**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**DR. MARC LEICHTUNG**

Hello everyone... to family and friends, faculty and administrators, distinguished guests, and most of all, to all of you graduates of the Class of 2019 of Monmouth University, I want to thank you for inviting me to share this moment with you. I would like to extend very special thanks to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to speak to all of you today. Since the completion of my formal education.... I attended (**Name the college and medical schools from which you graduated**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and throughout my career... my personal life..... and my travels... I have come to realize the importance of not only receiving an education, but relying on what I’ve learned to enhance and inform each action and every experience I’ve had since. W.E.B. Du Bois said, “Education must not simply teach work-It must **teach Life**.” Today signifies the completion of the formal part of your education... this ceremony, filled with tradition, is a rite of passage. When you leave here today, you will begin your true course in the education of your lifetimes. You have the foundation.... it’s time to really build upon that and find your voice and path to a fulfilled and worthwhile life.

Of course, as I look at all of you graduates, about to enter dental and medical practices, I am reminded of what my life and career has been like for the past twenty five years since my own graduation. Although I am a practicing dentist, I’m also a businessman, a creator, and an entrepreneur, as well as a husband, father, son, and friend. I’ve worked in every aspect of dentistry and I am proud to say that I have been very fortunate to have established, collaborated on, and own, several thriving dental practices employing dozens of professionals at all levels.... I’ve worked with fellow dentists, assistants, clinicians, suppliers... you name it... and the one thing I can say without hesitation is... none of the success... none of the experience... and none of the appreciation of any part of the process.... or my life... would have been possible without having received a firm, comprehensive, educational foundation. (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**)... just ask my wife, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ she’s one of the smartest people I know... and she keeps me on my toes!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Albert Einstein said, “I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.” Curiosity spurs the brain... it encourages thought... it supports research and the action of making informed choices. Some people find wisdom and insight in the expression, “I don’t know what I don’t know.” Realizing the truth in that statement is the first step to enlightenment. Let’s focus on what we **DO** know and how we can express and understand the importance of education. When it comes down to essential elements that define the importance of a firm foundation, I’d like to focus on five words that begin with the letter, “E.” (**If you want to make a little joke, you can say**) ... Of course it doesn’t hurt that in the act of saying these five words, we have to smile... and show our own teeth... (**and wait for the laugh**)... here are the five words... try it!!! **EDUCATION**... **ENERGIZED**... **EMPLOYMENT**... **EMPOWERMENT**... **EVERLASTING**...

Having an **education** is possessing the most valuable tool you might possibly have. That education sparks a process... provides a background, and prepares you for the tests, trials, and opportunities you will encounter throughout your lives. It’s been said that the whole purpose of attaining an education is to “turn mirrors into windows.” With knowledge comes an inherent curiosity and respect for the world around you. Education and exposure to the process of life, the professional world, and diverse social and community situations expands your scope... encourages your empathy... and supports your growth as a human being.

Knowledge is **POWER**. Curiosity **ENERGIZES** an individual. Embarking on a career, especially one that serves others and provides support and optimism to patients and clients that really need and appreciate our services, creates an excitement and sparks enthusiasm for the challenges we all face... at all levels of the professional world. There is nothing more exciting than experiencing the newness of change... unless it’s rising to the mandate of sustaining that energy throughout one’s career... and life... and that all goes back to the educational foundation you’ve built... the one that has taught you that life ... and knowledge, are multi layered... with each bit of information... with every revelation and realization, if we’re very smart, we realize that every answer reveals the next question.

Now that you are graduating, it’s time to put those lessons to work. **EMPLOYMENT**.... It’s what this is all about!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Having not just a “job” but building a **career**... at whatever level supports and sustains you, is an **essential** part of life. In order to be a fulfilled and well rounded human being, it’s so important to make your mark in the professional world.... and not only for the obvious reasons... Employment teaches us about life... it encourages us to respect discipline, find the value in teamwork, and most importantly, work towards a greater mutual goal and success... work takes us **beyond** our selves and gives us focus and purpose. Having the opportunity to continue one’s education through the work environment adds incredible experience to our foundation and teaches us more about life and ourselves than we could have ever dreamed.

Of course, you can imagine that kind of process encourages **EMPOWERMENT**. It was Deepak Chopra who said, “Every time you react in the same old way, ask yourself if you want to be a prisoner of the past or a pioneer of the future.” Having an education is vital in your own self development. Knowing you possess a foundation that will support you in assessing any situation is powerful... it provides a lens through which you can make critical observations and informed choices. Being aware of choices, options, and free will releases you from the bonds of past mistakes. Think... act... repeat.

And, of course, the value of an education is **EVERLASTING**.... but keep one thing in mind... that education needs to be used in order for your knowledge base to strengthen and grow. Ignorance is **NOT** bliss... apathy is unacceptable... it is only when we are fully engaged in life that we can really appreciate the value of everything we encounter.

These five words came to mind a while ago when I had a chance encounter in Manhattan... Growing up, I was lucky to have some great friends... some have stayed with me throughout my life, others remind me of where I’ve been and where I’m going. They provide cautionary tales of what might have happened... if only... Of course everyone goes through difficult times in their lives... marriages end... there might be health issues or trouble in business. But these two friends... we can call them \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_... we all grew up in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and played sports together throughout the years. The first friend, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, had graduated from college, had a law degree, and was quite successful. My other friend had chosen to not continue his education and joined the workforce directly after high school. I witnessed as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ went through a particularly difficult time and was able to rely on his education to help him think of, and start a new company where he was once again energized. He used his smarts to rebuild his life... his career was renewed, he remarried, and he’s currently living his best life.  While I have to admit that after a while I lost touch with my other friend, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, many years later I was in the city, coming out of a coffee shop on 9th Avenue, and I saw him on a bike delivering packages. That image stayed with me and later that same day, I couldn’t help but reflect on how these two friends, who had basically come from the same place with similar backgrounds, had such parallel life situations and how outcomes were so starkly different. To me, it illustrated the point that education is everlasting and can be relied on in difficult times..... another thing to keep in mind.... remember I said some people I know use the expression, “I don’t know what I don’t know?” My friend, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ just didn’t have the practical tools to cope. Although he was doing what he could to, at the time survive and sustain himself, I can’t help but wonder what his life would have been like if he had the interest, energy, and enthusiasm back then to continue his education...

I want to congratulate all of you graduates.. for your commitment to the quality of your lives, your determination, and your recognition of the importance of attaining an education and **USING** that knowledge to open your eyes, hearts, and minds to a bright future... thank you all!!