**15576, Joseph Zitp**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to welcome all of our graduates, their family and friends, as well as the teachers and staff of Devry University to the 2016 graduation celebration. A man named Robert Orben once said, “A graduation ceremony is an event where the commencement speaker tells thousands of students dressed in identical caps and gowns that ‘individuality’ is the key to success.” I hope to do better than that for you today.

Today is one of the most important days of your lives and you will always remember it. We all know DeVry’s slogan, “Different, On Purpose.” No one here today is a traditional student. That’s what makes each of you unique. You had a good sense of who you are and what you want to do with your life before you came to DeVry. That’s why you chose this school over a traditional school. You didn’t want to spend two years simply exploring your options or figuring out your strengths and weaknesses. You already knew your strengths and weaknesses and came here to mold your uniqueness into a Career, not simply a degree to get a better job. Your future matters to you and you want your future to matter to the world you live in. Let me assure you graduates, that you are now fully qualified to do that regardless of the degree you earned. The degree doesn’t determine your success, but it does act as a roadmap to the direction you want to travel.

You came here as non-traditional students. Many of you are the first one in your family to earn a college degree. But, with your example, I promise you will not be the last. You are trailblazers in your families. I know what that feels like. When you first came to school, you were scared. You knew what you wanted to do, but being a trailblazer requires great courage. You knew there would be great challenges, but you knew you had to face them head on. Now you have conquered those challenges and won the war. You have now raised the bar for the rest of the family. Never again will someone be able to say, “I can’t do that. It’s never been done in our family before,” because you have already done it and done it well.

I know what it feels like to accomplish something so important to you as a person and to your family. I know, because when I was your age, I was the trailblazer. I had to face my fears and step out in faith so I could meet and overcome my challenges so that I could see my dream come true. I am now an emergency medicine, critical care physician who is a child of Italian immigrants who at one time a non-traditional student and became a physician in NY. In the years since I began, I have graduated college; I have been recognized with multiple professional awards and appointments, along with many personal accomplishments. I have published professional articles as well as being a successful professional public speaker in addition to being a successful physician. I tell you of some of my accomplishments to give you hope that you have so much before you. I won’t bore you with an item by item listing of what I’ve been able to do in life. Your path may be different, but no less important. There is much to be done in this world and you are prepared to do what is needed.

Today is the first day of a brand new season for you. You may feel somewhat bittersweet with the completion of your degree. There is always a bit of that when you finish a season. You think, “Well, I finished what I started, now what do I do?” I’ll tell you what you will do. You will count today as day one of the next season of your life. Now, if you haven’t already done it, you will set up new goals to seek, new challenges to meet. Some of you may go on for additional education. Some of you are anxious to put your education to work in a new career. You can barely sit here listening to all the speeches because you just want to get started on that new season.

Whatever your plans are, let me encourage you that this is not the end of anything. It is the beginning of much more to come. Your education will continue whether it is formal education or on the job training. Because you have already chosen to be a trail blazer you will continue to blaze new trails. You will be the one that all the parents point to when they encourage their children to reach for the sky and0 to dream big. “Look what \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ did. You’re as smart as he is. You can do whatever you want if you are willing to work for it.” Even people your own age will take heart at your accomplishments. They will see that they can learn a new language. They will believe they can find a way to work a job and still find time to go to college and prepare for a new career rather than just stay in the dead end job they have. You will be their inspiration because you have taken that first, important step to get out of the rut of, “this is the way we’ve always done it.” Don’t worry, it will happen to you.

There are so many opportunities for each of you to choose from. I encourage you to join a mentoring program. You will learn as much as your mentee and you’ll have a ball doing it. You will know in a very tangible way that you are making a difference in the lives of others. Volunteer work is another great opportunity, whether it is community mentoring or corporate mentoring.

You have so much in front of you, personally and professionally. Your education will open doors for you that would not have opened without it. When you take the education you have earned and combine it with your life experience you have a rich repertoire from which to draw so that you can make a mark on society and make a difference in the lives of those around you.

Good luck in your future endeavors.