bills.**

**It's important to take that trip you know you'll never have time for later on.**

**And, if you have to ask for some help along the way, that's okay – that's what the family, friends and others who have joined you here tonight are for.**

**Second -- pursue joy, not happiness.**

**Everyone will tell you that your goal in life is to be "happy."**

**And, if you work hard and sacrifice, happiness – a nice house, a nice car and nice things – is pretty much assured.**

**But take my word for it, happiness is temporary and fleeting.**

**Joy, by contrast, is forever.**

**Joy comes from pursuing your interests and passions, and pursuing joy – studying and doing what you love, not just what you need – will make all the difference in the world.**

**Third -- challenge the known and embrace the unknown.**

**One of the biggest mistakes you can make in life is to accept the known and resist the unknown.**

**You should, in fact, do exactly the opposite: challenge the known and embrace the unknown.**



**Let me tell you a short story about ice.**

**In the late 1800s there was a thriving ice industry in the Northeast.**

**Companies would cut blocks of ice from frozen lakes and ponds and sell them around the world.**

**The largest single shipment ever was 200 tons that was shipped to India.**

**Only about 100 tons got there unmelted, but that was still enough to make a profit.**

**Soon, however, companies began inventing mechanical icemakers, and they put the ice harvesters out of business.**

**It was no longer necessary to cut and ship ice because companies could make it in any city during any season.**

and then Low & Behred along came the ~~Refrigerators~~ ~~refrigerators~~ ~~refrigerators~~ 10

**After all, if it was convenient to make ice at a manufacturing plant, imagine how much better it was to make ice and create cold storage in everyone's home.**

**You would think that the ice harvesters would have seen the advantages of ice making, or that the icemakers would have seen the advantages of refrigerators.**

**But they couldn't.**

**Challenge the known and embrace the unknown, or you'll be like the ice harvesters and the icemakers.**

**Fourth – learn to do things other than your job.**

**Learn to speak a foreign language, play a musical instrument, or how to play golf.**

**Getting paid to do your job well will keep *you* living; speaking a foreign language, reading**

**fiction, playing golf or strumming on the guitar will keep you alive.** - *and enrich you beyond your imagination*

*- and related*  
**Fifth – continue to learn.**

**Learning is a process, not an event.**

**No one should ever stop learning.**

**Indeed, it gets easier to learn as you grow older because you get better at seeing the relevance of what you are learning and why you need to keep learning it.**

**Sixth -- learn to like yourself or change yourself until you do like yourself.**

**Not liking yourself leads to very few things that are good.**

**You being here tonight indicates you already have a desire to improve yourself.**

**But remember the reason why you are doing it.**

**Self-fulfillment before you can meet others' expectations.** - Repeat

**When you fly, there is a reason why the flight attendant stresses that, in an emergency, you should always put your own oxygen mask on first before helping someone else.**

**Your first goal should be making you into someone YOU can respect and like.**

**Everything else follows.**

**Seventh -- play to win and win to play.**

**This simply means always do your best, and never stop trying.**

**If you're not playing to win – in other words, doing your best – others' expectations of you will diminish.**

**And, if you think or act like your first few victories mean you can stop trying, others'**

**impressions of you will fall even further.**

**Eighth -- obey the absolutes.**

**This ties in with the previous rule.**

**Playing to win means playing within the rules.**

**You will find that things in life often change from absolute to relative.**

**When you were a child, it was absolutely wrong to lie, cheat, and steal.**

**As you get older, and particularly in the work world, you will be tempted by the "system" to think in relative terms**

**I didn't cheat as much on my taxes as my partner did.**

**I don't pad my expense reports as much as others."**

**This is completely wrong.**

**Preserve and obey the absolutes ~~as much as~~  
you can.**

**If you never lie, cheat, or steal, you will never  
have to remember who you lied to, how you  
cheated, or what you stole.**

**There *absolutely are* absolute rights and  
wrongs.**

**Finally, and most importantly, enjoy your  
family and friends while you can.**

**Believe me, this is the most important advice  
I can offer, and it really doesn't need much  
explanation.**

**I'll just repeat it: Enjoy your family and  
friends as much as you can.**

**Nothing you will ever gain – money, a nice  
house, a fast car, or a good job – will match  
what you already have in them.**

**My greatest joy has been my family; your greatest joy will be your family – mark my words.**

**I hope you take these words of advice in the spirit they are offered, and think about them every once in awhile – when you interview for that job you maybe really don't want; when you're tempted to cut corners to gain an advantage; when you stay at the office an extra couple of hours and miss your child's dance recital or baseball game.**

**We are all honored to join you in celebrating this moment in your life and your accomplishment, but I want you to remember that this is only a part of your life.**

**Sometimes, that gets lost in the instruction.**

**Tonight, you receive a diploma, and with it, a brand new opportunity both vocationally and personally.**

**How you use it is now ~~entirely~~ up to you.**

**But that decision doesn't have to be made solely by you.**

**Look around at the people who accompanied you here tonight – they've helped you reach this point and they will help you reach past this point.**

**Make as productive use of them as you do of this degree.** *Because, believe me they are willing to do that for you -*  
**Again, congratulations to all of you, and good luck in your futures.**

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