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McKeesport

**Commencement Address
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Addressing you on this occasion is an honor.

Commencement is a great opportunity to deliver an inspirational, powerful and memorable message, a message that touches the heart and is appealing to the intellect... What a challenge!

Probably the best way to proceed is to work with a simple formulation and a short speech. Something like: "To achieve success, invest in human capital," or "Do not wait: Start saving for your retirement, right now!"

A short speech, not another academic session, please! I m sure you are thinking. We do not want to spoil the joy of the day with a lot of dry sociological stuff, do we?

This commencement address is centered on the power of two words: "Global Citizenship."

We all know that global ties are now stronger than ever before. And these global ties have profoundly altered the way we live. With the emergence of a more tightly knit global society we have gained important advantages.

We also face new threats and a growing awareness that our actions are no longer independent from the actions of people living in far away places.

We are increasingly connected by global trade, finance and culture. We buy and sell across the world; we consume what is produced in other countries, we compete in a global labor market; our health depends on the containment of pandemics ravaging other continents.

Global cooperation has become indispensable. There is no other way to stop environmental destruction or the proliferation of dangerous weapons. We and our children will live better lives if countries around the world are able to cooperate and devise global solutions to common problems.

As citizens we have rights but also obligations to our communities. As citizens of a fast changing global society, we have to learn to combine the rights and duties we have as members of individual countries with the obligations stemming from our membership in

the global society. There are no barriers capable of isolating us. The so-called “global village” is here to stay. The concept of global citizenship is already changing traditional approaches to policy-making as well as conventional forms of diplomacy and political action.

The idea of global citizenship is also behind new efforts to reform the curriculum in schools and universities. At Penn State McKeesport we have been working in this direction. We started the Teaching Haiti Project in 2004, implemented the Teaching Africa Project in 2005 and we are preparing the Teaching India Project for 2006. The purpose is to bring new contents to the educational process and prepare students to better deal with the reality of a new world.

And global citizenship has inspired many international and local campaigns aimed at mobilizing public opinion. You have heard about some of the efforts to achieve freedom, security and peace in all nations.

There are a number of human rights campaigns: to protect the rights of women and children, the rights of racial, religious and political minorities, to fight the use of torture.

There is also a major campaign to combat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and generally to improve global health. The ONE campaign (which you can find at one.org) starts with the principle that acting as one, working together, we can make poverty history.

Major actors in these global efforts are religious and political organizations, international agencies as well as private foundations (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, has been active in funding several global health initiatives).

Hundreds of non-governmental organizations and millions of citizens, people like you and I, are participating in these campaigns, channeling resources, spreading information and bringing new voices to global debates.

We all have a role to play. The forces of globalization might seem too complex to understand and too powerful to control, but what global campaigns emphasize is that the concerted efforts of governments, citizens and organizations will accelerate progress in human well-being through education, nutrition, environmental and other economic and social programs.

The key, I believe, is on the part that citizens can play in these initiatives. They can hold political and religious leaders accountable for their indifference to global risks.

Citizens can inspire other citizens to become knowledgeable and engaged. They can organize efforts at the local level, and they can press the media to report accurately on the conditions of the world.

In the course of your school years, you have been learning about ideas, theories, authors, tools, research methods... This means you are especially well prepared to think about complex issues.

I am sure you have experienced more than once that learning can be challenging, but it can be fun... Learning is like opening our eyes; it is like getting out of a bubble.

Often, however, it takes a long time to open our eyes, because the meaning of what we think we have learned easily escapes us. Learning is like butterflies, marvelous but fleeting. Getting close to them involves persistence and hard labor. If you do not want your learning to fly away, like butterflies, you will have to keep opening your eyes.

Perhaps this is what people mean when they say that learning never ends. In a sense, education is never over.

You may have seen that bumper sticker that reads: “The truly educated never graduates.” (Sorry to those who thought they were through with school...!)

From now on, you will be responsible for your own intellectual development, guided by curiosity and hopefully by a strong sense of your duties as citizens; not just citizens of a single country, but citizens of the world.

Luckily, learning about the world has never been easier. The sources of information and knowledge continue to multiply. It only takes a computer to find what the latest trends are in the areas that interest you.

We could think of the learning process as a series of revelations that lead to subsequent searches and then to new revelations.

Some of these revelations end up defining key aspects of our identity as persons. They may encourage us to leave a mark, to accomplish something valuable, something meaningful, something we may look at the end of our lives with pride and a measure of nostalgia.

I would like to give you an example of what I mean by an important revelation, the kind of revelation that changes people’s outlook, the kind that transforms, that motivates people to pursue worthy goals and realize major dreams.

I recently came across a commencement speech given at the University of Pennsylvania in 2004 by Bono, the rock star who is now a major figure in campaigns to improve human well-being in Africa.

Bono told the audience at UPenn that after the Live Aid concert in 1985 –a concert that helped raise millions of dollars for humanitarian purposes—he and his wife went to Ethiopia. During that visit he met a man who asked him to take his son with him. “If you do not take my son –the man said- my son will surely die.”

I will quote from Bono’s speech: “At that moment, I became a rock star with a cause. Except it isn’t a cause. 7,000 Africans dying every day of preventable, treatable diseases

like AIDS? That's not a cause. That's an emergency. And when the disease gets out of control because most of the population lives on less than a dollar a day? That's not a cause. That's an emergency. This generation –yours, my generation—we are the first generation that can look at poverty and disease, look across the ocean to Africa and say, with a straight face, we can be the first generation to end this stupid extreme poverty, where, in a world of plenty, a child can die for lack of food in its belly.”

So, Bono had a revelation. His life and his work were fundamentally changed. If you go to Bono's website, you will see that his commitment to alleviate human suffering in Africa has not been just the passing whim of a celebrity. Far from it; he continues to work in a crusade that is mobilizing thousands of people, business groups, actors and musicians, community leaders, young people around the world.

I liked Bono's speech; for some time I have been impressed by his accomplishments (and I am no rock fan!). He has been able to call attention to issues that we tend to ignore. He has helped us connect with tragic realities without losing sight of the enthusiasm and energy needed to achieve complex goals. He has brought people together, young people like you, conservative and liberal politicians.

Being at opposite ends of the ideological divide has not stopped people from getting involved. Bono works with experts and government officials, with local leaders, business groups, academics, entertainers. He advocates a very practical approach.

Clearly, the first step is to raise awareness that the needs are massive and urgent. I like his simple formulation: “This is not cause. It is an emergency.”

My own message today is simple. You should invest in human capital and you should invest in your retirement. But you, and all of us, should also invest in our world, a world we share with about 6 billion people. I mean, we should invest to make our global society a better place.

Our global society shows signs of improvement. The economies of China and India are growing fast. In general, the larger economies are growing faster while others are trapped in poverty, paying huge debts, affected by health crises, population expansion and environmental degradation.

Increases in global trade have benefited many; but large segments of the world are falling behind. The gap between rich and poor leads to frustration, higher crime rates, and political instability. Millions migrate, leaving their families in search of better prospects.

The movement of people across national frontiers is restricted, but international migration has increased. This is understandable if we consider the following: The average person in a wealthy country dies at age 70. In some low-income countries life expectancy is only 31!

20% of the world's people consume 86% of all goods and services. On the other hand, the poorest 20% consume just 1.3% of goods and services.

Wouldn't you think of moving if you and your family were facing persistent unemployment, lack of opportunities and extreme deprivation?

More than one billion people lack access to water. In Africa, the poorest region, less than half of the population has access to health care and clean water. In Latin America, over 40% of the population lives in poverty. Worldwide, four out five people are poor.

Every year, four million infants die within the first month of life and 17 million children are born underweight because their mothers are malnourished. One third of the people in Africa are malnourished.

And AIDS, which affects over 40 million people around the world, has already left 12 million orphans in Africa alone. This month, on December 1st, another AIDS day was marked with a campaign that said: “We all have AIDS, if one of us does.”

Precisely; we cannot be healthy in a world full of illness, we cannot feel safe in a dangerous world, and we are not rich in a world full of poverty. The world will be getting more dangerous and more unequal if global citizens do not open their eyes to the emergency.

We citizens need to make sure that our global society becomes more peaceful, more just, and healthier. We all need to get involved, because the connections between our immediate environment and the global community will become stronger, not weaker. Our fate and the fate of the global society are inescapably linked.

Promoting a more peaceful, a more just, and healthier world is no longer a matter of altruism or naïve idealism. It is a matter of survival.

I am not suggesting this will be achieved easily. I am stressing that it is not an impossible task. The enthusiasm and creativity of young people are crucial.

By thinking and acting as responsible global citizens we can make a difference. It is only in a world that protects the dignity of all humans that we can truly prosper as human beings.

I wish you all a future of great prosperity.

And I congratulate you for your achievements at Penn State University. Enjoy this celebration!