**14379, Jarrod Phillips**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I was asked to give a commencement speech for this graduation I was surprised but excited because fifteen years ago I graduated from this college. It’s good to come back, to see what has remained the same and how much has changed. This was always a beautiful place to be when going to school. The Hill still has the most astounding view of both the town and river. Don’t you agree?

I remember how many dreams and plans I had back then and it’s good to see where I came from and where I am today. It’s been quite a journey from being a college student back then to being the mayor and a restaurant owner now. I’m sure that I have surprised more than one of my professors with the direction my life and career has taken.

If I can say anything to our graduates today it’s that just because you have graduated from college doesn’t mean that your learning is done. Life is all about learning. You need to be open to new life lessons and new experiences every day so you don’t miss any new lessons about life. There is so much life to live. Even the challenging situations of life will teach you lessons that are invaluable to you.

As you begin the next phase of your life always remember to be willing to step out of your comfort zone so that you can accomplish your goals in life. The best goals in life will require you to step out of your comfort zone, you know, sort of like me giving a commencement speech. Public speaking isn’t my favorite thing to do. But, it’s important for me to pass along lessons that I have learned and to set an example to those who come after me.

Now that you are finished with school and stepping out into society, you will want to give something back to society as you go on with your lives. One of the ways you can give back is by volunteering. There are so many ways and places that you can give back. Maybe you have a cause that you can champion. Maybe you want to work with young people who are on the fence about whether they want to give back to society or take away from society, possibly to overcome a guilty conscience for your own misspent youth before some mentor turned you around?

Always remember your experiences here at Culver Stockton College. You will learn many lessons, both in your education and in your life. Education is a valuable experience in life, yes an experience, not just a task you must do to get somewhere in life. The education you receive here will not only affect your future career but it will direct your career in many ways, not the least of which will be the major you chose. Always remember the lessons you learned about how to get along with your professors as well as fellow students. But, the relationships you build and the experiences you have with those people will become a part of who you are. Some of the friends you gained here will be your friends for life… for better or for worse.

Technology has become a huge part of our lives today, from our cell phones to our IPADs to our laptops and every new piece of technology that comes on the market. They are very useful tools but they can be addicting. After our parents worried so much about us becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs who would have thought we’d have become addicted to a piece of equipment. I would strongly advise you to occasionally disconnect from any and all technology. Don’t allow technology to overwhelm and control your lives. Go outside, smell the roses if you will, look at a natural sky and enjoy a beautiful sun in the day and all the stars at night. Technology can’t recreate that.

Along those same lines, I encourage you to disconnect from social media. We are all so busy on Twitter, Facebook and multiple other forms of social media that sometimes we forget how to have a face to face conversation with another living, breathing human being. Why not have that face to face conversation with that other human being sharing a look at sun, moon or starts? Enjoy the natural beauty of the sky, along with a real, live conversation. Do we still know how to do that in today’s world. How long would it be before you were itching to check your email or text messages?

Another reason to disconnect from social media is to get to know people and become familiar with the real facts about social issues. Talk to your neighbors, read the newspaper, find out what’s really happening in your town or neighborhood so you know the real facts, not just what you are being fed by the media at all levels. Knowing what’s going on in your community, your state and in the world is important if you’re going to succeed in life. I mean look what media produces today. Sometimes it’s hard to tell what a real news show is and what a media comedy copy is. Amy I right? Learning the truth of what is happening in the world around you will do more than make you prepared for voting come November. It will make you better prepared to choose the steps you make in your personal life and in your career. You owe it to yourself to do your own research and make your own decisions and not just blindly follow what media tells you.

Today is a very important day in your life. Today you celebrate a major achievement in your life, graduating from college. Today has been one of the most major goals you have set for yourself and you have earned what you have achieved. But, tomorrow is the next important day of your life. Tomorrow you strep out into the world as a college graduate. Some of you have a job already lined up. Others are still looking for just the right next step to take. I encourage you to have faith in yourself and your abilities. Look at me. I once stood where you stand. Each step takes courage and you must be courageous enough to take those steps so that you will achieve your goals and dreams.

Good luck to each of you as you move forward to become all you were meant to be.

Thank you