

Janet Anderson  
Commencement Speech, Fall 2006

YOU did it! YOU are a graduate of Utah State University – and YOU, and YOU and YOU. Commencement is such a personal event. Only YOU know all of the sacrifices that went into getting here. I tend to be very sentimental about graduations. Some people think they are more personal than weddings. They are almost as much a step into the unknown as funerals -- though I assure you, there *is* life after graduation.

We, the faculty, are extremely proud of you. We know what this accomplishment means. We have pushed, prodded, encouraged, pulled, reinforced, and even threatened you at times. We do this year after year with a new group of students and we do it because we know this is a major life accomplishment – one that will forever change the outcome of your life. We also do this because we need your help. There are many problems in this world to solve that have your name written all over them. You are our hope.

Please remember that you have not done this alone. You have many people to thank. Take care of business. Not like this (slide #1 – a cell phone with a text message) but like this (slide #2 – a hand-written thank you). You are a professional now and more is expected from you.

You have come a long way since starting at Utah State four years ago. The transformations you have made are remarkable. When you started college as a freshman, you thought your classes were unbearably difficult, now when you look back, you realize they were easy compared to your upper division courses. You weren't afraid to email your professors to tell them why you missed class, but then commenced to ask them if "you had missed anything important." Now, you simply do not miss classes – AND you even seem to think what we teach really IS, in fact, important!

You started at USU with a full pantry, now you survive on Top Ramen noodles, mac and cheese and granola bars. I know – I teach nutrition! Back then, you were proud when you spent an hour studying for a freshman exam and thought you could ask for extra credit work if you didn't perform well on the exam. Now you spend twelve hours studying for exams and realize that you have to do your best work the first time around – extra credit is not an option. You came here owning only a hoodie, now you own a down coat. You used to have money to eat out, now you sell your plasma to pay for fees. Did I say you made a transformation or a transfusion?

You've seen many changes in your world during your time at Utah State. You have never been an adult without knowing war. You have never owned a land line phone – your cell phone is with you everywhere – including in MY class sometimes! You don't have to go to the library for information – you go for coffee, to socialize or to study. But you can access your information from your finger tips.

The changes in Logan have been remarkable over your tenure at USU. When you showed up here, there was no Café Rio, No Olive Garden, No Hamilton's, No Border's, No

Staples!

Tomorrow you are going to wake up feeling a tremendous sense of relief, but you might also experience some small sense of loss – loss of identity. Who are you? You have ALWAYS been a student at Utah State University (... some of you a LOT longer than others!). But who are you now?

You are beginning a new chapter of your life – one in which more will be expected of you.

Your degree will open doors and provide you more opportunities for job interviews. It will not, however, guarantee you a beginning salary equal to what your parents earn – sorry! You will still need to work hard to earn a chance for advancement. In the end, you will earn twice as much as someone with a high school diploma, but you still have to “prove yourself.”

Your employers will want your technical knowledge. But more important, they will want you to be honest and organized, and to have a strong work ethic, team skills and communication skills – and to be pleasant, even under stress.

As you enter the job world, be prepared for the “I feel like a great big fake” syndrome – that “do I really know what I’m doing here” feeling. Don’t worry. We all experience it. Regularly. And we still hate it. But it’s normal. Anne Lamott calls this “comparing your insides to other people’s outsides.” Confidence doesn’t just happen – it’s developed after many episodes of freaking out just a little bit but doing it anyway and feeling proud and relieved afterwards. The freaking out diminishes and the confidence expands.

As much as I hate to tell you this, you will need to “conform” on some levels. Yes, the ear buds are cool. Yes, you like your profanity-laced “get-BYU” T-shirt. Yes, that steel thing poking out of your eyebrow makes a statement. But, in that real world of work, you better be prepared to prove yourself to your organization before you get to individualize your attire. One former student of mine worked hard to set himself apart with wildly long hair and an unusual fashion sense. He was always entertaining to the faculty. I ran into him several years after he graduated and he had transformed – short, well-groomed hair, clean-shaven face, professional dress. When I asked him what had happened, he said “I got tired of trying to prove myself to every doctor who came in to the hospital.”

Remember that everyone is part of your team and that no one is beneath you. I’m reminded of a story of a college student who was given a pop quiz in his second month of school. The last question on the quiz was “what is the first name of the woman who cleans this building?” Surely this was some kind of a joke. He had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s, but how would he know her name? He handed in his paper, leaving the question blank. Just before class ended, another student asked if the last question would count toward the quiz grade. “Absolutely,” said the professor. “In your careers, you will meet many people. All are

significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say “hello.” The student never forgot this lesson. He also learned that her name was Dorothy.

You will learn more during your first year of employment than you can imagine. But the good news is -- some of that learning will be realizing how much you DO know.

What do you do if you end up in a job where you feel stuck or that you dislike? Learn from it. Stay for at least a year. Future employers will look for this indicator of commitment. Focus on learning as much as you can. Make your job what you want it to be, rather than assuming that the grass elsewhere is greener. Sometimes it’s just another shade of green. If you like your job 80% of the time, that might be as good as it gets out there.

You may not want to hear this today – but life WILL become increasingly more complex. Expect it. Because of this, you will need to establish realistic expectations for your career. It may seem like life is a race – but it isn’t. The game is yours. It’s your life and you should do what you want. You will still have due dates at work, and you will have performance evaluations, but in the big picture of life – you determine your grading criteria for “overall life GPA.”

Take care of yourself. This first year on the job is going to be fast and furious. You will have a lot to learn. It may feel like trying to take a drink from a fire hydrant. It is going to become increasingly difficult to find time to exercise and eat well, just ask your parents. Martin Seigelman, who writes about Authentic Happiness, researched what truly made people happy. It wasn’t money, or job, or stuff. It was experiencing frequent and regular periods of what he calls FLOW. Flow is the experience of being so engrossed in something that you aren’t thinking about anything else. You are just there, doing whatever your form of flow is -- playing an instrument, exercising or art. Make time for flow in your life. Think of flow as a required course, not an elective.

Don’t get carried away with the gadgets. Thomas Friedman reminds us that all these tools might make you seem smarter, but they sure won’t make you smart. They might extend your reach, but they will never tell you what to say to your neighbor over the fence, or how to comfort a friend in need, or how to write a story that sings or how to develop a breakthrough in science or literature. You cannot download passion, imagination, zest and creativity. You have to upload it, the old fashioned way, under the olive tree, with reading, writing, travel, study, reflection, museum visits and human interaction.

Be grateful. Oprah Winfrey recommends keeping a gratitude journal. Every night list five things that happened this day that you are grateful for. What it will begin to do is to change your perspective of your day and your life. If you can learn to focus on what you have, instead of what you don’t have, you will begin to see that your life is rich in both meaning and in “things.” You will find that you need less than you think. Be grateful for what you have and relish in the life that is yours. I believe that if you can learn to focus on what you have, you will always see that the universe is abundant with treasure. If you concentrate and focus in your life on what you don’t have, you will never have enough.

“Honor and respect dad and mom. Forgive them for mistakes they might have made while raising you. Remember that it was their first time raising you and experience is a great teacher.” Apply this rule to your parents – but maybe to co-workers and bosses, too. It helps us to remember that we are all “new” at some point.

Happiness is a journey, not a destination. Bringing joy, passion and optimism to your work is not what you get to do when you get to the top. It is HOW you get to the top. If I have had any success since I was sitting down there where you are 20 years ago, it's because I found ways to learn from, and enjoy, some part of each job. You can't bet your whole life on some destination. You've got to make the journey work too.

At this holiday time of giving, I would like to leave you with one last challenge. Give the gift of being present. Give this gift to yourself and others. In other words, “wherever you are, be there.” This was the sign-off statement that Dan Rather used for a while after he took over for Walter Cronkite on the CBS evening news. I think this is terrific advice. When you're home, BE HOME. When you're at work, BE AT WORK. When you are with a friend, BE THERE. (Slide #3 – 3 people walking; one with ear buds and one on the cell phone). These days it is too easy to be connected to everything, yet be connected to nothing or to no one. If you are present, you will be able to notice everyone who works with you. You will be able put your life in perspective. You will use your gadgets appropriately. You will notice things you should be grateful for. Give the gift of being present.

With that, President Albrecht, .....let us commence!

