Thank you for that kind introduction and thank you for giving me this opportunity of speaking this afternoon.

Graduating from the NCO Academy is an important milestone in each of your careers, not only is it important to you, but also to your leadership, your friends and families in attendance today.

Colonel Williams, Colonel Dana, Chief Sharp, Group Commanders, Squadron Commanders, Chiefs, First Sergeants, Supervisors, subordinates and of course family and friends: Thank you for being here to share this milestone with class 14-3.

I know the only thing that stands between you and your certificates is me, I have only been given 5 minutes, so I will be brief. When I was asked to be your guest speaker I asked myself, what could I possible talk about that had meaning, I have been to several leadership graduation and listened to many speeches so I figured, this can’t be hard. When I finally came up with a topic, I went through the whole speech writing techniques, that you probably learned over the last six weeks. I came up with a thesis statement, created an outline and wrote the speech. I did everything by the book, I wrote multiple drafts, organized and even edited it, and the next step was to practice. And practice I did, I practiced this speech every morning and night in mirror, I practiced at work whenever I got a chance, I got so good at it, I even practiced in the car wherever I went, because we all know that practice makes……. Perfect. The only thing I needed now was an audience to practice in front of and what better audience they my wife. I sat my wife down and asked her to pretend she was just graduating from the NCO Academy and I was the guest speaker. I asked her to be honest with me in her feedback and tell what I could do to improve. I knew what the outcome would be, she would look at me and tell me how I WOW her and that I wouldn’t have to change a thing, the audience is going to love it. So I delivered my speech and it was PERFECT, I used pitch and voice inflection in all of the right places. When I finished I had big smile on my face and I was feeling confident so I asked her “babe, what did you think?” She looked at me and said………. It was BULLCRAP!......... You could have heard the wind being knocked right out of me as I deflated, the smile turned to a frown, all I could say was, you kidding right? She said, no Rich I’m being serious. I said, what was wrong with it? She said it lacked heart and meaning, it sounded canned… Well after a few days with a broken ego, I thought about what she said and as usual, she was right. What my wife did, was provide me honest feedback, though it might have been painful it was the truth, so I took her words and actually made it my topic … ALWAYS speak from the heart, be honest, and walk the walk, don’t just talk the talk.

What I mean by this is, always give everything you have to everything you do with honesty, pride, and conviction. When someone is subpar, tell them, this only leads to better production, better airmen and overall better support of the mission. If someone is a super troop, tell them, this only creates empowerment, increases morale, and overall, better supports the mission. If you live by and spend your energy cutting to the chase, you will find that this eliminates the need to go back and clean up messes that you have made by trying to skirt tough issues or decisions. We all know this is a rough time in our military, with cutbacks and early outs, but whatever your destiny, live your life open minded, honest and with your heart, be true to the mission, be true to those around you, but most importantly, be true to yourself … this will only lead to better relationships, better work environments, and overall, a better you!

So I challenge each of you here today, to give honest feedback to your subordinates and your leadership

Honest criticism is hard to take.

[Walking your talk is a great way to motivate yourself. No one likes to live a lie. Be honest with yourself, and you will find the motivation to do what you advise others to do.](http://www.searchquotes.com/quotation/Walking_your_talk_is_a_great_way_to_motivate_yourself._No_one_likes_to_live_a_lie._Be_honest_with_yo/7580/) [*Vince Poscente quotes*](http://www.searchquotes.com/quotes/author/Vince_Poscente/)

*A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him or her. David Brinkly.*

Congratulations and thank you.