

May 24, 2019

Lisle Commencement

Thank you, Mr. Howard. Thank you, the board members, teachers, alumni, and friends for inviting me to this year's graduation ceremony. It is truly my honor to be here with you today.

To the Class of 2019 and their family members, my sincere congratulations. I was in your shoes 45 years ago. Excited about going to college and dreaming about my future. At the same time, fearful of facing the ruthlessly competitive world. It was the same feeling that I had just about 4 years before. As a 13-year old Korean boy adopted by the Epsteins of Lisle, with full of hope and expectation of American life combined with the fear and uncertainty of a new beginning.

Right after the Thanksgiving holidays in 1970, just a few days after I had arrived in Lisle, I walked into the halls of Lisle High School, currently the junior high school building. Although I could not speak any English, my Mom wanted me to start in the 9th grade. Mr. Doolen, the counselor at that time asked Mr. James, a math teacher, to join the meeting to test my math skill. I passed the math test, and I was allowed to start as a 9th grader. On my first school day, I was completely lost. Everything was new and strange to me - changing classroom between the periods, the fact that the school had its own indoor gym with hot showers, cafeteria, and my own locker. I also remember my first lunch period. After getting my food, I did not know what to do. The moment I walked into the dining area, all of sudden everyone stopped talking to each other and then there was a deafening silence in the room. Quickly, a number of students -- later I learned that they were my freshmen classmates -- came to my rescue and invited me to join their table. That was the beginning of my journey in America.

Four years later, when I graduated from Lisle, I wanted to become a medical doctor. Instead, I became an investment banker. I did not know much about banking industry until I was in my senior year in college. It took me three years

into college to realize that the medical field was not right for me. I could not stand the sight of blood. So, I dropped out of University of Chicago in the middle of my third year, and then moved to Los Angeles. To initially support myself, I took a part-time bank teller job. I then found out that it was almost impossible to get into a full-time management position as a college drop out. So, I returned to college and graduated from USC. Upon my graduation, with my former branch manager's recommendation, I got into the management training program of the bank. Soon, I learned that the fastest growing area of the bank in the early 80s was in International Division. I asked my training officer whether I could be assigned to that division upon completion of my training program. Well, I was told that the only way I could even be considered for an international division position was to obtain an MBA degree. I got frustrated and annoyed that life had so many obstacles and hurdles in store for me. I resigned from the bank a year later to work on my MBA degree at UCLA. Subsequently, at the age of 27, just ten years after graduating from the high school, I became head of the bank's Jakarta Office in Indonesia. It was physically and mentally far, far away from where I thought I would be.

After this Summer, many of you will go to colleges or find work. Some of you may choose to take a year off to give yourself a break. Regardless of what you do and whether you know or don't know what you would like to do in the future, one thing that is true even today for any high school graduates: the enthusiasm about your future. Go after your future with vigor and vitality regardless of any fear of uncertainty. Tomorrow represents uncertainty. The things that are "certain" belong to the past; there is nothing anyone can do about yesterday. Today's world is changing faster, becoming smaller and more competitive than ever before. This also means increased uncertainty about the future for today's young people.

My dear graduates, as an accidental investment banker, I would like to encourage you to embrace and cherish the feelings of uncertainty, and turn those uncertain and fearful feelings into the energy of hope and endless possibilities. Don't push away any unexpected or unfamiliar opportunities when they come to you. Instead be ready to proactively explore those opportunities so that you can reach your new heights. Make mistakes. Just make sure that you don't repeat the same ones. Don't lose hope either, and keep up the spirit of youth as the world

looks to you for the enthusiasm that inspires, the fire that starts, and dreams that produces. That spirit of youth will make you vital and crucial contributors to our troubling society today. Life is a journey and it is your turn now to live your life with depth and breadth, and with a fiery passion and courage. And, when you do that, remember those who made today possible for you - your parents and teachers.

I would like to close my remarks with a quote of Hillel the Elder, a Jewish religious leader, who lived about 2,100 years ago.

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

If I am only for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

Once again, my heartiest congratulations to the Class of 2019. God bless and best of luck to you all. Thank you.

Hobart L. Epstein '74