

# Graduation Speech – Carlos Tacchetto

Good afternoon everyone.

Distinguished faculty, staff, families, friends, and most importantly, my fellow graduates.

It is truly an honor to stand here today.

Before I begin, I would like to ask for something very simple.

If you are an **international student**, or if you moved far away from home to be here today... please raise your hand for a moment.

Look around.

Now let's give these people a round of applause.

Because leaving everything behind — your family, your friends, your language, your routines, your culture — and moving to a completely different country is not easy.

You leave the comfort of everything familiar.

You enter a new system with different rules, different expectations, and often a lot of uncertainty.

And lately, the immigration landscape has made that journey even more complicated.

So to every international student here today:  
your presence in this room represents a daily act of courage.

You didn't just pursue a degree.

You pursued a **possibility**.

And that deserves recognition.

— — — — —

When I moved to the United States from Italy, I arrived in New York with two suitcases and... almost zero connections.

I didn't know anyone.

No network.

No family here.

No clear roadmap.

Just curiosity, ambition, and a lot of questions.

And if I'm honest with you, for a while I felt... lost.

Not because I didn't want to work hard.

But because I didn't know **where to channel all that energy**.

I've always been what I call a **generalist**.

I was never the person who was clearly the best at one specific thing.

Some people know exactly what they want to do since they are 16.

That was never me.

I was curious about **many things** — marketing, technology, negotiation, business, people.

But curiosity has a downside.

When you are interested in everything...  
it's hard to understand **where to go next**.

So when I arrived in New York, I did the only thing I could think of.

I started **showing up**.

To events.

To talks.

To meetups.

To networking events.

To coffee chats.

I messaged people on LinkedIn.

A lot of people.

Sometimes they replied.

Sometimes they didn't.

But slowly something started happening.

Every conversation opened a tiny window into a world I previously knew nothing about.

Every event exposed me to new industries, new ideas, new ways of thinking.

But at the same time, I realized something else.

Entering a completely new ecosystem is incredibly difficult.

You don't know where to start.

You don't know which events matter.

You don't know which people to reach out to.

You don't know how the system works.

You are basically trying to **learn the map while already inside the maze.**

And that process can take years.

— — — — —

Then something interesting started happening.

People would ask me a simple question.

"Carlos, how did you start meeting all these people?"

And I would tell them the truth.

"I just kept showing up."

But I also realized something deeper.

The **speed of your learning** in a new environment is often determined by **who you meet early on.**

Because **people are shortcuts to knowledge.**

A conversation can save you months of confusion.

A connection can open a door you didn't even know existed.

And this made me think about something.

What if there was a way to **accelerate that immersion?**

What if there was a structured way for young professionals from around the world to come to New York and quickly understand how the ecosystem works?

To meet founders.

To meet operators.

To meet investors.

To visit companies.

To exchange ideas.

To ask questions.

To build relationships.

To compress **years of exploration into one intense experience.**

And that idea eventually became the **New York Business Fellowship.**

— — — — —

But the story of how that started is also a story about something else.

The **power of random connections.**

Because the person who eventually became my co-founder...

I met him **by chance.**

At a networking event.

One of the many events I randomly decided to attend during my first months in New York.

If I hadn't gone to that event...

If I had stayed home that night...

If I had arrived 10 minutes later...

If we had stood in a different part of the room...

This entire project probably wouldn't exist.

And this happens more often than we realize.

Some of the most important opportunities in our lives come from **moments that feel completely ordinary when they happen.**

A conversation.

A coffee.

A random introduction.

A seat next to someone on a plane.

A message you almost didn't send.

You never know **which interaction will change your direction.**

That's why one of the biggest lessons I've learned is this:

**Opportunities are born from people.**

My parents used to say something similar when I was growing up.

One of their favorite phrases was:

"A smile opens a million doors."

And the older I get, the more I realize how true that is.

Not because smiling magically creates opportunities.

But because it **opens conversations.**

And conversations create **relationships.**

And relationships create **possibilities.**

— — — — —

Now, when people apply to the New York Business Fellowship, they often ask me during the interviews:

"Why did you decide to build something like this?"

And my answer is always the same.

Because I remember what it felt like to arrive in a new place with **no map.**

I remember the confusion.

The uncertainty.

The feeling of trying to figure everything out alone.

And if we could create a program that helps even a few people **accelerate that journey**, then it would be worth it.

— — — — —

But today I want to talk about something even deeper.

Because behind every project, every career path, every decision we make... there is often a hidden question.

A question many of us ask ourselves quietly.

"What am I supposed to do with my life?"

Maybe some of you have a clear answer.

But many people don't.

And that's okay.

Because the truth is... most people **never fully figure it out**.

And that's not a failure.

That's reality.

For a long time I thought the goal was to **find the perfect answer**.

The perfect career.

The perfect direction.

The perfect long-term plan.

But life rarely works like that.

Even if you think you found the answer today...

There's a very high probability that in five years you will change your mind.

Or discover something new.

Or want something different.

So maybe the question "**What will I do for the rest of my life?**" is actually the wrong question.

It's too big.

Too abstract.

Too impossible to answer.

A better question might be much simpler.

"What is the next step I want to take in the next three or six months?"

That's it.

Just the next step.

Because clarity doesn't usually appear **before** you move.

Clarity appears **after** you move.

— — — — —

This brings me to the final thought I want to leave you with today.

Imagine a miner digging a tunnel through a mountain.

Every day they dig.

And dig.

And dig.

But while they are inside that tunnel... everything looks the same.

Dark.

Dusty.

Uncertain.

They can't see the outside.

They can't see the final result.

From their perspective, it's impossible to know exactly **how close they are to the exit.**

Maybe the light is just a few meters away.

Or maybe it's still very far.

They simply don't know.

And life often feels exactly like that.

We are digging.

Studying.

Working.

Trying.

Winning or Learning.

And sometimes it feels like we are doing all of that **without seeing the light yet**.

And when that happens, we start asking ourselves questions like:

"When will I finally feel successful?"

"When will I finally be happy?"

"When will everything make sense?"

But those questions assume something dangerous.

They assume that happiness is waiting **at the end of the tunnel**.

After all the digging.

After all the effort.

After everything is finally figured out.

But what if that's the wrong way to look at it?

Because the reality is... life is mostly **digging**.

There will always be another tunnel.

Another challenge.

Another unknown.

So maybe the goal is not to eliminate the uncertainty.

Maybe the goal is to **learn how to enjoy the digging.**

And that's not easy.

But it might be one of the most important skills we can develop.

Because in a world where so much is unpredictable...

The only things truly under our control are:

Our mindset.

Our reactions.

Our willingness to keep moving forward.

— — — — —

So if you are feeling lost sometimes...

If you don't have everything figured out...

If the tunnel still looks dark...

That's normal.

It doesn't mean you are on the wrong path.

It simply means you are **still digging.**

And sometimes, the breakthrough happens right after the moment when you almost stopped.

— — — — —

As we leave this university and start the next chapter of our lives, I wish you to remember three simple things.

First:

**Keep showing up.**

You never know which room, conversation, or person might change your direction.

Second:

**Focus on the next step, not the entire map.**

Clarity comes from movement.

And third:

If life is mostly digging...

**find a way to enjoy the digging.**

Because the process itself is where most of life happens.

— — — — —

Congratulations to all of you.

To your families.

And to everyone who supported you along the way.

The tunnel ahead might still be long.

But today we celebrate how far we have already dug.

Thank you.