**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**BILL LEWIS**

Hello everyone... to family and friends, distinguished guests, fellow faculty, officers, and most of all, to you, our graduating cadets, today is a special day... and while all graduations are special in their own way, this one is also special to me. In a way, I consider this **my own** graduation speech and as all of you cadets prepare to embark on the next phase of your lives and careers, so do I and I’ll explain a bit more shortly. (**If there is anyone in particular you want to acknowledge, you can do that here**). To be a police officer, an educator.... or really just about any position in life, it requires a team, and San Juan County Criminal Justice Authority is no exception. As this program has partnered with San Juan College, connections and support from both entities have proven invaluable in the success of this course. On that note, I would like to acknowledge \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for all of the encouragement, dedication, and guidance provided for each student. Being a part of a community whose mission is unified in the support and training of young people like you in order to prepare to fulfill positions critical to the well being of our communities and neighborhoods has been and always will be, very gratifying.

It’s been said that “Bravery is not the absence of fear but the mastery of action in the face of fear.” Cadets, it is no secret that you’ve chosen to enter a challenging profession but it is one that offers great rewards. You have trained and studied for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years and now it’s time. Of course just because you have completed the formal education and training part of your careers as cadets, please don’t take that to mean that you’re done learning.... in fact, **you’re just beginning**. As you accept your assignments within the police force, you will be exposed to all different types of situations and opportunities and you will be challenged.... as police officers, professionals, and most of all, as people with unwavering integrity, bravery, and commitment to your colleagues and community.

As I stand here before you today, and, as I mentioned, this is a graduation of sorts for me as I will be retiring after thirty-six years in my profession in education, I can tell you I’m as excited and curious as I imagine all of you must be. I don’t know if any of us have real certainty or a clear picture of what life holds for us... in an hour.... a week... or in the long term, but I **DO** know what has gotten me through the twists and turns of my career and my life for the past three and a half decades. I know this is simple advice and I encourage you to listen and use whatever you can in order to keep yourselves vital contributors in every area of life, and today, especially in your careers as police officers.

Some wise, anonymous person once said, “Character is who you are when **no one is looking**.” No matter where you find yourself... no matter the situation you may be in, remember to live your lives with character. We **never know** who may be watching us for guidance. Operating with character goes hand in hand with being vigilantly observant. Learn to practice the power of observation. Learn to **trust your gut**. Make sure you are always conscious of the difference between right and wrong because that’s what you’re here for. Demonstrate relentless respect for your superiors, your colleagues, and those you find in your path. They are your **TEACHERS**.... and remember, just because today is called “graduation,” it doesn’t mean you stop learning. On the contrary, it all starts happening **NOW**. While you’ve received a wonderful, multi-faceted education here, I invite you to keep in mind the words I heard a little while ago.... “I don’t know what I don’t know.” There isn’t a person alive that knows everything... and while we all know something... many things... there’s so much more to learn. Every bit of experience... every strange or great or difficult situation is your teacher. Every test has the potential to be your **lifeline**.

In so many ways, police officers are the glue that hold communities together. You are the **conscience** of your neighborhoods. Your presence can cause people to think twice.... about feeling assured that they are safe while to others you may be the symbol of “second thought.” Seeing you patrol, being vigilant and strong, ready to protect and defend, acts as a deterrent to those that might consider.... straying.... for lack of a better word.... and while there are those that may believe in the deluded idea that they are above the law, you’re there too... to show them that good really **must** triumph.

It takes dedication, concentration, and a willingness to bravely face the unknown in order to do what you’ve signed up to do, and for that, I know I speak for everyone here when I say we thank you. We acknowledge you, and we applaud your selflessness.

I’m sure that over the past several days, while receiving deserved congratulations, you’ve also gotten lots of advice from those around you. Guess what? I’ve got some too.... and believe me, I’ll be heeding this myself! It may seem simple and too practical right now, but I invite you to keep these tips in the back of your mind... you never know when you might need them.

Remember that no matter where you find yourselves, as I said earlier, make sure to have a positive, constructive attitude, operate with integrity and empathy, and honor the core values that demonstrate the respect you have for others and the way in which you would want to be treated.... if the tables were turned.

Keep in mind that we live in an age of technology.... and as we’ve seen... **nothing** dies on the internet and anything that you say or do can be recorded or preserved for “posterity.” Basically, that means to default to what I said earlier....living your lives in anything less than a truly ethical manner may come back to get you, so maintain your honor. You are in positions to set a positive example. Never forget that.

Every job entails politics of some sort. It has to do with getting along with people and in the police department, it can have a lot to do with working through stressful situations. Do what is necessary to get along with your colleagues and fellow police force. There’s enough that has to be dealt with outside of the precinct house. Maintain respect for all and if situations do arise, handle them with maturity and professionalism. You’re all in this together. It’s also important to maintain strong, supportive relationships in your personal lives as well. There’s too much potential for stress on the job to have that complicated by additional issues outside of work. To friends and family here today, I want to acknowledge all of you for the support and care you clearly give our graduates and we all know that as caring, concerned friends and family, there will be times that challenge your relationships. All I can say is, this is an opportunity for all of you to learn, grow, and protect those who serve as they protect us. I can’t imagine anything a person would appreciate more than that. And while you, our graduates, are about to forge very deep bonds with your fellow officers, remember the people who are with you today... the ones that keep you grounded and laughing... they’re the reasons you’re about to do what you signed up for...

Keep up your education... continue to hone your skills... prepare for your future... set goals.... remember that being a police officer is a tremendous, important part of your lives. Also remember that a life well lived is well rounded, enriched, informed, and encouraged about what the future may hold.

It’s been said that “The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.” (**Malcolm X is credited with this quote. Do you want to attribute? I think it’s an important sentiment but I didn’t want to get political**). Think about that for a moment. I can’t emphasize enough how important it is to be as prepared as possible in life as you can be. So many factors throw “curve balls...” and whether it’s global conditions or local incidents, everything has a way of affecting all of us. In the current age of technology, more than ever, we need to be alert... aware... mindful of who we are.... where we are... and how we fit into and affect the world around us. We hear a lot of talk about law enforcement... the good and the bad.... and it is my intention that you.... this graduating class... enter a profession that protects, defends, and leaves this world a better place. I know it’s a tall order for you, nineteen of our newest and finest, but I, along with everyone here today, have great faith in your ability, your enthusiasm, and your willingness to make a positive mark on the profession and the communities in which you will bravely, thoughtfully, and dedicatedly serve. You are now poised to raise the bar and set an example for future cadets, and as you stand on the shoulders of previous graduates, we look forward to looking up to each one of you.

Congratulations and thank you all!