

UG November 2015 Congregation

Live Your Dreams

Acting Chairman of the University Council, Professor John Hyde, Members of the University Council, Vice-Chancellor, Members of the Advisory Board of the College of Humanities, Members of Convocation, Staff and Students, Alumni, Invited Guests, Graduands, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I have to say that it is one of the great honors of my life to be able to address this gathering here today and I wish to say thank you. Most of all, I want to say congratulations to this distinguished group of Graduands — the Class of 2015

To all the family members (Parents, Grandparents, Siblings, Cousins, Aunts and Uncles), I want to congratulate all of you also, for it is you that supported these young men and women to be where they are today. Consequently, this is your day, as well. Just think about it — your sons, daughters, nephews and nieces— they spent the last three years away from home and here in Legon, and yet with all the distractions that were thrown in the paths of these young men and women (new to independent living), they still made it here today. So you've done something right. Graduands, give a big round of applause to your family for everything that they've done for you.

Finding Your Path

Some of you came to university already sure of your dreams and your ideal paths. Others came looking for new ideas, new opportunities, and new paths. But whether or not you have a firm grasp on your future, I have two messages for each new graduand here today.

My first message is to define your dream and chase it with all the rigor you can muster.

Arguably, almost all of you are already successful according to conventional definitions. But while you're thinking about making money, make sure you're also thinking about being relevant. Money without relevance can be unfulfilling. All of you graduands here today can and should seek both. We spend a quarter or more of our lives working. Make sure it is more than just a job. Make sure it is a life — an interest — a passion. You are blessed with an endless list of career options. Take the risks required to find the one that is most fulfilling for you and pursue it. It's better to [come home late](#) from a job you love than to come home early from a job you hate. Above all, always remember there's no such thing as an overnight success; be prepared to pay your dues.

My second message has to do with the urgency of time.

I recently attended my year group class reunion and it left me in a reflective mood. A few of my classmates are no longer with us. There are some lessons in this for all of us. Right now, it may seem as if you have a lot of time to make decisions that may put you on a path different from where you ultimately want to end up, someday. Maybe you want to be an artist, a musician or a social entrepreneur but that job with a big salary is calling out to you. You will get to those other things, someday. For many people, someday will never come. It certainly never came for my classmates who are no longer with us. Time is more precious than money. Every one of you has the capacity to make a lot of money. But none of us can manufacture more time.

Preparing for the workforce

Some of you are entrepreneurs and will leave here to set up your own businesses. Others who are not entrepreneurial will join the large pool of graduates seeking employment with the few established firms in the country. To increase your chances of employment my advice is to do the following

- Hone your interview skills by practicing with relatives and friends who are professionals and have been through the process.
- Video record the mock interviews and critique yourself or submit yourself to criticisms by your professional friends and relatives
- Learn the grooming language of the industry you are interested in- appropriate dressing for appropriate industry
- Consider non paid internship programs which gives you an opportunity to demonstrate your capabilities to your prospective employer - offers you a foot in the door
- National Service is another opportunity to show your worth, unfortunately some graduates just squander the opportunity and laze around for the entire year, the excuse being the work they are given is routine and the assignments, boring. It never occurs to them to take the initiative to come in early, truncate their lunch breaks and close late so they may avail themselves to learn the other jobs they find interesting - Smart national service students however seize the opportunity to learn as many jobs as possible, understanding that employers value staff who have multiple skills.
- Progressive companies don't typically hire people for their good looks. They hire people to help them solve problems. Demonstrating your problem solving skills and how you can bring them to bear on your prospective employer's challenges at the interview would almost always stand you in good stead with your prospective employer.
- While working, if you want a promotion, first be great at what you do; And there are two ways to do this: First, get clarity on the expectations of your current job. Second, ask your manager for feedback and regularly ask what you can do to improve. If you're great at what you do, people will take notice and have you in mind for special projects and maybe even for that promotion.

Some of you are graduating with First Class. Some of you are graduating with Second Class Upper. And I know some of you are just graduating by the skin of your teeth, “thank you, Lordy.” For those of you graduating at the top of your class, I lift off my hat to you. Remember however that success in life after university is not guaranteed to those performing at the top of their class. Graduating top of your class is a great thing; to the prospective employer it shows you are the most trainable among the lot and while it may help you get your foot in the door, once there you’ve got to prove your mettle. The currency here is not an A or A+; the currency here is the bottom line. Can you help the firm generate more revenue, cut costs or do both? So if you are today graduating as an average student don’t despair, this new professional life you are about to step into offers you another opportunity; but you will need to learn the rules of the game of new your profession and then if you diligently apply yourself you could perform at the top of your class.....except this time your reward will not be an A or A++ but a big fat pay check!!!!!!! (How do you like me now!!!!!!.)

Define Success

Success comes in many shapes and forms. To most people in this part of the world, it is financial, but to a few others it is fulfillment in the job that they do. So if you define success as helping one thousand orphans get an education and you are able to do so, then consider yourself successful.

Cultivate A Habit of Investing

Perhaps the most easily identifiable habit of self-made millionaires is *the habit of frugality*. Wealthy people are careful with every pesewa. They know money and allocate their funds carefully. Financially independent people develop the habit of regular saving and investment from an early age. Human beings are creatures of habit. We very quickly adapt to almost any external condition or circumstance. If you save 10% off the top of your paycheck, and discipline yourself to live on the other 90%, you will soon adjust your lifestyle so you are comfortable on the lesser amount. In no time at all, living at this level becomes a habit and you stop thinking about it. For some people however, the idea of saving 10% of their income, off the top of each paycheck, is too difficult for them to even consider. In this case, which is quite common, I recommend a gradual process of learning to save money where you begin by saving 1% of your income and living on the other 99%. For example, if you are earning GHC2,000.00 per month, make a decision today to save GHC20.00 per month. You can then live on the other GHC1, 980.00. And the money saved and invested should be for one purpose only; to enable you to achieve financial freedom as soon as possible.

Continuous Learning

At the individual level, continuous learning is about expanding your ability to learn by regularly upgrading your skills and increasing your knowledge. Fresh thinking and fresh ideas are being espoused in every field every day. What you've learned today could be archaic in a year or two. To remain relevant in your profession strong continuous learning skills are required to successfully adapt to a changing work and life demands.

Remember

Opportunity is random and may come in many different forms. Sometimes it comes in the form of a disappointment. The challenge is to be ready and recognize it when it appears.

If you get [knocked down seven times, get up eight](#). Don't fear failure, unless it's the kind of fear that drives you to succeed. Have you ever had a dream that you were afraid to go after? **Have you ever passed up an opportunity because you were afraid to fail? We all have dreams and often the only thing standing between us and our dreams, is the fear of failure.**

[Thomas J. Watson](#), the founder of IBM once said if you want to succeed, you have to double your failure rate. There is so much truth in that quote because **we learn from our mistakes not our successes**. If we don't take chances, we will never have the opportunity to learn from our mistakes. **The only way you will ever fail, is when you let fear stop you from pursuing your dreams."**

"Whatever you do, strive to do it so well that no man living and no man dead, and no man yet to be born can do it any better."

As I finish my thoughts today, I'd like to leave you with these words from Eleanor Roosevelt: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Again thank you for the privilege. Congratulations, Class of 2015. God bless you. God bless the University of Ghana. And God bless mother Ghana

References:

Obama's 2013 Speech to Morehouse College Graduates

Thomas Staggs, Chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts

Benjamin Mays, President, Morehouse College