

Daniel Toscano - Commencement Speech. UConn 2013

When I graduated from UConn in 1987, the most likely descriptions you might have heard were: “sleepy”, “commuter school”, “safety school” ...heck, the dorms didn’t even serve meals on weekends (given the quality of the food, noone really shed a tear!)... In my junior year, UConn hired a new basketball coach, a man from Massachusetts you may remember...named Jim Calhoun...that meant we couldn’t play pickup basketball games on the court in the field house anymore if the team had practice scheduled. (Of course, Gampel Pavilion wasn’t even on the drawing board yet...)

I don’t think a building had been constructed on campus since the WW2 GI Bill, and we all know those were not intended to be around very long...

Look at this place now...just in the past two years...

*Bioscience Connecticut

*Faculty 500

*Next Generation Connecticut

All on top of 21st Century UCONN...and that is just the beginning...

#new leadership

#new facilities,

#new faculty,

#an increasingly impressive student body (ok, that was my gratuitous ass-kissing pandering in the hopes of getting raucous applause at the end of this speech...please don’t forget me !)

And, of course, the new Storrs Downtown Center is finally open...so people might actually WANT to live in the area!

Think of how much this place is evolving, and how much has changed in the four years since you first arrived...

As the signs on the site of the new basketball development center say..."Greatness is not an accident!"

By the way, with all the noise about athletic conference realignment, might I point out that over the past 4 years:

UConn teams have played in a BCS Bowl game, have won 17 conference championships and captured 3 National Championships...

All during your time here...(I hope you were there to cheer them on).

Our future is so bright...

Did you know that over half the schools in the ACC (7 to be exact) have won a combined 0 national championships over the same time period?

Sometimes I think we forget how good we have it!

And while I am on the subject of our student/athletes, no event at Gampel would be complete without a t-shirt toss...

Our university is creating greatness throughout...

academically, athletically, socially...

in its facilities, in its alumni base (with you as our newest additions!)...In its role in Connecticut's economic base and as a cornerstone of investment in the state's future.

We are winning...in the classroom, on the field, in the laboratory, in the concert halls and art studios

and, yes, importantly, in the business world...

I will come back to UConn at the end, so don't forget where we left this topic.

LIFE AHEAD

On behalf of everyone here today who is NOT about to graduate, I would like to welcome you to the REAL WORLD...a world that is vastly different than the one I entered with my UConn diploma 25 years ago...

With the technology revolution that has occurred over the past 30 years... communication, access and awareness have spawned a new world. I remember back when Al Gore invented the internet...I thought to myself-this could be the one of history's greatest moments of progress, up there with the printing press and the combustion engine...

Technology allows us to know instantly what happens around the world—to see it...to debate it...to act on it...

We live in a world of constant, immediate change, a world without physical boundaries. The technology revolution has made it easier to find each other, to connect us to each other and to 'get the word out'...when I was a student, when something 'went viral', we ended up at the infirmary...

Technology has made the world truly global for the first time...

Capital flows around the world in an instant.

Economies around the world are integrated. It's difficult for the US economy to grow if China is contracting. A growing middle class in emerging markets presents opportunities for manufacturing around the world.

A month ago, a tax on deposits in Cyprus roiled financial markets from Singapore to NY...I'm not sure we would have even known about that a quarter-century ago.

The "REAL WORLD" has had to adapt...and it has embraced the technology revolution.

The world you are entering has never been more fascinating, has never offered more opportunities for self-motivated people and should be one you EMBRACE!

So, I am going to throw out a handful of my thoughts on some things to think about as you decide who you will be and what you will do in the real world.

These SIX thoughts are completely random and in no particular order...

1 Let LUCK play a role.

Are you familiar with the sayings “it’s better to be lucky than smart” or “she was in the right place at the right time”? If you aren’t, I would suggest you get familiar with them. All the talent in the world doesn’t succeed without an element of serendipity. You can’t really plan for it, but you need to be aware that it is out there and grab as much of it as you can. You can’t manufacture luck, but you can put yourself in a position to find it when others aren’t even looking for it. One way you can do that is to develop a deep network...not just a network of people whose email addresses you have or who you met at a conference, but people who you have gotten to know and who know you, within or outside of your professional life. The best way to do this is to look for opportunities to help people...help them make a connection to someone you know, take a meeting, etc...however you can help someone (whether professional or personal). The deeper your network, the more likely you are to be in the right place at the right time...with people trying to help you out. You want to be the one who seems to find all the good luck. I can assure you it isn’t as random as you might think...

Let’s have our own saying as UCONN grads...”It’s EVEN BETTER to be lucky AND smart!!”

2 BELIEVE in something.

One of the most amazing things to me in the business world is how many people out there just mail it in. In my mind, this happens because people don’t always pursue something they really believe in. You have probably been told 1,000 times to “follow your dreams” ...but what if you aren’t really the dreamer-type? I offer an

alternative: “follow something you believe in”, whatever it is. It can be a business plan, a profession, a group of people...something...ANYthing...

Apathy is one of the most destructive nouns in our vocabulary. If I give you just one piece of useful advice, it would be to avoid apathy at all costs. Apathy saps us of our energy, of our creativity, of our will to win. Without those, we are just poorly-performing machines...

I'm reminded of a quote from a man who believed in something...our Hall of Fame Coach Jim Calhoun. He said “The first step in BEING special is BELIEVING you are special. You can't do something special without believing it can happen.”

Of course, I am also reminded of the great WC Fields who said: “It's important to believe in something...I believe I'll have another drink.” Maybe not necessarily part of the recipe for success!

3 ENJOY what you do.

You can find satisfaction in many different ways, in many different vocations.

You can bring creativity to the production floor

You can bring technology to fine arts

You can commercialize a great idea

Just make sure you enjoy the path you are on and it means something to you; if you don't...find yourself a different path.

Every day won't always be a walk in the park, but if you enjoy what you do, that alone can get you through the times where you lose confidence in what you are doing.

4 don't SETTLE.

“Settling”...my LEAST favorite word. Settling means making a bad decision when you KNOW it's a bad decision. There is a big difference between accepting failure and settling. Settling is capitulation without the benefit of lessons learned, accepting

failure is paradoxically one of the critical ingredients of success. Please don't ever settle...

5 The CLOCK IS RUNNING; don't waste time.

I think this is certainly obvious to parents, seems like just yesterday you were changing their diapers and teaching them how to ride a bike, now look at them. Before you know it, the roles will be reversed and they will be changing YOUR diapers! You have your whole lives ahead of you; that is an exciting thought. But...it does go by quickly, so make sure every day has meaning. There are times where it makes sense to wait in line and other times where it makes sense to find a different line.

6 Look ahead, but DON'T PLAN TOO MUCH.

Picture a quarterback stepping up to the line of scrimmage...they always have a play called. But the GREAT ones survey the situation and aren't afraid to call an audible and go a totally different direction. In order for an audible to work, trust has to be established and people have to be willing to fail. Some of life's great successes will come on audibles. Be willing to take the risk when it makes sense. As the great boxer Mike Tyson once said, "Everyone has a plan...until they get hit in the face!" Instinct is one of the greatest assets in the real world. Use yours...

7 Do more than the MINIMUM.

I think this advice is pretty obvious, but it is often overlooked. "The minimum" is where mediocrity lies. Surprise people by delivering more than is expected, that is the mark of a successful person. Expectations are not always explicit, you have to figure it out for yourself most times. If you deliver more than you think is expected, you will find success...maybe even some of that "luck" I mentioned earlier!

I'm not sure if you were keeping track, but I said I had SIX pieces of advice for you today, and I actually gave you SEVEN. See, I delivered more than the minimum! Consider the extra one my little graduation gift to you.

Don't let others define you do the defining...

Find a few words that you want to define you. For me, it is 'overachiever', 'self-made' and 'generous'. Make sure what you do every day is consistent with how you define yourself.

Back to UConn for a moment before I get out of your way this morning. When you got here 4 years ago, you were probably around 18 years old, intimidated, and you didn't know where anything is. Now look at you:

confident, informed, educated and ready to take on the world. Hopefully UConn played a role in getting you where you are.

I want UConn to be a permanent and never-ending part of your life. You are a Husky forever; your work here is never done. I promise you...this University's best days lie ahead, but it does so ONLY with the commitment of our alumni base-which you will be joining in a few minutes (assuming you have paid all your parking tickets and library fines!).

Don't wait to come back, don't wait to get involved. Support our teams, but do more than that. Remain connected to the School of Business, to your friends and classmates, your professors...

Where you went to school...and who you marry are two of the most indelible marks on your life! I promise UConn will never nag you to take out the garbage!

Please Please Please join me in making UConn important to you for the rest of your life. Alumni support, both financial and otherwise, are key to any great University.

Please remember what this school did for you. Help UConn do it for others.

You have made some great choices to get to where you are today. I would like to congratulate you on your success thus far in your lives and wish you nothing but the best in your adult lives. I know greatness will come out of this class, and I look forward to watching you work your magic.

I leave you with two quotes that sum it all up.

“It’s what you do when people AREN’T looking that defines who you are.”

And I quote our legendary coach one more time...“Better your best”

Thank you.