COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

FOR

LORI WELLMAN

Hello everyone! Welcome to the 2013 Commencement exercises for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ University Leadership Academy (**insert correct name as necessary**). I want to extend warm and enthusiastic greetings to all of you-family, friends, distinguished guests, faculty, administration, and of course I want to express a very special welcome to all of our graduates. Every guest that is here today has cheered at least one of you graduates onward to success and completion of this course and I have to say, I am confident that I speak for all of us when I tell you that we are incredibly proud of each one of you and we’re inspired by your enthusiasm, commitment to the quality of your lives, and your optimism for the future. As the Director of Alumni Relations here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I have had the gift of working with you and your colleagues and those that have walked the same path before you. I have had the privilege of being in your shoes as a student, graduate and young professional, and each vantage point has provided me with new and interesting insights about the power of knowledge, the impact of experiences forged during the college years, and inherent benefits of receiving a quality education that encourages us to keep questioning, learning, and conquering thoughts, puzzles, and situations. We all know that today is a celebration of completion. In a little while, you will be shown that symbolic door and you will each walk through it, hopefully not for the last time, but for the last time as college students. When you return, you will be students of life and you will have a different perspective; one that is even more valuable as it will be built on the experiences that formed your tenure here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Remember to be in the moment as you walk through, remember to notice what it feels like as you shed your student “skin,” and emerge on the other side ready to “conquer the world.” Today is a once in a lifetime experience. Cherish it. Of course there will be many special moments throughout your lives, and today, the ultimate lesson I intend to share with you is, as Anna Quindlen taught us, “Remember to enjoy the view.”

Anna Quindlen wrote a simple book called, **A Short Guide to a Happy Life**. It was actually inspired by a graduation speech she gave, and her wisdom has the power to resonate within all of us. Hopefully some of you-or many of you have read her work. You are moving on to bright new challenges throughout every aspect of your lives-you’ll begin your professional careers in earnest, your living situations may change, your opportunity to broaden your horizons will be expanded beyond current comprehension. Throughout your college careers you learned to extend your grasp of knowledge, extra-curricular involvement, relationships, and community participation, all with the common goal of learning what it truly means to be a leader. As you progressively absorb the lessons that are essential to build the foundation for success, the ability to focus becomes more and more intense and paradoxically even more elusive, but what we learn from Quindlen is to find the simplicity of **balance** in life. We need to experience the dull to appreciate the gleam of brilliance. Remember her words, “Life is made up of moments, small pieces of glittering mica in a long stretch of grey cement. It would be wonderful if they came to us unsummoned…. but that won’t happen. We have to teach ourselves to make room for them, to love them and to live, really live.”

As you step into your new rolls and responsibilities out there in **THAT** world, also remember the words of the author Edith Wharton who said, “There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” When you think about it, that’s all there is to life. We cannot exist unless we are reflected in the eyes and hearts and minds of the people with whom we interact. Think of all the “light” that was shed from the projects and lessons and processes in which you participated. Think of how you took that knowledge and passed it on and in effect, became the mirror upon which it was reflected. We’ve all grown up with the image, albeit possibly comical, of a gleaming light bulb over someone’s head to signify the dawning of an idea. Think of all of the lessons you learn-every day- as bits of light to lead your way in the world. Your path has been illuminated. Keep the light shining with new and exciting ideas and projects and enjoy the panorama that your light brings to life with every step you take. In turn, remember to be there to receive that light from others, and by being there, I mean **be present**. Pay attention. Enjoy the view. **Enjoy the ride**. Bask in the light of others who love you. Remember to experience and enjoy time for yourselves. Remember to embrace failure-some of the most valuable experiences are inspired by failing!!! Remember that even if you fail, you have still produced a result and as a leader, remember to take responsibility and find a way to correct the situation. When we are young, our inclination is to take the fast lane to achievement. Champion racehorses have blinders; their focus is singular. But we are not racehorses. We, and especially **YOU**, are young, exciting, smart and inquisitive citizens of this world, about to embark-literally-on the adventure of a lifetime. It is up to **YOU** to make it count-to find those moments and live them fully…even the not so pleasant times.

Anna Quindlen also teaches us, “A ‘finished’ person is a boring person,” and the comedienne Lily Tomlin once said, “The road to success is always under construction.” Let us all hope and intend that you all realize that the fun is just beginning!! Like a masterwork of art, a brilliant painting is never “finished.” Forget “perfection!” Go for excellence. Concentrate on amassing layers of experience and knowledge, and in turn, you will become your own masterpiece!! For many of you, your college careers have been completed, but are you finished? No, I don’t think so!! Never lose your thirst for knowledge. Every day and every situation presents the opportunity to learn…to spark the light…to ignite the soul… to teach others and share that light.

Harriet Tubman was an inspiration, a leader, and truly a force to be reckoned with. One hundred years after her death, her brilliance still resonates. As an escaped slave and ultimately an abolitionist, her life’s path brought chaos, struggle and triumph. She said, “Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” Listen to those words. We of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ believe in the dreams of each one of you. We have watched you learn and grow and spread your unique and special light. Think of each one of your dreams as a wick, like on a candle, and it is up to each one of you to find the way to light that wick and burn your flame and take your lessons and become the leaders you are destined to be. You’ve learned your lessons-or at least the foundation part of your life’s lessons. Now it’s time to take those lessons, apply them, find your mentors and beg for more lessons!!! The more you learn, the more you’ll grow, and the more prepared you will be for the real challenges of life! Helen Keller said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.” As we pass the torch of completion to all of you graduates, here’s to the daring adventures, the astounding lessons, the quest for excellence and leadership, the brilliance of your light and the incredible impact each one of you will achieve in the future! Congratulations to all of you!! Thank you!