**INDUCTION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MICHELLE RICHARDS**

Hello everyone! I would like to thank all of the family members, friends, colleagues, and distinguished visitors who are here tonight to celebrate our graduates and acknowledge their achievement. Reaching senior NCO status (**Please rephrase if this is not the best way to state the achievement**) is an impressive accomplishment. It takes a level of drive and commitment that is rare and valued and for those who have risen to this point, much is expected. This induction ceremony represents the attainment of an important milestone. Graduates, you've worked hard, made sacrifices, invested a tremendous amount of time and personal initiative, and demonstrated your commitment to **OUR** Air Force. You've shown us your willingness to do whatever it takes to learn, grow, and lead…. **So far.**  (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**) I think we can all agree that each one of you has literally “earned his or her place at this table.” Enjoy the meal! Celebrate the investment you've made into your future and the well being of our country!! Recognize the determination, strength, and energy it has taken you to get to this lofty place in your military careers…Take a moment to congratulate yourselves…. Because tomorrow…..the **REAL** work begins!!

General Colin Powell has said, “The chief condition on which life, health, and vigor depend on, is **action**. It is by action that an organism develops its faculties, increases its energy, and attains the fulfillment of its destiny.” As you enjoy this ceremony, I invite you to spend a few minutes looking back on your lives and careers- think of the lessons you've learned and the actions you've taken to sustain and energize yourselves… up to this point, and I want you to remember something very important. You've chosen to be here and to follow this path. You've invested time and sweat and a great deal of your own personal equity to fulfill your destiny as leaders, but keep this in mind…. While we are **all** leaders in some way or another, there is always someone to whom we must answer. There is always another step to go. The “rope ladder” to success is self perpetuating… as soon as we hit what seems to be that top wrung and take a break to rest… like tonight… a newer, steeper course appears with new accolades and distinctions once again to be targeted in the distance. The only way to propel forward is with the uncommon adrenaline formed from passion, enthusiasm, and determination. The horizon line is our goal, continually redefining itself, always beckoning, in constant motion, pushing us to reach further than we thought possible…. in our lives and in our commitment to the Air Force. Responsibility is non-negotiable, and with this induction exercise, graduates, you move one step closer to that elusive horizon. As you advance, your performance and your impact on your peers becomes more indelible. You've reached a level of immersion that demands that you reassess your investment and reaffirm your commitment to your missions as leaders.

What inspired you to join the Air Force? What visions did you have for what life would be like as you climbed the ladder and rose through the ranks to finally achieve your SNCO status? Recently I was asked what sparked my interests and fueled my passion to be in this branch of the military. We all have stories. Some of them are so simple, so much a part of our being, that we take those early sparks for granted. When I thought back, my response was so clear…. The defining moment so obvious… I was ten years old. (**Did you say you lived near an Air Force base? We need to clarify… I just have that you saw the planes**). We lived near \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I would see the planes flying overhead from there. Those planes looked and sounded intriguing…. amazing…. And somehow very inviting…. And I knew that some day, I would be flying them. Of course at ten years old we don't factor in boot camp, management strategies, or learning the hard lessons…. But here I am, and here are you! (**Wait for the laugh**)

If there’s one thing I've learned as I grew from a ten year old dreamer to the “public speaker” (**Would you prefer to use your rank/title?**) standing before you, is the simple concept of **ownership**. We know in life that we can either “rent” or “own”…. Property…. possessions… commitments. To rent is nice… there’s a limited time span in which one has an agreement to participate with or use the rented items to the full extent of the contract. Once the term expires, ties can be cut, goods can be returned, and people can move on. When one steps out to commit to ownership, the property becomes his or hers. There is a great deal of pride in ownership and there's also a tremendous, complete, and encompassing commitment that distinguishes the two scenarios. To own is to know that there is no back door…. that there is only one responsible party, and if anything should happen to the property, goods, or commitment involved in the contract, the owner is the solely accountable. Officers, I want you to know that at this level of your military careers, we regard you as **owners**. That means very simply, that although you have teammates, **YOU** are 100% responsible for every fragment associated with your job, your company, your squad, your project….. to **KNOW** that you are an owner is the essence of leadership.

General Bruce Clarke said, “When things go wrong on your command, start searching for the reason in increasingly large circles around your own desk.” In other words…. There is no one else out there. And as sure as the day is long, if there is one detail… one small gesture, that you think is insignificant, that will be the one thing that will bite you and then come back to haunt you. There are **NO** short cuts to effectiveness, success, and earned respect from your peers and your company (**Is this the correct word? If not, please revise**).

I have another request of you…. Think about those people throughout your lives… when you were young… when you were in school… as you started your military career and training…that inspired you with their leadership skills. We all have had mentors. What characteristics did your guides and mentors possess? As leaders that really own their commitment and participation, some of the traits that people respond to are things like emotional and intellectual stability, a sense of dominance balanced with adaptability, conscientiousness mixed with boldness, self assuredness strengthened with tenacity. We know that these traits, among others, exist within each one of you officers. We also know that in your new roles as SNCO’s, you will be challenged every day to hone your abilities as leaders while demonstrating your increasing willingness to own your missions.

Many great minds have spent lifetimes articulating what it means to have power…. To transform one’s experience of leadership, how strength and authority are used… what true ownership is… and how small, significant gestures can create tremendous and long lasting shifts. While the author Susan Sontag said, “The only transformation that interests me is a total transformation, no matter how **minute**,” it was the great inventor and philosopher, Buckminster Fuller who taught us the importance of the trim tab. Having served in the U.S. Navy during World War I, Fuller had the opportunity to observe, and the brilliance to find, inspiration in the mundane items around him. In an interview he once gave, he described the overarching power that lives in the smallest of gestures. “…Think of the Queen Elizabeth (**the cruise ship**). There's a tiny little thing at the end of a rudder called a **trim tab**. It's a miniature rudder… just moving the little trim tab builds a low pressure that pulls the rudder around… takes no effort at all.”

What Fuller was saying was, and is, that, as leaders, when we accept that we unconditionally own our commitments, there is freedom in knowing even the smallest of gestures have infinite potential. Nothing goes unseen. No detail that you bring to your post is insignificant. Your leadership identifies and exposes you in even the smallest of gestures, so it is critical to be vigilant in your interactions, planning, and execution of all tasks. Each one of us are innately acting as trim tabs and our actions can be used to inspire and shift perspective…. Or not.

It is my intention that each one of you graduates embraces your new assignments and responsibilities with a strong sense of pride, purpose, and mission…. No matter where you might find yourself. A true leader owns every interaction, no matter what. A true leader inspires, motivates, and learns…. The learning never stops.

To each one of you, I wish you…. And by you I mean **us**…. success and enlightenment as you continue on your journey of service in the United States Air Force. It's truly great to be here and it's even better to have such dedicated, spirited, committed partners.

Thank you!