GRADUATION SPEECH

FOR KEITH STEFFEN

Hello everyone and thank you for asking me to attend the graduation ceremony for the class of 2013 here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (**If there is anyone in particular you would like to acknowledge, please do so here**). I want to extend special thanks to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and of course \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for his/her \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak with all of you, and whether you are one of today’s graduates, or a friend, family member, faculty, administration or a distinguished guest, experiencing an event like this is vital for each one of us as we take a moment to reflect on life as we know it, the history that has brought us to this place and time, and the outlook for the future. It reminds me of an anecdote the writer Aaron Sorkin told at commencement exercises at Syracuse University. He said, “Two newborn babies are lying side by side in the hospital and they glance at each other.  Ninety years later, through a remarkable coincidence, the two are back in the same hospital lying side by side in the same hospital room.  They look at each other and one of them says, "So what'd you think?"  (**Wait for the laugh**). It makes me wonder, what will I see when I look over my shoulder in the future? What have I seen since I graduated from college? What have I learned and what advice would I give to new graduates? Well hang on; we’re about to find out!! (**Say this with enthusiasm and wait for the laugh**).

Graduation is a special time in anyone’s life and it marks a milestone that will be referenced throughout your existence here on earth. As all of you graduates literally stand on the threshold between “then,” “now,” and “tomorrow,” I’d like to share some thoughts with you. Remember this. Today you are special. The world is your oyster. Everyone is here specifically to celebrate your unique achievement. Congratulations!!! Enjoy every moment **TODAY** because **TOMORROW**, the work begins. It would be great to think that life after graduation is an “endless summer” of carefree fun and games, but tomorrow you step right onto the road of adulthood, accountability, independence, and commitment. And that’s the GOOD NEWS! We’ve been waiting for you!!! Up to this point, you have invested years in learning how to learn. You’ve absorbed the basics and statistically most of you are quite adept at applying what you’ve learned-so far. And now the time has come for you to use what you’ve learned as a foundation to **learn more**… or has no one told you the learning **NEVER** stops? Of course not! It’s why we’re here on earth. We learn and we teach and the cycle repeats itself from generation to generation, and if we’re lucky, like the two old men in Aaron Sorkin’s little story, we’ll have a chance to see what we thought…many years from now.

I ask myself, what do I wish I knew then that would have guided me now? I think I would have wanted to **listen** more. When we are young, we think we know everything. Some people refer to this as “the arrogance of youth,” and for those of you who have this characteristic, you probably aren’t listening to me anyway, so congratulations! If you can hear and really **listen** to what I am saying, you’re halfway there. Listen to your superiors and elders. Listen and then do your research, and if you disagree with what someone says, then present a valid counterpoint to support your beliefs. I would have wanted to really know how to get results. Over the years I’ve learned a very simple lesson, and that is, “if you have a problem, take it to the person who can do something about it.” It is useless to just complain to the wrong person. On the other hand, I would say that one of the most valuable characteristics of a successful businessperson is that he or she doesn’t present a problem in the workplace. He or she offers a **solution**. I think I would have wanted to realize that **life is not fair**. Some people I know have removed the word “**fair**” from their vocabulary. Life may not be fair, but as adults, we have options to protect and defend ourselves with intelligence, compassion, integrity and self-respect. I wish that back then I knew the value of a **budget**, and by that I mean budgets of time, of money, and of resources. People speak of “misspent youth” and literally, that can happen. Think about honoring the resources, gifts and blessings you’ve been given and learn how to really appreciate them so that ultimately, you can be as self-sufficient as possible. I think that if I had pushed myself when I was younger, I could have achieved even more. Remember the expression that a person’s reach should exceed his grasp-remember to always stretch further than you’ve done before. Don’t get me wrong- I am proud of my accomplishments in life, but somewhere inside me, I realize how essential it is to continuously challenge myself to be more aware, more appreciative, more compassionate. And remember this-the more you are able to achieve, save, and budget when you are younger, the more your resources will grow **geometrically**. The great ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov once said, “I do not try to dance better than anyone else. I only try to dance better than myself.”

As you probably know, I have worked in hospital administration for almost my entire career, and I have been associated with OSF St. Francis for my entire life…**REALLY**. Actually, I was born there!!! As I look back on my career and the events I have experienced, I see that being immersed in the health care system reminds me that the medical environment really is a microcosm for life itself. The trials and challenges we face every day at OSF St. Francis illustrate the same principles and opportunities experienced in living a full and engaged life, and they provide a window to assist all of us. In particular, observing what life is like in the medical community can be a tremendous support in guiding you in anticipating what life might be like as you go forward now that you’ve graduated. In many ways, the work world is a lot like being in school, except that from now on, you take what you’ve learned to strengthen your sense of responsibility, community, concern, and plans for the future. As we are constantly challenged to learn more, be more efficient, and be more proactive with regard to maintaining health, so must you as graduates maintain your “educational health.” Stay aware, updated and informed. You have to constantly install updates on your computers and mobile devices-your brains and your souls also need updating regularly.

Now, especially, knowledge and wisdom are essential if you are going to navigate the waters of adulthood, career life, and community accountability. Believe me, I know!! As we all anticipate the new laws that are gradually being instituted with regard to health care reform, I can tell you that all of us will have to be alert and ready as we tap into those skills learned during our education careers. The new laws will be daunting for most, but once again, as a whole they illustrate a vital life lesson, which is, “the more things change, the more they change, and it is our mandate to be prepared.” There is a popular commercial that I’ve seen on television. It is for an insurance company and it tells us that insurance is for the “what if’s in life.” There’s no sure fire way that we can be totally prepared, but we can train ourselves to adapt to the times and the curveballs that life presents to us, and if there’s one thing we’ve all seen is that life is throwing more and more curveballs all the time, and the velocity is rapidly increasing! From natural disasters of increasingly greater magnitude to global economic crises, it’s clear that not only is the world getting “smaller,” we are more exposed to, and affected by, developments and crises no matter where they may have occurred around the globe. At the same time, our ability to be connected and to participate and have our voices heard is far greater than it has ever been before, but let me ask you a question. Has our ability to access news and information made our lives easier???? Maybe yes and maybe no. We are all feeling the affects of sensory overload. We are bombarded with information constantly and I am sure that our brains and reflexes are in the process of adapting to this age of heightened and ever-evolving technology. As we adapt, I believe we’ll find that our behavior will morph with technology as well. I think as we do experience all of this sensory overload, the ability to concentrate and focus is being challenged. We live in a world of multitasking. Of course, the good news is, most of us are becoming fairly good typists!! We’re also learning a new language whether we realize it or not. It’s called “How to interpret mistakes in predictive typing 101!!” (**Wait for the laugh**). I also heard of someone who wears a medic alert bracelet. Talk about a sign of the times… One side lists his life-threatening ailment and the other side is engraved with the simple request, “Please delete my browser history.” (**Wait for the laugh**).

As graduates, you have the opportunity, the facility and the wherewithal to use the tools of our new age to achieve even greater heights of accomplishment. As I said in the beginning of my talk with you, “we’ve been waiting for you!” It’s time for you to apply yourselves and to bring your unique talents, intelligence, integrity and determination to the world. You are the reason that all of us that have plowed the path before you have worked so hard. It is your turn to become the custodians of our communities so that the next generation may stand a little taller and see a little further because you have developed strong shoulders and an even stronger vision for the world. As you know, I have been affiliated with OSF St Francis since my birth, and whether it was from my vantage point in the neo natal unit-not that I was aware of what was going on back then! or as its President, I have been present to witness challenges, milestones, and most importantly a **progressive** evolution. When I think of its humble beginnings –founded by five pioneer women in 1877 with it’s first building being a two story frame house, to what we have today, I am astonished to think of its evolution. (**Name some achievements and milestones the hospital has accomplished**) Today OSF St Francis does an incredible job as a vital support system to a large part of its community. With a staff of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ doctors, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_health professionals, and the capacity to serve \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ inpatients, we have learned to literally, “adapt or die,” and thankfully, we choose the former. Technology and the information super highway let us know the state of the art equipment that we need to invest in so that we remain relevant and essential to the growing demands in the world of health care, and the more we rely on research, current up to the minute information and patient demand, the better we can serve all in our community.

Once again, I want to congratulate all of today’s graduates and their families and friends. I want to acknowledge the faculty and administrators for a job well done, and I want to express my hope that we all experience success, good health, happiness and prosperity as we all find our way in this very exciting world and era we live in. Thank you all!