**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**LENNY RODRIGUEZ**

**FINAL**

Ladies and gentlemen, faculty and administrators, family, friends, and, of course, distinguished guests, it is a privilege to be here today... coursework completed.... with newly minted, well earned knowledge added to our identities... with refreshed and inspired purpose on our prospective horizons... It is a most appreciated honor to have the opportunity to stand before you and share some thoughts... It was Abraham Lincoln who said.... “Extemporaneous speaking should be practiced and cultivated. It is the lawyer’s avenue to the public. However able and faithful he... or she... may be in other respects, people are slow to bring them business if they cannot make a speech”.... I’d like to thank you, my fellow graduates for your expression of faith in my ability to “hold the crowd” ...and, of course, to President Lincoln for the clarification! (**Wait for the laugh**).

For each one of us, life is punctuated by milestones... for my fellow graduates and me, today is one of those days that provide a point on our personal timelines.... it gives us the chance to look back on the past few years, acknowledge our accomplishments, and set our intentions for the future. Today is a completion of sorts but it is by no means an end.

As I look back, I see other milestones... and **millstones**... that formed us and propelled us to this point... Who will ever forget prepping and taking the LSAT exam, and wondering if our score was good enough to get into law school...then getting that acceptance letter and feeling jubilation with getting in... **WHOA**... we had **no idea** what **LURKED** behind door #1.  Then orientation started….  We took an assessment on the first day called the Nelson-Denny test. For many of us, we bombed it, feeling like we got punched in the gut... and learning to live with that uncertainty... After surviving that first week of orientation, door number #2 opened and off we went... Some of us may remember the Contracts Professor who would quote hip hop songs, specifically Snoop Dogg, as part of his lecture... or the Ethics Professor who instilled what it means to carry a Florida Bar Association card; and how easy it is to get it taken away... And we can't forget the Torts Professor who had us on pins & needles hiding behind our laptops in hopes of not being called on to brief a case.... (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**) **... Yes. It’s true... laptops CAN save lives... (and wait for the laugh).**

We still have Door #3 to tackle... passing the bar in order to be able to impact the lives of those who rely on us in their most challenging and frustrating times of need.  While this commencement exercise is an acknowledgement of completion, we’re also on the precipice of finding our place, doing the work, and making our mark....

Today is about us, the graduates, which is great, but honestly, let’s enjoy the accolades here and now, because tomorrow will be about service. It will be about discovering what’s needed in our respective communities, taking a look around, and providing common sense, practical, proactive knowledge and support in just about every facet of personal and professional life. While it’s impressive to some that we’ve graduated and are JD’s, the mandate now is to operate, not only with knowledge, but with **common sense**. No matter where we are in the hierarchy of life, there is always someone to learn from... and someone to teach... **NOT ONE OF US** can claim to know everything (**If you had a particularly knowledgeable professor, you can say**).... not even \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**And wait for the laugh**). Our effectiveness and success as attorneys will come through practice, listening, maintaining open minds, and continuing to learn. While the legendary Anonymous teaches us, “I don’t know what I don’t know,” it is believed that Arnold Palmer said, “The more I practice, the luckier I get...” Somewhere in between, we discover the balance of life .... and the practice of **law**.

To paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes, “People have to live with themselves and they should see to it that they always have good company.” While ultimately, we travel our own life path with our gut, our heart, and our inner conscience as our greatest companions, we receive immeasurable support from others along the way.... on behalf of my fellow graduates and colleagues, I want to acknowledge the family members, the friends, the teachers, and even the adversaries, that have provided encouragement... strength.... opportunity... and pause... all of which indelibly contributed and continues to fuel, who we are and what we have become.... Alfred Lord Tennyson said, “I am part of all that I have met.” ... I say it’s all a gift... thank you all for your support and lessons and examples you’ve so generously shared. It’s an honor to be here, to know you, and to go forth and contribute. Thank you all!