

Good morning everyone.
Congratulations graduates on a job well done.
Let's hear it for the class of 2024!

President Vaughn, Board of Trustees, faculty, and graduates it is a privilege to be part of this important event.

First, I would like to share my gratitude to Dr. Vaughn for his transformative work here. The University has evolved into a nationally recognized beacon of excellence under your leadership. You not only created the vision - you brought it to life. I know we count ourselves lucky to have been part of this incredible growth. Thank you.

Graduates, today is your day. You've worked hard and persevered. But before you leave here today and embark on your next adventure, I want you to take a moment and look around, your professors, the staff, your family, and friends, are the people that believe in and support you.

Hold onto them. They're your cheerleaders, consultants and, yes, sometimes even your critics. They mean well. Keep them close as you move through life and your career.

Some of you may be concerned about tomorrow. You could be asking, "what do I do next?" I don't see any job openings for "professional student". When I was accepting my diploma on the steps of Plant Hall, I thought to myself, I have zero job prospects, can I just go back into the school? But the world outside, and your parents, demand that you move forward and make some decisions.

You may have several careers before you find the one that is right for you. But, you are now graduates and need to get out in the world and start.

My business journey began in Honduras, at the ripe old age of 11. My Father helped build the first ice cream factory in Central America. I saw firsthand how a food plant was built and operated. I also learned how to drive an ice cream truck, and let me tell you, nothing quite prepares you for the chaos of being a new entrepreneur like trying to drive when you can barely reach the pedals.

We lived in an area where people struggled to survive. I remember being mad at my Mother as she gathered up all the clothes in my room and gave them to a family at our front door, telling me, "You can get more clothes. They can't."

It was an early lesson I learned - that it is essential to be aware and respectful of each individual's journey in life.

I was a business student right here at the University of Tampa when I met my wife and business partner, Kate Jones.

Kate and I created our worldwide gummy vitamin business through persistent hard work out of an idea that didn't exist before. Two students who met at a University in Tampa many years ago.

I can't tell you how many offices I got laughed out of, when we first tried selling the idea of a gummy vitamin. People just did not believe that you could put vitamins in a gummy bear. Everyone here grew up with gummy vitamins, but back then they didn't exist, so there was a lot of resistance to the idea of replacing tablets with gummies. Yet we had no doubt it would succeed.

Today, this multi-billion-dollar global industry has created opportunities and careers for people around the world, thanks in part to 2 people who simply asked themselves, "Can we make this taste better, and be better for you?".

Our idea did succeed, but not without some bumps along the way.

After our first large shipment of gummy vitamins left the building, our young company had a party. But our entrepreneurial high was short lived after we got a call from our first big customer in Florida on a hot August day. They were screaming through the phone that we had shipped them melted product.

What had happened that turned our "A-ha" moment into an "oh crap" moment? We asked the customer if they had left the product on their shipping dock in the hot sun. "Yes, we did, the customer said, vitamins don't melt." Well, gummy bears do. We reshipped the entire order at our expense. But we put very large signs that said, "Do not leave in hot sun, product will melt."

Don't focus only on your successes. Your failures are also gold.

I believe success is sometimes born out of failure. You might be surprised to learn that we can't solve every issue and problem in our lives with artificial intelligence. Sometimes we learn using our own natural stupidity.

How many of you have heard these expressions: life is not a sprint, success rarely happens overnight, and patience is a virtue?

I am here to tell you today to forget all that. We live in a fast-paced world where success sometimes happens at lightning speed and very few successful people I know are patient.

Maybe you have an idea right now that has the power to reshape an industry and change people's lives. You may be thinking, "I'm no expert, what do I know?" I'm telling you don't underestimate the impact each of you will have, even if your idea is new and a little misunderstood.

The big ideas are exciting, but remember, it's the small things—the meticulous planning and the careful execution that can set you apart from the rest. It's what transforms ordinary into extraordinary. Remember, a goal without a plan is just a dream. You need to plan and execute big and not just dream big.

Each one of you will go on to influence the world in your own way and be a part of all types of ventures. Whether making critical decisions at the speed of light or impacting lives through your actions, your influence on the people in your universe will be significant. Life and business are not zero-sum games; it's about making people's lives better by lifting them up through your decisions and actions.

One day soon, you'll be responsible for other people's well-being. They may be family, co-workers, friends, or employees. Your decisions will not always be measured financially, but also by how you make their lives better.

You'll need to get out of your comfort zone, and sometimes get out of your own way, putting your own life aside for a moment and act when you can support another person. Even small kind actions can make all the difference.

Now, I have three final pieces of advice:

#1 Always align yourself with kind and ambitious people and make sure they share your values and vision.

#2 Take calculated risks. Life itself is risky, but not all risks are created equal. Make informed decisions. But don't be afraid to take a leap of faith every now and then, like putting vitamins in a gummy bear.

#3 Harness your youth and passion because now is your time. Have those big ideas. You'll get there, even if your feet don't reach the pedals.

Bottom line: This is your journey. Embrace it. Make a positive impact on the world.

As our own President Vaughn says, "You're either getting better or you're getting worse. There is no in-between. You can't stand still."

It has been an honor.

Thank you and Congratulations Class of '24!