



**Remarks**  
**42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Commencement Exercises**  
**Atlantic Cape Community College**

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**Association of Community College Trustees**

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**Mays Landing, New Jersey**

Congratulations graduates!

This is momentous day for you. Forever cherish and celebrate this moment. You have earned a significant and extremely valuable credential in today's world – a college degree.

I congratulate your families and friends. Their support and encouragement helped make this day possible.

I want to thank the Atlantic Cape Board of Trustees, and President Peter Mora for the honor of being your commencement speaker.

The term “commencement” means a “beginning.” And who knows, if I nail this speech, it may be the beginning of a whole new career.

But seriously, as I thought about what to say to you, I reflected on my own journey, and the lessons I've learned along the way that enabled me to achieve success.

To be sure, you have climbed high on the achievement ladder. So enjoy today's well-deserved praise and hard-won acclaim, but remember the next step on the ladder still awaits you.

Nineteenth Century Biologist Thomas Henry Huxley perhaps put it best, when he observed:

*The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man's foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.*

How many more rungs do you plan to climb?  
And what should you know before you ascend to the next rung?

Recently, I was asked to share those things I learned after college that equaled, if not exceeded, what I learned in college.

I would say “be prepared to learn everything you can, find your passion in life, know what makes you happy, and be entrepreneurial in your outlook.”

These are the things that have helped make my journey a little less arduous than it might otherwise have been.

## **Be Prepared!**

I commend you for your desire to seek the best preparation for success in our increasingly interdependent world. I suspect that's what led you to Atlantic Cape. You made a wise decision.

Preparation for learning is the key to whatever you do in this world. They say that the definition of “luck” is “when preparation meets opportunity.”

Be prepared through learning, so when a new opportunity grabs you from behind when you least expect it, you can grab it right back!

I remember Mr. Young, my 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Biology teacher telling us the first day of class, “If you fall asleep in my class, you wake up in a jar.”

At the time I didn't fully appreciate Mr. Young's rather strange sense of humor. But I learned that Mr. Young was warning us to pay attention in class and to be ready to learn – to embrace learning. Not just in his class, but all classes, and frankly, in all that we did in life regardless of where the journey takes us.

If you're not prepared to learn, not ready to seize opportunity when it comes to call, you could end up in a jar – isolated, unable to take advantage, and tragically, left behind in a world that rewards those who are not afraid to take a chance.

Be prepared to embrace new and sometimes unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations – do not let yourself be trapped by them.

But now it falls to you to continue to find new ways to stay prepared. Learn as much as you can wherever you can. *Carpe Diem* - seize the day. Make the most of life's opportunities.

## **Find Your Passion!**

*We may affirm absolutely, that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.*

Those are the words of German Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Hegel tells us that there can be no greater accomplishment in life than to do that for which you have great passion. Passion is a key ingredient for success and achievement.

There's an old cliché: “If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.”

Use your passion to illuminate the way, even if it means “taking the road less traveled by” as the American Poet Robert Frost reminds us.

In my experience, when you find an opportunity to marry your passion with the opportunity to serve, you come closer to realizing the “good life” sought by the Greek Philosophers of old.

Find opportunities to serve others and to harness your passion as a motivating and inspiring force in all that you do and all those you touch.

Focus on those things where you can have an impact greater than just for yourself or those immediately around you.

Be an agent for change.

Be an inspiration to those around you.

Serve a greater good and reach out to others.

### **Know What Makes You Happy!**

The cover story in the current *Atlantic Monthly* is entitled “What Makes Us Happy.”

It’s an inside look at an unprecedented study of Harvard men that found that one thing in particular contributes to happiness – family and friends. Not fame, nor fortune, nor good health, but family and friends - those relationships developed and nurtured throughout a lifetime.

Look around you. Surrounding you are family and friends that will give you purpose and focus to take on whatever life throws at you.

Keep family and friends close as you move on to life’s next set of challenges.

Never forget those that bring happiness and satisfaction to your life. The dividends they bring will help to sustain you through life's journey.

### **Be Entrepreneurs!**

Our nation faces many challenges, but none so great as growing competition from countries that are investing a greater percentage of their gross national product in education, and in particular, education that fosters innovation and fuels the entrepreneurial spirit.

Entrepreneurship is glue that has bound our nation's progress. Entrepreneurs and risk-takers led our nation from an agrarian confederation of states, to an industrialized superpower that redefined what was possible in the world.

With the world economy now “flattened,” broadband technologies powering laptop computers and PDAs, entrepreneurs today neither respect national boundaries nor are constrained by them.

In short, innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit are more free to rein today than at any other time in human history.

Be a champion for change and embrace the entrepreneurial spirit. This will help you succeed in reaching the next rung on the ladder.

As you reach greater heights, so too will our nation, and we will be ready to take on any and all challenges that await us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Support Community Colleges!**

But before I leave this podium and the real celebrations begin, I must ask a favor of you, and that is this - be a lifelong advocate for community colleges and especially your new *alma mater* Atlantic Cape.

The term *alma mater* derives from Latin, and literally means “fostering mother.”

What an appropriate metaphor for community colleges, because there is no more transformative and life-changing institution in American higher education today.

Community colleges are uniquely American institutions. They are by far the most innovative and responsive institutions to be found anywhere in higher education.

You who graduate today have experienced first-hand, community-college faculty second to none in our higher education system when it comes to providing student-centered learning and fostering student success regardless of personal circumstance. They have helped prepare you well.

Celebrate your experience here at Atlantic Cape. Consider coming back from time to time, whether to teach or take an opportunity to learn something new. Bring a friend or family member, and stay in touch with the faculty and administration.

Spread the word about the power of community colleges generally. Help others understand that community colleges put “wings on dreams.”

A community college put wings on Dr. J. Craig Venter’s dreams, the first individual to map the human genome.

Dr. Venter returned to the States after serving his country in Vietnam, but he couldn't get into university. So he went to San Mateo Community College in California instead. He wrote a book entitled *A Life Decoded: My Genome: My Life*.

Dreamers like Lt. Colonel Eileen Collins, the first female space shuttle commander, earned her wings through the community college.

In 1999, she commanded the space shuttle Columbia on the mission that included the deployment of the Chandra X-Ray Observatory. Collins attended Corning Community College in New York State.

And it was a community college that set Vice Admiral Richard Carmona's dreams in motion.

Of Puerto Rican descent, he grew up in Harlem, and had a decorated career in Vietnam. But it was Bronx Community College in New York

that gave Dr. Carmona his wings to go on and become the 17th Surgeon General of the United States.

Community colleges are a \$35 billion enterprise. They employ over half-a-million individuals, educate and train nearly 12 people annually, and return on average \$3 to state and local coffers for every \$1 invested by taxpayers.

Failing to support community colleges will mean fewer students like Dr. Venter, Lt. Colonel Collins, and Vice Admiral Carmona, and you who graduate today, will have an opportunity to gain a foothold in the new economy.

Let's not neglect the most important weapon we have – an educated and entrepreneurial citizenry.

Through your advocacy and efforts we can rekindle our economy and ease the uncertainty and anxiety wrought by the current financial crisis.

So be prepared to embrace opportunities to further your learning, so you're ready to seize opportunity when it comes to call.

Find your passion and make it work to sustain, inspire and lift you and those around you, even if circumstance seem daunting.

Remember your family and friends – they are your support pillars.

Be entrepreneurial and embrace change. Be a change agent.

What you take away from this special place and time, and how and where you apply what you have learned, will make all the difference in your life.

Again, congratulations for placing your faith in the community college and for honoring the Atlantic Cape administration and faculty through your accomplishments.

I wish you every success in the future.

Thank you.