GRADUATION SPEECH

FOR

 CARLOS MEDINA

Hello everyone!!! I want to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to speak with all of you today and I want to acknowledge and congratulate all of this year’s graduating class of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Community College!! At every level and time in life we are each faced with our own unique challenges. How we turn those challenges into opportunities is a reflection on our strength of character, purpose and determination, and all of your friends, family members, teachers and classmates really appreciate the work you’ve done to achieve this milestone in your lives. As I prepared and thought about what I wanted to speak to you about today, the one word that kept coming to mind was “relationship.” The quality of our lives is based on the relationships we have, and whether we discuss our connections to people or our involvement with the work we do in life, the degree of our self worth and feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction in life has everything to do with our relationships-how we find the ones that work, how we relate to the work we do, and how we tie it all together to see how all of the we have link to each other to form our own individual lives.

I am here today so that I can relate and share my experiences and observations to you. As a business owner and Volunteer Chairman of the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, I have the privilege to work with and relate to many people in all walks of life. That gives me the opportunity to challenge myself in my capacity as a professional business owner, attorney, and leader of one of the largest Chambers of Commerce in the country. I am proud to say that as an organization, the relationships formed and encouraged through the organization have made an incredible and positive impact on the state of New Jersey. We are the voice of **70,000** Hispanic owned businesses and together we contribute **over ten billion dollars** annually to New Jersey’s economy. If **that** doesn’t demonstrate the power of relationship, I don’t know what does! (**Wait for the laugh**). I want you to know that I really appreciate all of the responsibilities and challenges that form my professional life. I love juggling both of my jobs and I really love supporting others as they find their way to their own accomplishment-including all of you.

I stand before you as an experienced professional but I want all of you to know that really, deep down inside, I am just like each one of you. I came from humble beginnings. I am the son of immigrants. I grew up shy and introverted and have **NO IDEA** how I found the courage to speak before large groups of people…. but I did and here I am, and there you are, and the time has come for **you** to acknowledge the challenges in your lives, find the opportunities, and make sure you know how to treasure and respect the relationships you form in life.

I am the son of a Cuban father and Puerto Rican mother. My parents met in New York City over 60 years ago. My father had to flee the political unrest in his native country and arrived in the “Big Apple” with ten dollars in his pocket. He soon met my mother and with barely enough money to sustain himself, we can only assume he had lots of wit and charm because my mother saw tremendous potential. Unfortunately her father was not as star struck and warned his daughter, “ Stay away from that Cuban!! He’s only looking for his citizenship papers!!” Apparently there was more to that relationship than met my grandfather’s eye, because they have been happily married for sixty-one years!! And here I am, clearly a product of relationship, dedication, and resilience!!

I am blessed to have inherited the spirit and determination of my parents, but life was not always so simple. As I said, I grew up shy and reserved and nervous to speak in public. I remember that on the first day of some semesters in both college and law school, I would somehow not show up…. okay-I confess… I made it a practice of cutting class the first day of school in order to avoid making introductions around the room!! (**Wait for the laugh**). And here I am!! Speaking with all of you!!! Six hundred graduates **PLUS** faculty and administration, **PLUS** family and friends and distinguished guests!! I better stop counting before I get a panic attack!! (**Wait for the laugh**). But in all seriousness, I do get nervous, but I have learned to alter my relationship to that nervousness and I have used that energy and adrenalin to focus and make it have a positive impact.

I have also noticed throughout life that it’s the genuine and nurturing relationships that I have with people that have provided the most blessings and appreciation for life. When my father and my mother met, they trusted their relationship and although my grandfather may have been short sighted at first, thinking that my father only wanted something immediately from my mother, their bond has lasted for over three generations. When I became the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, there was a heavy burden to deal with and many challenges were sent my way as the previous chairman had been ill and ultimately passed away. It was the relationships and connections I had with my friends from grammar school and high school that came through for me. I knew that those people had my back, understood what I was facing, and it was those childhood comrades that ultimately became successful lawyers and accountants who helped me to reorganize the Chamber so that all of the membership would feel the consistent support needed to keep their businesses flourishing. I invite each one of you to look to your left and to your right… right now…. these are the people you may call in twenty or thirty or forty years for advice and moral support. Make sure you honor and respect those relationships!

I make it a practice of always trying to exceed my limits, and (**If you want to make a joke you can say)** even though I’m pretty grateful that as a kid I missed the **“YouTube**” generation… oh the **HORROR** of all of that **public exposure**!! (**Wait for the laugh**), as I said, I do face my limitations and try to move past them. In that vein, I have given some interviews lately and one reporter asked me what advice I would give to a younger Carlos. My reply was and remains, “DO want you Love and DO NOT take a job or career path just for money. If you do what you truly love money and success and more importantly happiness will find you.” Find the relationship to your professional life that satisfies you and you will be a success. I would also advise the younger Carlos to maintain integrity and quality in relationships and in all phases of work and professional partnerships. Quality may be more expensive in the beginning, but in the end that expense turns into **value** and you will ultimately save time and money. By the way, that also means that YOU have to be the best at whatever you do. Pay attention. Acknowledge any errors you might make. Be responsible for your work and respect your skills and the skills and time of others. Remember in everything we do, it’s al about relationships, partnership and respect.

Also remember that there is support for you in whatever you choose to do, and when possible, use your local chamber of commerce to support you in finding information and direction you might need. I want to congratulate all of you - (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) you’ve been a great audience. I want to thank you all for supporting me in working on my public speaking and I look forward to hearing great things about you!! Good luck!