Purdue Commencement 18th December 2016

Live, Love, Laugh

What an exciting day it is…..for both of us. You for graduating today and me the opportunity to be the commencement speaker this year at my alma mater. I would like to first thank President Daniels for giving me this very special honour and privilege, something I will remember for the rest of my life.

Class of 2016, a hearty congratulations. Today will remain one of the most important days and memories of your life. So soak it in folks and live the moment. This is a keeper. Also a very special congratulations to all the parents, families and friends, who have come here from across the US and the world, as a show of strength and support to their loved ones. You must be very proud of them. Especially since Purdue is a very tough school to get into but even tougher to graduate from. I know it from experience.

It has been 30 years since I graduated from Purdue, and what a 30 years it has been. How the world has change in this time. Mark Zuckerberg was playing in his diapers when I joined Purdue. I landed in Chicago in December 1984 and on the first night was hit by a blizzard and 12 inches of snow. I had never been to the US before and never seen snow in my life. I was so excited and I remember my first drive to Purdue along the Wabash River. As we approached West Lafayette, I saw a lot of signs for bars and I remember thinking, wow, what a rocking place it must be. I stayed at Tarkington Hall and the first semester the only company I had was my amazing roommate. My TV was my only companion as it was a terrible winter. We would spend hours on end every single day after classes until I would switch it off every night before I went to bed. I did not have the chance to meet anyone, until one day on the coldest day that winter I saw nude people running around. Yes it was the Nude Olympics when all hell broke loose and everyone came out as though there was no tomorrow. And then came spring and West Lafayette sprung to life and I was never the same person again.

At Purdue I was exposed to so many things and it was here that I was shaped into who I am today. University is not only about education but equally about the experiences that you go through which will make you the person you are in your life. It was when I was at Purdue that I had my first drink, my first date, learned how to shovel snow, became responsible and also learned how to study hard and party hard. It is here that I dreamed of what I wanted to do with my life and wrote down my life goals. Most importantly, it was here that I fell in love with the love of my life, Pinky, the gorgeous girl who I married and is with us in the audience. I owe a lot to Purdue and I am sure you will someday realize the importance of the role that this institution played in your life.

But I am here today to talk about you. For all of you this moment is the pinnacle of your life so far and your greatest achievement. While there is a lot of satisfaction and celebration, there must also be a question as to where do you go from here. And I don’t means Harry’s bar. I mean after Harry’s bar and after that and so on. I was in the same position 30 years ago and I want to share with you what I learned and hope that it will be something that you use as a guide to create your own beautiful journey into the future.

In order to answer this very important question of where you want to go, you need to first figure out what do you want from life. This is obviously not an easy question to answer for many of us. It can take an entire lifetime. There are two ways to approach this very important question. Either you take it as it comes and see where you end up in life or in the alternative you decide what you want and work out a plan towards achieving it in a step by step manner. I would recommend that you go for the latter. Life will be so much more fun when you decide where you are going. I don't mean you should remove the excitement of spontaneity but there needs to be a plan. As they say “What you think, you become”.

When I was faced with this very question, it set me thinking as to who I could learn from who may have already worked it all out. Is it the rich, the young, academicians, religious leaders, politicians, doctors? Who is it? After a lot of soul searching it became clear to me that it is children, especially the teeny boppers who are clear about what they want and they go after it. Think about it; they are not bothered about the world around them; they just do what they want and expect the world around them to adjust to their desires and dreams. As children, we live life to the fullest, give unconditional love to everyone and laugh our hearts out loud at every given opportunity. Unfortunately as we grow older, we get influenced by the ways of the world and in the bargain we get confused with what we want and therefore where we want to go.

I captured this simple yet profound attitude of kids into something which is easy to remember in three simple words; **Live, Love, Laugh**. The three L’s. Yes, live your dream, love everyone and laugh out loud. This is what I have been following as the simple goal of my life. It is a journey with no beginning or no end, the journey is the destination.

**LIVE your dream**

Let's first talk about living your dream. You are all actually living your dream right now. If not, you would not be in this room. You are graduating from one of the best universities in the world, because you were clear on your goal and decided to go after it with all you got. During your time at Purdue you must have gone through a lot of challenges and ups and downs, but every time you would pick yourself up and remind yourself about your goal and work single-mindedly towards achieving it.

Every single day a new window of opportunity opens up; it is up to you to recognize the opportunity and see if it matches with your dream and if so, go after it. Be the architect who gives shape to your life; the artist who paints your future and the singer who creates the tunes which resonate with your heart; you can create your own magic. It is in your hands and only yours. Yes there will be many external factors that may influence it but it is your own single minded determination that gets you to where you want to go. You may come across naysayers, as there a lot of them in this world, ignore them and say to yourself, it does not matter, I will go ahead no matter what as it is my life and I will live it to the fullest. Listen to your heart and it will tell you where you want to go.

A famous philosopher once said, “We all have two lives and the second one begins when we realize that we have only one”. Just think about it, many of us end up living someone else's dream until we realise we have only one life. It is then that we make amends to start living our dream. I came to this realization much after school and since then I have been sculpting my life into something beautiful and I feel I am in control and it gives me immense joy and happiness.

I always wanted to be a serial entrepreneur and start new businesses every few years. Pursuing this dream, I got involved in many businesses including hotels, power plants, pharmaceutical research, resources and airports. And next year I am about to start a new business around technology. Some of my friends would think that I am crazy since once a business became successful I would move to the next. I always used to say that it is not about making the money that gave me the kick but the challenge of creating and achieving something. At every given opportunity I aimed very high and reached for the stars.

My father taught me to never compromise and only aim for the best. When our company won the tender to own and redevelop the Mumbai Airport, we were faced with a project which was the most constrained airport in the world and had huge challenges. But we did not waiver and set a clear Vision to become the best in the world, which will make Mumbai and India proud. A lot of people told us that the task was audacious and impossible. But we did not waiver and pursued it one step at a time. The Mumbai airport was ranked last year as the best airport in the world in our category by Airports Council International. It was featured in Discovery Channel in a global program called Build It Bigger as an engineering marvel. I am proud to state that my engineering education at Purdue gave me the insight and the confidence to take up such large and complex projects. My lesson from this project was nothing is impossible.

In living your dream, whatever it may be, I want to give you only one piece of advice, pursue excellence. Do not be satisfied with anything ordinary, go for the extraordinary. It will add that special zing into everything you do. It will make it more challenging but also more rewarding. In everything I do I look for that something special which will make it extraordinary and stand out from the rest. Dream big, take chances and live life to the fullest as in the end the only things that you will regret is the chances that you didn’t take. Abraham Lincoln said “In the end it is not the years in your life that count. It is the life in your years”.

**LOVE everyone and everything**

In our Indian philosophy, we are always told what we give, we get. This is more relevant when it comes to love. It is important that we never forget to love our family, our friends, and our community but most importantly you have to start by loving yourself. The more you give the more you get. Love is not a bank account where it gets deposited daily and we can withdraw it when we want. It has an expiration date and every day lost is lost forever. This is something I released later in life as in my younger years my entire focus was only on work. We cannot compromise one for the other. I realized that you should never try to change the people you love and you should love them unconditionally like children do. I used to always correct and try to change many people close to me thinking I was doing it for their own good, not realizing that I was actually doing it to suit my needs. I don’t do that anymore because they are beautiful as they are with all their perfections and shortcomings, just like I am.

In addition, at every given opportunity we should work for the betterment of our community. I can assure you that there is nothing more gratifying than doing something for others. As a part of GVK Foundation we have an organisation called GVK EMRI, which runs the world’s largest ambulance service. We operate 12,000 free ambulances in India and employ 45,000 people. We cater to 750 million people, handle more than 200,000 calls per day, around 25,000 emergencies a day and save more than 700 lives per day. It is something which my father spearheads personally and we are all very proud of it due to the impact it has on the community. Even though we have been successful in business, if there is one thing GVK will be remembered for, it will be this.

At your age success is normally measured by the amount of money one makes and reaching a senior position in your organization. There is nothing wrong with that, but it will not do. You will later realize that true success is measured by the number of people who love you and remember you. There is no point being the richest person in the graveyard if no one loves you. So be humble, kind, compassionate and loving to everyone who crosses your path. A smile does not cost you anything. You will always be remembered and loved back. Winston Churchill said “we make a living by what we get but we have a life by what we give”.

**LAUGH out loud**

Life is too short with so much to do and so little time. We must learn to do things which make us happy and laugh. While I really enjoy my work I have so many passions that I want to pursue. I love to collect traditional Indian art, running marathons, reading books, scuba diving, trekking, traveling, traveling, playing golf etc. I go after each one of these with a passion. I set metrics for each of these passions in terms of how often and what I need to do. I measure them, keep track and review them regularly so that I know that I am not ignoring them. It is similar to what do when we work. We measure everything and review regularly. Why can't we do the same for things which are our passions?

I also find that I don't know what I really like until I try it. For example I never skied but was forced by my friend to go with them last year and both Pinky and I loved it so much that we would like to go back every year if possible. So don't give up an opportunity to try something new. Who knows, it may become the most important passion of your life.

I believe that in the end all we are left with are memories, everything else fades away in comparison. I want to create memories and deposit them in my memory bank which I can encase and enjoy when I get older. Memories of fun and laughter. Memories of laughing out loud.

These are some of the things I learned in life and am trying to follow them so that I am happy. Live, Love, Laugh. It a very simple concept, easy to remember and implement. Make it a part of your DNA. When you walk out of this door today, you will enter a new phase of your life, a new world which is welcoming you with open arms. It is all yours for the taking and I am sure that you will pursue it with passion. I know that Purdue has taught you well and I am quite sure you will give back to the world, more than what you have taken from here today. Friedrich Nietzsche said, “The doer alone learneth.” So, take what you have learned and go into the world and make a difference with it.

I would like to end by saying that you should dream as if you will live forever and live as if you will die tomorrow.

Don't forget to LIVE, LOVE and LAUGH. All the best and wish you luck……Gooooo Boilermakers.