**Akinci Speech [EZ Speech No. 16401]**

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Graduation address by Dean Fevzi Akinci to the 2017 graduating class of the John G. Rangos School of Health Sciences.

president gormley . . . faculty and staff . . . parents, family and friends . . . honored guests:

i feel both priviledged and honored to have been asked to address the 2017 graduating class here today, especially since i’ve been dean of the rangos school for only a couple of months now. but as i noted in my first address as dean, i continue to be awfully impressed by the quality of our marvelous faculty and the world-class education for which they’ve become justly famous in the health sciences field. and as for you graduating seniors, i’m so very impressed with the dedication and energy you’ve brought to your studies here at duqusene. i’m proud to be associated with such an outstanding group of scholars!

now i know that it’s traditional for a commencement speaker to inflict upon his or her audience a few pearls of wisdom about how to lead a worthwhile and productive life. well . . . i’m not sure how much wisdom fevzi akinci can bestow on anyone. But i *have* had wonderfully diverse life, i’ve seen a great deal of this world, and i’ve met an enormous number of wonderful and interesting people who, even today, are part of my professional network. and as I traveled my somewhat circuitous route through [no.] years of education at [no.] of schools, and [no.] more years of experience in [no.] professional posts, i think that i’ve gained, if not wisdom, then certainly a great deal of useful and practical knowledge. and if you’ll alow me, I’d like to share some of that knowledge with you here today.

now, if I had to identify the single most important thing i’ve learned — from my own life and that of others — is that one cannot succeed in one’s education or in one’s professional life without the help of others. if you read the biographies of very successful people, you’ll find that virtually every one of them credits his or her success to the help, the influence, and the guidance of a mentor. in my case, i was lucky enough to have had the help, support, and guidance of two wonderful mentors.

the first was [name, title] who took me under his wing while i was a student at [name, location of school], and who urged me to improve my language skills and taught me the importance of focus and diligence. my second mentor was [name, title] at st. louis university, who — like the proverbial knight in shining armor — helped me land my first teaching post at King’s COllege in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. i’d been attending school here in the u.s. on a scholarship from the turkish government. but there were strings attached to that gift, or rather, one *big* string, and that was that, if i wanted to stay in the united states instead of going back to turkey as the terms of my scholarship stipulated, i had to pay back the entire amount of my scholarship, *plus interest!* i simply couldn’t’ve done this without my apointment at king’s college; and i couldn’t’ve got that job without the passionate advocacy of [name]. as i’m sure you’ll all learn as you go on through life, it’s good have friends in high places.

now, a mentor can be older or younger than the person being mentored, but the key aspect of the relationship is that it’s voluntary. mentors aren’t appointed or elected or even chosen. they’re volunteers. they see something — some quality, some ability — in another person that they want to nurture and develop to its fullest potential. everyone needs a mentor, but you can’t choose who your mentors might be. your mentors choose you. you’ve got to be ready and willing to accept their help. and when it’s offered, you’ve got to be both ready and willing to accept it. even more important, you’ve got to be ready and willing to express the sincerest gratitude for the support your mentor provides you. the surest way to lose a mentor is to forget to thank him or her. an attitude of gratitude goes a long, long way in this life, believe me!

another thing i’ve learned is the crucial importance of setting clear goals for yourself, and to articulate a clear plan for your life going forward. believe it or not, it was pablo picasso who once said, *“Our goals can only be reached through a plan, a plan in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.”* and as the entrepreneur and personal-developoment guru, jim rohn, warned, *“If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's. And guess what they have planned for you? Not much.”*

obviously, helping you define that plan and articulate your goals in life is one of the most important things a mentor can do for you. but i also want you to remember that there are always alternatives in life. most skills sets are transferable to other arenas, other occupa-tions. you’re almost never locked in. your choices are limited only by your physical abilities and your imagination. for the most part, you can accomplish anything you set your mind to, as long as you’re willing to take some risks — and as long as you don’t set your sights, at [your age] years of age, on becoming goalkeeper for the turkish national soccer team!

and this brings me to the third and last pearl of wisdom from my own life’s experience that i’d like to bestow upon you this [morning/afternoon/ evening]; and that is that you should never, *ever* be afraid to take risks. for as t.s. elliot said when he said, *“only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far it is possible to go.”*  my own life’s path offered me plenty of oppor-tunities to take a risk, and yes: they were scary at the time, though i must say, i’m glad i took those risks.

i’ve already mentioned, for example, the huge risk i took when i decided not to go back to turkey when my scholarship term ended and I was faced with having to pay back more than [no.] thousand dollars of debt. this was a huge risk, but needless to say, i’m glad a took it.

on another occasion, when i was teaching at washington state university back in the [decade], i was presented with a wonderful opportunity by a colleague i’d met at a professional conference. he’d just become president of a brand new university back in Turkey, and he invited me to take the post of founding dean of the school’s business school.

it was a tough choice, for i knew that this was perhaps the most challenging job i’d ever had. i knew we’d be starting from scratch. but i had no idea what “scratch” meant until i arrived to view the new campus where i’d be working: it consisted of but a single, [no.]-story building!

but we all worked hard and persevered, putting in 14- and15-hours a day, including weekends; and in time, we were able to build a world-class center of learning. ultimately, i was honored to be promoted to a provost position there. so once again, my willingness to take risk paid off.

whatever else *your* future holds, it will undoubtedly be filled BOTH with opportunities to play it safe and oppor-tunities to take some risks. i urge you to embrace the latter choice, remaining confident in the wisdom of an ancient zen saying: “leap and the net will appear.”

i wish you all the best in whatever risks you decide to take, and whatever leaps you decide to make.

thank you.

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