

Pennsylvania State University
Harrisburg Campus
Fall 2017 Commencement Remarks

Good morning and thank you Dr Kulkarni for inviting me here to speak on this momentous occasion, and thank you Penn State faculty and staff for dedicating your skills and talents to help these students and many others fulfill their educational dreams. I know for me, the faculty of Penn State Harrisburg helped to give me the foundation for whom I am today. Because like you graduates, I am a proud Penn State Harrisburg alumni.

Graduates, parents, relatives, and friends, today is a day like no other, today is the fall class of 2017's day. Some of you are the first in your family to graduate from college, others are continuing the family legacy of being a Penn State graduate, and for many, you're fulfilling an expectation laid out for you by your parents. Some of you travelled thousands of miles to attend this institution to fulfill your educational dream and for others, you're here because it gives you the flexibility to stay at home while obtaining an excellent education. Whatever the reason that got you here one thing that

you all have in common is that you had to work hard to be sitting here today as a graduate, and for that, we all salute you!!!!

Graduates - your parents, spouses, relatives and friends are extremely proud of you. They have been your biggest cheerleaders and encouragers throughout this phase of your lives. These people are major contributors to helping you get to where you are today, so don't forget to thank them. For them and you, this is one major goal fulfilled. Now the question is what are you going to do with this education? Penn State has given you the foundation to move forward to be or do anything in life, but the decision of who you become and what your contributions to society will be is totally up to you. Today is truly the first day of the rest of your lives, so now what's next?

My role today is to help you think about your tomorrows, to help inspire you. However, I also know that I stand between you getting your diplomas and continuing with your celebration, so I promise not to be long.

When Dr Kulkarni asked me to speak today he said he was inspired by my story and wanted me to share it with you today. I can honestly say I never thought my journey would lead me to be a university commencement speaker. My life's journey wasn't about striving for recognition or titles, or how much money I could earn, or the awards I might receive. I've been driven by what difference I could make within my sphere of influence to make things better for others. My life's journey reflects what **Arthur Ashe** once said, **"Success is a journey not a destination: the doing is often more important than the outcome"**.

As my biography in your program indicates, I have had the opportunity to work in government, the for profit and not for profit sectors, and to be an entrepreneur. I had no idea my life's journey would give me that breadth of experience, but when the opportunities were presented to me I accepted the challenges of each position and absorbed all I could from that experience. Each opportunity built on the other – such that people recognized my work and that opened doors to new more challenging opportunities.

As you begin or continue along your career paths will you be open to new opportunities and challenges that come your way? Are you willing to put in the time and commitment it takes for you to reach your full potential at each step of your career path? These are decisions that each of you will have to make over the upcoming years.

I recently read the book Essentialism, the Disciplined Pursuit of Less by Greg McGowan. In this book Greg discusses the importance of finding your passion and not getting distracted by things that are not essential in your life. For me, it took about 30 years to really find my career passion, and that's with Hamilton Health Center, where I'm employed today. I realize that each of my other positions and opportunities were preparing me for where I am today and for what lies in store for me in the future.

If you would indulge me for a few more minutes, I'd like to share with you my journey with Hamilton Health Center and how my experience relates to what I've just espoused to you.

I first started with Hamilton Health Center as a volunteer Board member in the late 1990s. In the summer of 2000 the board asked me to step down to become the interim CEO of the corporation. By this time in my career, my husband and I were running a successful not-for-profit business that he and I started. I had already completed a successful 20 plus year career in state government culminating in a cabinet level position with the Governor of Pennsylvania and I had also worked for a successful woman owned business consulting with state governments around the country. So why would I gamble my reputation on taking a position with a community-based company that had a financial deficit of two million dollars? Everyone advised me not to take the position, it was too risky, it would ruin my reputation, they said. But I accepted the position anyway. Why? Because I was willing to take a risk for something I strongly believed in, which was that basic health care should be available and accessible to **All** people, not just some of the people and this organization's mission, which was to provide quality medical, dental, behavioral and social services to people regardless of their income, insurance or economic status embodied this. As Mohammad Ali once said, "**He who is not courageous enough to take risk will accomplish nothing in life**".

Fast forward 17 years to today, Hamilton is now a very successful corporation that has overcome some major hurdles. We completed a 23-million-dollar capital project in 2015 that has expanded access to medical, dental, behavioral health and social services to over 30,000 individuals in the Capital Region and employs over 250 people. We have grown to over a 20-million-dollar company that continues to be financially sound, but getting to where we are today has not been without its challenges. When we initiated our capital project in 2012, the plan was to convert a boarded up 67,000 square foot building in the center of the City of Harrisburg into a state of the art medical mall. Although we had been successful in turning the company around financially, and were showing growth year over year, leaders in the community felt that a community-based organization like Hamilton wasn't able to take on such a ambitious project. Scale back the project people advised. How will you finance this, others questioned? Finding people to believe in the vision in the beginning was almost impossible. Admittedly it would have been much easier to have changed course and plan for a much smaller less ambitious project, but I refused to do so. I convinced my Board

of Directors to stick with the plan. I also convinced a local bank to provide loan financing for our project, and we used our knowledge of government financing to secure local, county, and state grants to amass the 16 million dollars needed for phase one of the project. I had truly found my passion working at Hamilton and I was determined to fulfill the vision I believe God gave me of providing a place where people could receive quality health care, feel respected and welcomed, and, create an environment where we would become an employer of choice for people in the health care field.

As you progress in your career will you be willing to step out and go against the advice of others for something you believe in and are passionate about or, will you remain in the “safe zone” where things are more familiar and comfortable for you and be part of the masses? Remember, it takes nothing to join the crowd, but it takes everything to stand alone.

Standing alone requires courage, determination and self-confidence especially in the face of adversity. There will be times when you will have doubts about the decisions you make in life but remember there's no such

thing as a wrong decision. We learn from our mistakes and improve. That's what all successful people will tell you and they have all experienced failure in their careers.

Fear of failure is something that is in all of us. What sets us apart is how we deal with it. We can either let the fear of failure overpower us into inaction or we can face our fears and decide to move forward. Moving forward requires us to withstand criticism from others and have faith in what we believe in. For me, it was taking a stand to improve the lives of people who are often left out of the mainstream. It wasn't a popular position to take, but time has proven that it was the **right** decision to make.

I believe that Hamilton's success in bringing our vision to fruition was three-fold; **Perseverance** because I didn't let others sway me from our goals; **Credibility**, because people knew that my word was my bond. Whether in professional or personal circles your credibility will determine whether people believe in you, it is essential to success; and **Passion**, because that enabled me to persuade others, including my own team, that our goals are

achievable. Without passion, you can't convince others to follow you as a leader. These three characteristics enabled us to realize our vision and complete our 23-million-dollar project which included raising over seven million dollars from the private sector for phase two of our project in less than one year. Remember, no one believed in our vision when we first started phase one of the project.

Hamilton continues to grow and expand today because we are serving a significant need in our community and I'm honored and privileged to be connected to such an outstanding organization. I also feel truly blessed that our success has given me the opportunity to speak to audiences like this to tell our story. I am an example of an ordinary person who dared to believe and have faith in an extraordinary vision. I am no different than any of you here today.

Some of you are already in the workforce and for others you're just getting started. Regardless, my advice to all of you is to embrace each opportunity you have and learn everything you can from the environment you are in. Find others who are willing to help you along the way and learn from them.

Find volunteer opportunities in areas where you can give of your talents but also make additional professional and social contacts. After all, you never know when some of these contacts can be beneficial to you in the future. Don't get distracted by people or things that are the constant naysayers in your life. You know, the ones that cause you to doubt yourself, or downplay your hopes and dreams.

Today is truly the first day of the rest of your lives. Yesterday is gone and your mistakes are behind you. The decision today and tomorrow is what are you going to do with this educational foundation provided by Penn State. Only you can decide, but whatever you do, I challenge you to find your passion, be true to who you are and, enjoy the journey. The opportunities for your future awaits you.

Thank you and Congratulations