

On the Cusp of Life's Journey: Lessons for a Digital Generation

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Thank you, Dean Thorpe. Thank you very much for your kind words.

Graduates, Families, Faculty, Friends – it is such an honor to be with all of you today. And it is a thrill to stand here and look at this class of bright young men and women about to step into the world, prepared intellectually and emotionally to change it.

It is hard for me to imagine Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar without Chuck as its Dean. I greatly value the friendship we have developed since you first arrived here in Doha, and while I am sad to see you go, I know that you have built an enduring foundation for this fine institution that will allow it to continue to thrive for many years to come.

I thank you for all your amazing contributions to Education City and to Qatar and am certain that all the students you have touched here are also eternally grateful. I wish you the very best in all future endeavors and hope you will come back to visit us often.

A commencement ceremony is an interesting paradox. On one hand, we are here to acknowledge and celebrate all that you have accomplished in your academic endeavors. But the word commencement means beginning—it means taking what you've accomplished so far and using it to start all over again. Your family, friends, our nation, and the world needs and expects this of you. Now is when you start to put your knowledge to use.

Graduates there are three things that you should know about this real world, the fact that there are plenty of challenges, the fact that dreams are important, and the fact that we all have the opportunity to achieve our goals.

Let me start with the challenges.

I know you've just finished your exams and you think all the difficulties are over. But they're not. Life is filled with bumps and obstacles; now more than ever.

When I was your age our **world was less controversial, less polluted and less connected.** Our generation has let you down; we have left you a world that is far worse and much more vulnerable than the one we inherited from our own parents; we've given you more complex issues to deal with, but we've also given you **more connectivity** to help you deal with them.

While we had our own conflicts back in the seventies, the conflicts of today are of a different kind. Instead of the more clear wars of our generation, we've mixed things up and given you a war of cultures and of civilizations.

At the same time not only are we having conflicts of ideas, we are also battling the planet that supports us. The environment is collapsing under the weight of our inefficient production system.

When I was your age, we were told that the global temperatures were rising but my generation chose to do nothing about it. Last year in Copenhagen, climate scientists told us sea levels are rising, our forested areas are declining and global temperature will rise 5°C or more by the end of the century; **your generation will have to do something about it.**

At the same time though, we've also left you the tools to help address these challenges.

You live in an era where digital tools have made subtle differences in the way you learn, the way you communicate, the way you experience the world around you.

At your age, I could not have dreamed of your facility with technology and your sense of connectedness with your peers—both the friends with whom you are graduating today, and the people around the world who share your interests and experiences, though you may never have met.

In the midst of this digital age, all of these ideas and all of this connectivity, you might start to feel lost. Values that seemed immutable have begun to shift. The sense of tradition that was once par-a-mount in our region is less crucial to the way we work today. People will start giving you advice on everything and you will soon learn that dedication and perseverance are no longer enough. You will have to combine these two characteristics with a keen sense of insight to ensure that your hard work is being channeled in a way that will make a difference. And I believe that you have not only the potential but the obligation to make a difference in the world around you.

But where does this insight come from? Please do not limit yourself to what other think about you, **follow your heart and intuition** as Steve Jobs said “the only way to do great work is to love what you do If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle until you find it”

This is the power of dreams. As you set out on your lifelong journey, my hope for each of you is that you look deep inside and identify your dream – that unique goal, ambition, aspiration, that motivates and directs you. When you follow your dream, what you do becomes inseparable from who you are. Your profession and your person become seamless, work doesn't feel like drudgery, and you can make great things happen.

And don't be afraid to dream. Paul Hawken said, “The most unrealistic person in the world is the cynic, not the dreamer” **So be dreamers, take this generation and refuse to let it be the way it is.**

This is where the opportunity lies. Now, more than ever, what we need is ethical, smart leadership. In every corner of the world, great leaders are people that are not only knowledgeable; but are also deeply committed to a cause. These people create change because their drive to make a difference is unwavering.

That is what we need from you – stead-fast dedication.

What does this mean? Let me share a story with you. In March of last year a talented young man came to my office and shared with me his concerns about the challenges people with disabilities face in our region. This young man, who is disabled himself, didn't just come to my office to complain or talk; he came with a dream to make a difference. He had heard about ictQATAR's plans of connecting people with disabilities to the technologies that could enrich their lives and he shared his dream to create a center for assistive technologies in Qatar. A center that would help to *make* access to ICT technologies and the knowledge economy a fundamental right for people with special needs.

This young man's dream was only the beginning though. Working steadfastly on achieving this dream along with a talented team from ictQATAR and other local organizations, he helped turn his dream from a concept to a reality. He visited models around the world, helped shaped the strategy and form concrete programs, engaged regional and international partners and helped to hire staff and even localized the technology.

Last week I visited the newly opened Mada Center and was overcome with emotions at had been accomplished and how it all started with the willingness to dream and then to act. We now have a center that provides new hope to people with disabilities, offering advice, resources, information, assessments, and training on all aspects of assistive technology. This is amazing.

This young man, Anibrán, is a CMU-Qatar graduate **just like all of you** and today he is making a difference by channeling his hard work and energy towards achieving his dreams. Thank you CMU for helping your graduate not only dream but to have the **dedication and passion to become part of the solution to the problems, and literally improve lives, save lives, and perhaps save the world.**

You will become the people we've been waiting for.

Today I wish you Godspeed. Go boldly on your journey. You have too much to offer to be anything less than courageous.

I know Dean Thorpe will be watching all of you

As for the rest of us, we stand here beside you with pride in what you have achieved, and what you will achieve in your very bright future.