**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MARVIN JOHNSON**

Hello everyone… to friends and family, faculty, deans, administrators and special guests, I want to thank all of you for allowing me some time to speak with you and for being here and sharing so much combined support and good will. **(If there is anyone in particular at the school you want to acknowledge, you can do that here**) I would like to take a moment to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for your much appreciated support and encouragement, and to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, thank you for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Today is a special day in the lives of all of us who are graduating, and no matter the achievements we’ve accomplished or the degrees we have earned, this is a moment we will all hold in a special place as we prepare for the next steps on our individual paths.

Everyone learns and grows at his or her own pace. Today we have the privilege of honoring a diverse group of graduates. While some of us have earned advanced degrees, others have worked steadfastly to accomplish the goals and complete the courses that have brought them their first academic distinctions. No matter what requirements have been fulfilled, we all share a common bond, and that is that we have literally opened our minds, and that is a tremendous accomplishment. We are living in uncertain times, and whether that uncertainty seems more amplified because we have greater exposure to learn of news and global conditions in real time, or if we are getting older and more aware of how the news affects us personally, one thing is certain, and that is an education and the skills that come from learning are needed more now than ever before. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan said, “For all of its uncertainty, we cannot flee the future.” The best way to prepare is with knowledge.

The wold is changing…. **Rapidly**. And while some will pursue advanced degrees, as others of my fellow graduates join the workforce, each one of us will find a place in the world… no matter where we find **ourselves**. It will be the education we have earned through our studies at University of Phoenix that will remind us that we have learned to participate in the greater conversation of life. Education allows us to sharpen some very essential skills…. It challenges us to be curious… to not just accept the word of a person or institution as law…. Education trains us and encourages us to do research; to make informed choices; to find a means for our voices to be heard. Education provides context and connection… it brings people together, and whether in agreement or debate, during the discovery of any common ground…. there is usually a way to forge a bond, no matter how small or tenuous. Education promotes conversation and fosters a sense of community. We have also heard that “Knowledge is power.” Now we have an actual physical experience of what that means. As we learn we begin to realize that “we don't know what we don't know,” but acceptance of that concept encourages a new and meaningful level of commitment to self-awareness.

G.K. Chesterton reminds us, “ Education is simply the sound of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” We've inherited a legacy handed down by those that have taught us, and they accepted the lessons of those who taught them. Although the years change and the technology gets more omnipresent, the foundation remains and that is that we must build a world that will survive and sustain all of us in the present as we lead by example and show the way to those that follow in our footsteps. It is up to us to work together to shine a light in such a way that demands respect and a sense of community for everyone we meet. We have also gotten to a point in our own personal evolution where we know, deep down inside, that all life consists of is a series of lessons. Although some may have completed the highest level of formal education they intend to explore, that’s not the last page of the proverbial “lesson plan of life.” What we have received is a comprehensive foundation. Now it is up to use that to confront uncertainty as we face our individual challenges with confidence, tenacity, and determination. If there were one thing that never stops, it is that as human beings, we are perpetually learning. Every experience holds a lesson and it is those among us who maintain an open mind that will find satisfaction in that pursuit.

President Calvin Coolidge said, “Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is filled with educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.” Let’s make this distinction: you've received an invaluable education. It is your persistence that will turn those lessons into lifelong knowledge that supports the self-discovery of determination. Ignorance is not bliss. It is knowing how to build inner strength… knowing that we have what it takes to take care of ourselves, that will be our greatest source of personal self motivation…. In any situation. Remember this…. We have worked for this education…. What remains and what will teach us is **knowledge**. I encourage you to be persistent in the acceptance of that truth.

As we develop as a community and as a nation, so must we develop as self-reliant individuals willing to face whatever challenges and opportunities the future may hold. I am confident that all of today’s graduates have the self-possession to navigate their unique course through life. I wish all of you sincere and encouraging good wishes and congratulations as you continue your paths toward enlightenment, discovery, and opportunity. Thank you all!