**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**GREG EDINGER**

Hello everyone and welcome to the 2021 commencement exercises for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Career and Technical High School. **WOW**! What a year it’s been!!! ... And while most of you .... students, that is... entered this program four years ago and were confident that you would discover and explore interests and learn useable, sustainable, marketable skills for your chosen career paths, I think it’s safe to say that **ALL** of us.... including parents, teachers, colleagues, and distinguished guests, learned so much more, especially over the past several months. We learned that our regular, normal, daily routines and expectations can be upended in less than a moment’s notice. We learned that we are strivers and survivors. We learned to be prepared, and that we have capabilities to adapt that are far greater than we could possibly have anticipated. We learned that what we thought might have been insurmountable tests in the past can be placed in perspective when measured against managing our lives in a global and local crisis that affects all of us. Mostly we learned that, no matter how awkward or uncomfortable it might be to hang on to our hopes, dreams, and goals, it **IS** possible to work towards and **achieve** those goals, even in the most challenging of situations. How do I know that? Because we are all here, together, celebrating completion and the achievements of this graduating class.... It’s a class that clearly is made up of students who demonstrate determination, dedication, and the will to work through whatever is placed before them....and **THAT** is an incredible accomplishment. Congratulations, graduates!!! You’ve earned your diplomas, you’re moving on to your chosen paths and careers, and you take with you a unique set of valuable life lessons.... your technical, professional foundational education and your **BONUS** grit!!

The American philosopher, Eric Hoffer, said, “In a time of drastic change, it is the **learners** who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.” I think we can see that you, our graduates, as learners, possess what it takes to survive through whatever is presented. The future **DOES** belong to those who understand the power and importance of learning, adapting, and implementing sustainable practices in order to grow into and through, the future. There are no guarantees in life and there is nothing written that tells us life will “always be what we expect.” At no time in life is it ever okay to say, “I know enough,” because honestly, we never will. It’s very clear that the world keeps changing and evolving, rapidly and unpredictably, and while we all honor and respect traditions and ways of life we learned to love and appreciate in the past, growing into the future is even more important. This past year, each one of you graduates defied the odds. You triumphed over adverse and unusual conditions. You dug in your heels and showed your determination to achieve a goal - to be here today. While I think it is probably a stretch to say that the pandemic was a “gift,” it certainly forced opened our minds, causing us to think and act in new and creative ways about “how to get ‘it’ done.”

Now that we’ve lived through this period... so far... and though we don’t know how long conditions and restrictions may continue, it will forever be a part of our lives and our human history. Your educational experience and the lessons learned here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will also always be a part of your personal and professional stories. Be very proud of that!! You made the choice to come to this Career Tech program and to learn from it and apply those lessons to your future adventures. You’ve earned your foundations and you’ve learned even more, getting practical glimpses of what your future careers might look like. In the process, you learned to hone your goals and clarify your dreams. It is our intention for each one of you that the education you gained here not only opens your eyes and minds, but also opens the doors to even bigger dreams and goals, achievable through more study and practical application of what you’ve learned. Remember the quote I gave you a few minutes ago? To sum it up, it’s one thing to be “learned....” to be considered to have an education, to have “book knowledge.” It’s another, greater purpose to be a “learner,” one whose thoughts, thirst for knowledge, curiosity, and desire for expanded experience, will find the most fulfillment in life.... no matter the challenges and circumstances one might find. We all know how important it is to upgrade operating systems in our technology.... I’m pretty sure **none** of us wants to be operating in a 2.0 system when the rest of the people around us are up to 14.2.2 operating systems!!! **BOY**!! Would **THAT** get frustrating!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Graduates, in conclusion, I, along with your teachers, administrators, parents, families, and friends, want to extend congratulations to you for getting to this rung in the ladder of your lives. At times, that ladder may have gotten shaky, but you held on. You persevered. You determined your goals and kept on the path to this point. This is just the beginning. Please leave here today aware and confident of the skills you possess and the knowledge and experience your will seek out and achieve in the future. And as you go forward, remember to take a look back every so often, to see what you’ve been through, how you’ve grown, where you intend to take your experience, and to whom you will extend a hand to teach.... and to learn.... from those who enter your lives.

Congratulations again, and thank you all!!