



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Carnegie Mellon Graduation

Remarks of Ambassador Bleich at Carnegie Mellon Graduation, Adelaide

(As prepared for delivery – August 24, 2012)

Good morning and thank you for the kind introduction.

It is a real pleasure to join the great class of 2012 here at Carnegie Mellon. It is an institution that symbolizes Australia's and America's partnership in education. Congratulations to you all. Today you are graduating from one of the world's leading Universities – named for two of America's leading citizens, Andrew Carnegie and Andrew Mellon. I hope that you enjoy the same financial success, commitment to service, and generous spirit that they both had, so that one day I can come back to speak at a graduation ceremony at a school named after you.

In the U.S., traditionally commencement speakers take the opportunity to impart a lifetime of advice to the graduates. Often times, this consumes a good part of the graduates' own lifetime. Wisely, here, I understand that remarks are expected to be short. So I take my example from Sir Winston Churchill who gave one of the shortest graduation speeches ever delivered. This is his speech in its entirety:

“Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never -- in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

Then he sat down.

The slightly startled Headmaster asked Sir Winston if he'd like to elaborate on his remarks.

Churchill rose from his seat, returned to the podium, and said: “Never.”

Then he sat back down.

This is pretty much all the advice any graduate needs.

To the extent that there is a secret to life, it is that there is no one secret. For every person the things that will give you satisfaction will be different. Your challenge is to have the strength to pursue your goals despite the odds. Success will come if you resist



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discouragement and the urge to quit. Instead, I urge you to follow Churchill’s advice: “stumble from failure to failure with no loss in enthusiasm.” It is the surest path to success.

No one knows precisely all of the challenges your generation will confront. But we know some of them.

The first will be growth. The world’s population has nearly tripled since 1950 – from 2.5 billion to over 7 billion today. And we will add nearly 2 billion more by the time you all have reached my age. More importantly, though, in this same timeframe, people will be living longer and better. Growing middle classes around the world will demand more of what all demand today – larger homes, cars, fancy electronics, and hamburgers.

All of this greater prosperity will mean much greater demand for food, water, and energy. Today, we do not have nearly enough of these resources to meet that demand. The only answer will be in new technology and behavior: finding new ways to produce food, to increase harvests, to eliminate waste, to power agriculture, and to hydrate fields. Already, scientists at CSIRO, are developing hardier wheat and rice crops to feed the future, studying the Murray-Darling basin to ensure water flows through its rivers for centuries to come, and seeking new sources of clean energy to stem climate change and extend energy security to people around the world. But we are far off from meeting this challenge. It will be up to you. With your degrees bridging the worlds of science and technology, graduates of Carnegie Mellon are uniquely placed to help devise and deploy the technologies needed to ensure that the next generation is the largest and most prosperous in human history.

Innovation was the key to Mr. Carnegie’s and Mr. Mellon’s success. And it is practically Carnegie Mellon’s motto today. If you haven’t heard that word enough, just wait – the university is in the midst of its “Inspire Innovation” capital campaign – and as proud graduates, you’ll soon be receiving inspiring letters offering you the privilege of donating to that campaign.

That commitment to innovation binds us together. In the U.S. today, innovation is at that core of our economic recovery and the core of our national security strategy. We depend on this generation to dream of things that have never been, and to ask: “why not?” As President Obama said, we do not know what those innovations will be. But our future depends on advances that are just as “unforeseen to us today as the surface of the moon and the microchip were a century ago.”

This year, the United States and Australia helped land the Mars Space Lab, Curiosity, on the Mars surface. Tracking stations here in Australia recorded its progress and supplied its software. Scientists and technologists on both sides of the Pacific are



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studying its discoveries as it rolls across Mars, performing experiments and recording every detail. Your fellow Carnegie Mellon alumnus, Eric Blood, who graduated just two years ago, is in fact one of the elite scientists and engineers on NASA's Mars rover team. His example shows just how much and how quickly you all can make revolutionary contributions with your degrees and your hard work. Each of you can be part of this.

You all have it in your power, whether it is to come up with a good idea, or to help fund it, or to build a business around it. But entrepreneurship can be hard. Most entrepreneurs fail – some many times over. But Thomas Edison said it well, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." Success takes only the ability to learn from your mistakes, and some good old Churchillian resolve. So my hope for you, graduates of the Class of 2012, is that you fail. That you fail, and fail and fail, until you succeed.

So, because I am an American, let me conclude with just a few personal words of advice for how to make the great and hard journey to success more pleasant, and to help keep your enthusiasm high.

First, appreciate all people. Be courteous to strangers and grateful to everyone you meet. When you stay at a hotel, leave a tip for the person who cleans your room. The finest things you will ever do are the kind deeds you do quietly without expectation of reward. Your most gratifying moments will be those in which someone does the same for you.

Second, don't stop reading good books. People always say college and graduate school teach you how to think. But you had thoughts before you came to school. What education really teaches you is how to exercise some control over how and what you think. So choose wisely. My fellow Amherst alum, David Foster Wallace, said it best in his Kenyon College commencement. He said: "Be conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed."

Finally, one very practical piece of advice for those of you leaving with a diploma in one hand and substantial debt on the other: pay it off. Pay it off as quickly as you can. Do not pay off your Visa card with your Mastercard.

And wear sunscreen.

So congratulations again graduates, may you go on to great things, and appreciate all of the mistakes along the way. "And may you never, never, give in." Never.