

Thank you, President Hall, trustees, deans, and members of the faculty, staff, family, and friends and especially the class of 2018. It is an honor and privilege to be here before you today. I recall the time that I too once sat at my own graduation at the University of Arizona. I listened to my commencement speaker with much trepidation and excitement of what my future could hold. As a mother of three and working full-time, going to school was a constant challenge. It was not easy, but I persisted and I arrived. However, I could not achieve my first milestone without the help of my husband, family, friends, and colleagues and most importantly the faculty who encouraged me to persist. If you have someone in your life that provided you support, be sure to thank him or her. We really don't thank people enough in this day and age.

Life may have already placed many barriers in your way to arrive at this point in your lives. Whether you are a veteran returning home and trying to transition back to civilian life, a

single parent, grandparent raising children, aunts, or uncles helping a family member with life issues, drugs, alcohol, loss of employment or just trying find your purpose in life. The point is LIFE is not easy and many of you did not fall into the entitlement trap and accept a victim mentality. Instead, you persisted and drudged through the challenges and you are here today achieving this milestone! In my lifetime, I too had many challenges. For one, I was never supposed to go to college. My high school counselor guided me through the track “get skills girl” so when you graduate you can get a job and so I did. I was told if I work hard it was going to pay off. No one prepared me for economics and profit and loss. I worked in three different industries that experienced three different layoffs. When companies did not manage their funds well in order to balance their budget, employees were the first to go. I was fortunate in that I was never laid off, as I had several things going for me; I was young, low paid, and had a strong work ethic. However, what I

recognized is that for the people who did not have an education, it took them quite a long time to bounce back. I then realized that education was the key and I had to go back to acquire more skills and knowledge. The power of learning does transform lives and I thank God it did mine.

As I began to learn about WBU, I was drawn to the Hashtag #BETHESOLUTION! I LOVE THIS! This could and should be the motto on a national level. Some of our leaders have lost their way and as a nation, we are in a time of divisiveness, there are many social issues making headlines every day, some implicating that it is okay to treat people unjustly, even children. As a country, our values and foundations are under fire and the world is watching. During these times it can be difficult to understand how you make a difference and I say YES you can! Wayland has prepared you to think critically, which is necessary to solve these big problems, but the key is “part of the solution.” I remind you that over 240 years ago, 56 men bravely signed a resolution that changed this country

forever, the “Declaration of Independence.” They were of different beliefs and philosophies, but together they worked on a plan and developed a solution. Was it is perfect? No, but they made a difference and today you sit here as part of their legacy! You are the American Dream, so go out there and be great!

I know that being part of the solution is often hard work. My advice for you is to take it one step at a time. When I begin to waffle and overthink situations, that maybe it is too much or I become overwhelmed, I ask myself, “am I making a difference?” and then I read the Parable of the Starfish. For those of you that have not heard this story, let me share it and for those of you that have, please humor me.

One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, "I'm saving these starfish, Sir".

The old man chuckled aloud, "Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, and said, "I made a difference to that one!"

I would like to think that once the man heard the response that he too would have begun to help and throw starfish back into the ocean, but we will never know, we can only hope!

The point is each of you has the power to make a difference in at least one life! If I can help one person on a daily basis and not cause harm, I define that as a success! People will remember your actions, not your accumulation of wealth. In history, I cannot tell you who was the richest person or what they owned, but I do remember the people that touch the world and made a difference, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King just to

name a few. Each of these individuals found their passion and made a difference.

So what are the next steps? For some of you, it may be to take a job to pay the “Rent,” for others, to find their purpose here on this earth. At the end of the day, society will try to dictate what should be valued and what defines success, big house, big car or accumulation of wealth. I say to you today that you DEFINE your success! Also, let me offer this piece of sage advice. Do not fall into the trap of debt; let me begin with a story. I had a job where a project was transferred to me that was in quite disarray.

Although we made several adjustments, the project was too far off alignment and therefore suffered large losses. I was asked by my mid-manager to change some numbers so that it seemed the project balance sheet would show a profit instead of a large loss!

This was extremely unethical, as she also asked that I present those numbers to the president. Now you have to know I was young, 3 children, mortgage, car payment what to do? Anyone

who knows me knows that Integrity is very important to me. So I said, “NO”. She then rephrased her request, “change the numbers and I will present to the President,” and I said “NO”. Here is the report as it stands, I have no problem going to the president and telling her what went wrong and the solutions that need to be put in place to turn the project around. Well, she changed the numbers, presented the data and of course informed the President that I had authored the report. “WOW!” right? I submitted my resignation that day without another job offer to fall back on. However, this could not have been possible without several things in my life. First, I managed my debt and I had six months of savings, so this allowed me the freedom to walk away and avoid the pressure of debt forcing a decision that went against my spiritual wellness. Debt has become a way of life in this country; however, I had remembered in the back of my mind hearing the saying “big hat, no cattle” so I was forewarned you do not want to be that person! This information does not say don’t

buy that house or car, the point of this message is to have that nest egg so you will never be backed into a corner. Now, I am sure you are probably wondering, "Why did I not go to the president, myself, and tell her the truth? If you think about it, I was a first level manager and my supervisor was two grades higher. I imagined it was going to turn into a battle and after pondering my work-life balance, I realized working in this department was not for me. Although I was good at what I did, I did not find the joy in the work. Therefore, I really have to thank her as it forced me to reflect on what I was doing. But don't worry the truth came out, the manager was dealt with and in the end, I found a job within a week of my resignation with better pay, closer to home and where I could make a difference. My new job was working in financial aid and that is where I found my joy, very simply helping people realize their dreams and impacting their families' economic status and changing lives. Finding your passion can give you the best joy, more so than any designer



purses or luxury home. Do not get me wrong, money and things are nice, but it is not everything. Solving problems, making a difference was so much more rewarding for me. Grandma Moses, in the winter of her life, devoted to painting and at age 78 found success. She wrote her memories at 92! So find your passion, it is never too late!

As each of you moves forward on your next journey, it is important that each of you define success for yourself. It is also important to keep balance in your mind, body, and spirit and reflect on your choices. I reflect on those areas a lot, what is nurturing my mind? I often ask myself, "What am I watching on TV or what am I reading"? I shake my head and think is this adding value to my life or expanding my thoughts? I often will change the channel or put a book down and move on. This is not a battle; however, we all have some battles to overcome. Persist and you can overcome anything. Spiritual well-being is also critical and you need to take time to nurture it. When you have a

strong spirit, you are less likely to make a decision at the cost of your integrity. NEVER give up your integrity! It will be important as you define your success to reflect upon your challenges, develop a plan, and find time to recalibrate when necessary. Stop and ask yourself, “How are you living?” Each of these areas takes work! In order to have a good relationship, it takes work. You have to put in the time! As I begin to close, I pray that this last bit of information will be helpful. Stay away from NEGATIVE People or things! I know some of these people will be your relatives, a close friend or colleagues. They will suck the energy out of you! Quit giving them your time! Spend more time with people or activities that bring you joy and cultivate your passion! I know that the class of 2018 will be part of the solution and make this world a better place; I look forward to the legacies you will all leave and create! Good Luck and Godspeed and “Be the solution!”

Congratulations to the class of 2018!