GRADUATION WELCOME SPEECH

FOR

DON CHALMERS

Hello everyone and welcome to the 2012 Commencement ceremony of the University of New Mexico. It’s a thrill to see so many people here today, and whether you are one of this year’s graduates, family, friend of UNM or a distinguished guest, today is about completion and celebration. I want to extend special congratulations to all of the parents of our graduates as well. Erma Bombeck, the late American humorist, put it all in perspective when she advised; “Graduation day is tough for adults. They go to the ceremony as parents. They come home as contemporaries. After twenty-two years of child-raising, they are unemployed.” (**Wait for the laugh**). Parents, you’ve done a great job with these students, and as I am sure you have observed, you learned from them as they learned! Thank you for raising the future of our community and country!

 It is a privilege to serve on the Board of Regents for such a distinguished institution and it’s a pleasure to witness all of our graduates reach this critical milestone in their lives. Today also commemorates another graduation of sorts, as we acknowledge the retirement of our school’s President, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,. (**If you want, add a few sentences about the retiring president here**). Today is the perfect opportunity to reflect on the question, “Is there life after the University of New Mexico?” Actually, the good news is, life **BEGINS** after the University of New Mexico!

Senator Orrin Hatch, once found in a similar place-speaking before a commencement ceremony as I am today, said, “There is a good reason they call these ceremonies "commencement exercises." Graduation is not the end; it's the beginning.” College graduation signifies the official end of the building of your foundation. You have learned the basics and many of you have delved a little deeper and have identified where and how you will continue from here. Whether you go on to attain advanced degrees or join the professional world, you have earned the tools needed to initiate your life’s journey. The road that you choose will be defined by every step you take, so be conscious of your surroundings as well as your actions. Set goals and use your education and common sense to find the way to accomplish what you’ve set out to do, and keep in mind the advice of Henry Ford, who said, “Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off **your goal**.” Actually, it is the obstacles and challenges in life that will continue to teach you-but first you must always be alert and aware and remember there is no one out there but **YOU**.

You are now standing on the precipice of life. This can be both exhilarating and terrifying at the same time, but whether we realize it or not, we face the unknown every minute of each day. Nothing in life is guaranteed, but it is our responsibility as adults to be as prepared for life as we possibly can be; to consider every obstacle as an opportunity and to approach all with integrity, enthusiasm, self confidence and respect. I know someone whose mantra is, “I don’t know what I don’t know,” and it’s true. We have no idea what we don’t know. But on the other hand, I invite all of you to do what you can to avoid, or at least learn from, a condition known as the “arrogance of youth.” Keep an open mind and remember that there is only one mandate each one of us has in life, and that is to **LEARN** and to share that knowledge in return.

 Although your formal education officially ends with this celebration and tests have been taken and scores have been determined, you will be tested every day of your lives, and the true outcome will be revealed as your impact on the world around you is measured. Of course we all want to “do well,” but it is essential to the maintenance of the soul to “**do good**.” Life is not just what you want to get out of it, but what you put into it, and as you go through the different stages of your lives, you will find some more challenging than others. As you sustain yourselves through life’s tricks and tests, think of what you can do and who you can serve, because there is **always** someone who needs a helping hand-even more than you might. Life is not only about taking. It’s about giving too. Although we live in fascinating times and in an era when technology has made many aspects of our lives much more convenient, new challenges appear every day. Whether we face economic uncertainty or the ravages of natural phenomena, we are not alone on this planet and part of being an adult is learning to share.

Remember to be aware of, and cherish every moment of your life. Today is a great day and a milestone in your lives, but remember that milestones don’t come along that often. Your success will show in the way you treat your every day life. The measure of your accomplishments will be evident in the way you solve your problems, in how you express your eagerness to learn from those who know more than you, and in your demonstration of resilience and consideration for others. When you can stop and take a breath and acknowledge your accomplishments and move on to the next ones, then you will know you are living a worthwhile life. Susan B. Anthony, a woman who respected and fought for the rights of others said, “Sooner or later we all discover that the important moments in life are not the advertised ones, not the birthdays, the graduations, the weddings, not the great goals achieved. The real milestones are less prepossessing. They come to the door of memory unannounced, stray dogs that amble in, sniff around a bit and simply never leave. Our lives are measured by these.”

Once again, graduates, we congratulate you on your achievements and we want you to know that the world awaits you. It may not always have open arms, but I promise you that as you learn more and more of life’s lessons after you leave UNM, you will begin to know what true knowledge and wisdom is. We all look forward to hearing great … and **good** things about each one of you, and may all of you spend rich lifetimes setting goals, attaining them, and making a positive and enduring impact on your respective communities and the world around you.

Congratulations and thank you all!