

*Responsibility and Time*

University of Connecticut Commencement Remarks

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

I can't tell you how pleased I am to be back at UCONN to receive this recognition from my undergraduate alma mater.

It is truly amazing to see how the university has grown and prospered since the 1960s. I was certainly proud of my alma mater when I attended but am even more so 40 years later. I only wish I had aged as well.

As part of my Connecticut pride, I would like to give a special "shout out" to the UCONN Huskies women's basketball team for their unprecedented success on and off the court as both accomplished students and phenomenal athletes.

It is especially meaningful for me to share this moment with my wonderful wife, Marjorie, and to reunite with old friends and colleagues who helped make me the person I am.

Whatever successes I have achieved in life I credit to my family, friends and the University of Connecticut.

Even though I am honored and humbled to stand before you today, this is not the first speech I have given like this.

Throughout my academic career I have stood before many graduates such as yourselves and spoken carefully selected words about life and how to live it.

But my perspective on the lessons of life changed profoundly after August 2005 when my own life was forever altered by a hurricane you know as Katrina but we in New Orleans simply call “the storm.”

I would not wish the experience of Katrina on anyone. I cannot put into words the pain of watching a city and university you love disappear under dark floodwaters.

I cannot tell you the anxiety of wondering if that city and university will rise again to new life.

I cannot tell you what it is to like to look into a mirror and ask yourself if you are up to the task of saving a university, knowing the consequences of failure.

And now with Katrina in our rear view mirror, we face another unprecedented challenge emanating from the recent oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. This disaster took eleven lives and not only threatens the economy and unique ecosystem of our region, it also has serious implications for everyone in our country.

I can only tell you that after you witness and live events such as these you will never speak empty words again.

Based on my experiences, there are two things I would ask you to consider as you enter the next phase of your life:

Responsibility and Time.

Remember that all of you are privileged. Not because you are wealthy or because you have not encountered hardship in your own life. You are privileged because you have been afforded the opportunity of an education at one of the finest universities in America. This privilege carries with it responsibility--the responsibility to make life better for those less privileged than you so they or their children can receive the same opportunities you have.

As you watched the news after Hurricane Katrina you witnessed the plight of those who were left behind. You saw one of the world's most beloved cities inundated and its residents seemingly abandoned. You saw families waiting for days to be rescued from sweltering rooftops or fetid shelters. You saw scores of drowned bodies on the streets. You saw what happens when the government (federal, state and local) as well as society as a whole does not live up to its shared responsibility.

Make sure in your time you assume your responsibility as a citizen of the world. When it is time for any of us to leave this world, we will not be remembered for what we did for ourselves, only for what we did for others.

This leads me to the second point I want you to consider: Time.

The most precious resource we have in life is time. The concept of time is relative and its value lies in how you use it.

For example, it took a billion years for life, initially in the form of microbes, to take root on Earth.

The great physicist Albert Einstein once noted that “time is nature’s way of keeping everything from happening at once.” Accordingly, time allows us to keep track of what we do:

Two or three hours ago you were probably making your way to this ceremony.

Less than 24 hours ago, you likely were having a nice dinner with your family.

A few weeks ago you were struggling through finals.

Anywhere from one to six or seven years ago, you were arriving on campus to begin your education here.

Whatever time you have spent at UCONN it is likely a sizable portion of the time you’ve been on this Earth. It’s also—in the grand scale of things—a blink of an eye. I’d be very much surprised if your perception of your UCONN years wasn’t exactly that - - both a mad dash and a slowly unfolding story.

Right now I'd like you to think back to those first days on campus. Can you recall your excitement, anticipation, nervousness? Can you recall the very distinct feeling of knowing that a new experience was waiting for you?

When I look at you all, I can't help but wonder about the mix of emotions that each of you were experiencing when you arrived at UCONN.

When I look at all of you, I applaud your accomplishments, how you spent your time at UCONN and the potential you have to spend the time of your life serving others.

Today, I am proud to share in your recognition. That is what this ceremony is about. Look around you: this is a pretty amazing event. This time is in recognition of your achievements.

So hold onto this moment and savor it. It marks an important, developmental time of your life. But, when you're ready, let

the moment go.

There will be many moments and milestones ahead in the years to come. Embrace each fully but do not live in the past.

As you are already beginning to learn and as I have realized, our lives are both a mad dash and a slowly unfolding story.

We are the sole authors of our respective stories. Every word of it is yours.

Let's make sure we carefully choose each of them well.

Scott S. Cowen

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