**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**STEVEN MCCLAIN**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, distinguished guests, and members of the University of Phoenix staff and faculty, I am Steven McClain and it is a thrill and a privilege to be here today to accept this Masters degree in Management from University of Phoenix. This commencement ceremony has special meaning for all of us, but in particular, it has deep significance for me... on so many levels. Although I have also gotten my Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees from this school, because of prior circumstances, I was not able to attend those ceremonies, so this is the first commencement in which I have been able to walk and to accept my diploma in person, and believe me, what an honor it is to be present!!! It’s taken a long time for me to get here (**If you want to make a joke you can say)** .... and not just because of the Chicago traffic **(and wait for the laugh)...** and before you start to think, “My, he looks older than most of the graduates.... that studying took its toll...” (**Wait for the laugh**), please allow me to explain....

Henry Ford said, “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning **stays young**.” It seems I’ve heeded that wisdom throughout my life and although I have rearranged the order of my life’s accomplishments, each red-letter moment gets more valuable the more I know. I was very young when I met and married my wonderful wife, Janice, and we had three great children...Amber, Amanda, and Ryan, shortly thereafter. Through all of my early experiences, I studied at “the school of life.” As my wife and I raised our family, I always maintained the vision that one day I would stand in a place, much like this, and acknowledge the completion of the formal part of my education. It meant a great deal to me and especially to those that raised me and continue to teach me.... you see, growing up, I was aware that no one in my family had ever attended college, and although I was brought up in a household that appreciated and enforced the priority of hard work, diligence, and family, there were no precedents or “higher education guides” to chart my “course” or courses for me. Through observing my mother’s determination as a single parent, I realized how much I valued being the best example possible for my kids, my wife, and my **SELF**.

General George Patton said, “Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory.” I would have to say that describes a fraction of what this day means to me. I’ve had plenty of challenges, but I thank God for finding the strength to grow from each and every circumstance. My faith continues to inspire me and teach me, “Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but the lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.” (**This is from Proverbs 20:15... letting you know if you want to cite the passage**). I am also thankful that time and technology have placed us on a path upon which higher education is more widely available and accessible. Although distance education is something that was established about fifty years ago, thanks to ingenuity and technical advances, the advent of online universities like University of Phoenix has given new life, depth, and meaning to the term “**multitask**.” It’s also made another term nearly obsolete.... that would be “**free time.” (Wait for the laugh**)... yes... I’ve learned to juggle raising a family, devoting my time to a rewarding full time career as a production manager, and earning my progressive degrees ... simultaneously. Believe me, I learned a lot. I learned that effort yields knowledge and knowledge encourages progress. I learned that pushing myself beyond previously established limits proves to me that I can strive to achieve even more, and most of all, I learned that people are watching. Nothing goes unnoticed, and there are those that depend on me to **set an example**.... and so I did, and **DO** what is necessary to continue to learn, grow, and teach others **by example**. Each one of us owes it to our selves, our families, and our communities, to learn as much as we can about life and the world around us.

Even with the long hours... sometimes as much as twelve hours a day at work... the seemingly never ending assignments, tests, reading, caring for the family, it was all clearly so worth it... and while even vacations posed the opportunity to learn in new and more remote or exotic locations, my discipline for my schooling was something that I packed even before my sunscreen... **(Wait for the laugh**). While the load seemed heavy while I was living through the chaos, as I look back now, the time went by really fast...

The concept of receiving education from a distant source is not new, in fact correspondence courses were developed in the 1960’s. With the advent of the age of personal computing, online universities were introduced in the 1980’s... thank goodness!!! An entire world, filled with new and ever evolving possibilities opened up, allowing for the opportunity of receiving a college education, extended to those who might have otherwise been excluded from the realm of advanced knowledge. While we might observe people in superficial circumstances, we never know what he or she might be going through... or what challenges they may face. With the introduction and availability of quality online higher education, previously unattainable goals can become a reality. Believe me, **I KNOW**.

As I said when I approached this podium, this moment is very special to me, and I am proud to share this commencement ceremony with my fellow graduates. To each one of you that have shown determination, perseverance, and the **REALLY** elusive and rare gift of self-discipline, congratulations!!! **WE DID IT**! We prevailed... we achieved really important personal goals. We showed ourselves and those in our communities that we have a commitment to making this world a better place through knowledge, and it is through the unwavering purpose and hard work of those that preceded us that we are present and acknowledged today. We demonstrated that anything is possible because we saw that **IT CAN BE DONE**. Now it is our mandate to take what we’ve learned to lead others and ourselves to continue to inspire, motivate, encourage, and **PROVE** that it’s doable and worth it.

There’s an expression that goes, I don’t know what I don’t know.” Thanks to the proliferation of alternative means of attaining higher education, I know that I don’t know less than I thought I didn’t know. (**Wait for the laugh**). To paraphrase Coach Vince Lombardi, “The person on the top of the mountain didn’t fall there.” Getting to the top of any mountain, real or imagined, takes strength, determination, guts, knowledge, and a plan, but **NOTHING** is possible without having the foundation of education. Let’s celebrate our achievements and all the possibilities before us as we set our sights for new and higher mountains to scale. Thank you all!!