

Penn State Harrisburg Commencement

W. M. Lambert

May 4, 2013

Dr. Kulkarni, members of the Board of Advisors, Penn State Trustees, and alumni, administration and faculty of Penn State Harrisburg, distinguished guests, friends and loving families, and most of all, the Penn State Harrisburg Class of 2013!

I am deeply honored to be here with you on this wonderful occasion, and it is a tremendous privilege to be addressing you today.

I did some checking, just to see how unique I needed to be as your commencement speaker today.

Did you know that the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that this year, colleges and universities are expected to award over nine hundred thousand associate's degrees; nearly two million bachelor's degrees; three-quarters of a million master's degrees; and 175,000 doctoral degrees? Combined that's 3.7 million college graduates this year, all in black caps and gowns, similar to what you're wearing today.

So consider the irony of this: Across this country on this very weekend hundreds if not thousands

of graduation ceremonies, just like this one, are taking place. Three point seven million eager-to-graduate students like you, listening to Commencement speakers like me, all gathered just like this, all dressed the same, and listening to a Commencement speaker say, "INDIVIDUALITY IS YOUR KEY TO LIFE SUCCESS!" I think there's irony in that.

Or maybe the commencement speaker is going to say something like, "THE FUTURE IS YOURS FOR THE TAKING." Or, "THE FUTURE IS WHATEVER YOU MAKE OF IT."

Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize- and Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist, editor and professor said, "...the cruel fact is that the future is not just yours for the taking. And it is not just whatever you make of it."

"The future is also what other people make of it, how other people will participate in it, and how they will impinge on your experience of it."

That, my friends, is the cruel truth. And we saw ample evil evidence of that with the tragic events in Boston just three weeks ago. Toni Morrison was more right than wrong, "It's not just about you." In some ways that does sound like a cruel truth on this particular day that IS meant to be all about YOU.

But I see the corollary to her view. The corollary is that it's about US. It is about us! This can be an exhilarating, supporting, nurturing and freeing truth. "Us": me and you, together; Your family; Your professors, together with you.

It's about you and the friends you have made here at Penn State, in this present moment, going out into the world together, starting a career, raising families, taking care of loved ones and strangers' alike -- Together.

And whether your role will be fighting fires, or fighting diseases, or doing what I'm most familiar with – running a business – it will be Together, with others who share similar values and who together hold out great hope for our future.

Class of 2013, this is your time! Your future; to go out into this world – TOGETHER – and to impart your individual thumbprint upon this world! To be "EXTRAORDINARY." You can do it; I have seen it done! And perhaps to some small degree I think I've actually done it myself. In fact, I want you say something with me:

"I – AM – EXTRAORDINARY!!"

Now you say it with me; all of you and with emphasis like you mean it!!

“I am Extraordinary!”

All together again, *“I am extraordinary.”*

Your parents and loved ones have believed it for some time. Now you have said it. Now dedicate yourself to going out into the world and showing us just how extraordinary you are.

Each one of you has that within you!!

Your mission on this day is to believe in your heart that you are Extraordinary. Maybe you are an extraordinary engineer, or an extraordinary marketer, or an extraordinary educator, or an extraordinary public affairs official. But you are and can be extraordinary.

Bono of U2 said, “The world is more malleable than you think and it’s waiting for you to hammer it into shape.” View your degree as that kind of a blunt instrument. Use it in an extraordinary way to hammer this world of ours into an extraordinary shape, leaving your extraordinary mark all over it.

YOU CAN BE EXTRAORDINARY. And I have only a few rules to being extraordinary that I have experienced over the years. I’d like to share them with you, if you’ll allow me.

Let me tell you about the time when someone told me “the secrets of success.”

When I was here at Penn State Harrisburg, I had a part time job working as a mechanic at a recreational vehicle (RV) dealership, called “The House of Camping.” There was an older mechanic, Art Davidson, who seemed to know pretty much everything there was to know about RVs -- and maybe the world. Over lunch one day as my graduation day approached and it was clear I’d be leaving this line of work, Art felt the need to impart upon me some sage advice.

He said, “Will, (that’s what he called me) I’m going to give you the four secrets of success in life. 1.) Show up. You’ll be surprised how many people simply don’t show up. 2.) Learn to type. You’ll always have a job if you learn to type. 3.) Never give away all your secrets.”

And with that Art got up from the table and walked away.

“What’s number four, Art?,” I asked. With his back still turned he said, “See #3!”

Well, I won’t be so guarded with my secrets. And they’re not the same as what Art Davidson told me.

Remember: You are Extraordinary today and you can be Extraordinary beyond today as you go into the world. By:

- 1. BEING PASSIONATE, excited and enthusiastic about what you do!**
- 2. BEING COMMITTED to what you do! Be willing to say, “I will do whatever it takes!”**
- 3. HAVING A VISION for who you want to be! And that means taking the long view, in everything you do, always.**

Remember also, that Extraordinary Performers take total responsibility for who they are, where they are, how they feel, and how they respond to situations.

I can remember my first job after graduation at Penn State. I was a design engineer for Westinghouse Air Brake Co, or WABCO as they were best known. WABCO is the world’s largest air brake provider for trains.

I was going through a six month training program. I was learning all I could possibly learn about air brake valves, pressure regulators, and flow control valves that are used on trains. Bob

Worbois was my supervisor. Bob was in his mid-60's. He was in charge of "Locomotive and Passenger Transit Test Engineering" and I was in his group for a two month rotational assignment.

In Bob's lab, which was the size of a football field, he had a 250-car train set up with all the pipes and valves and fittings and gladhands and hoses and brake systems that exist on a real train.

Bob Worbois could take newly designed valves and put them through the paces like nobody else. He could freeze them, bake them, vibrate them to death, throw salt spray at them to corrode them, pretty much anything that a complex air brake system might see in real service. If it could fail, Bob would find it's weak areas.

The people at WABCO, and the people at customers like GE Locomotive and at AMTRAK, came to all depend on Bob Worbois and his team to test the reliability of these air brake systems.

Keep in mind that stopping, and stopping SAFELY, a 250 car train that weighs up to 10,000 tons is not easy. Bob told me, "AMTRAK delivers people, but our job is to make sure they

get there safely. Lives depend on what we do, Bill.”

When we’d run full blown simulations, Bob Worbois, 60-something years old mind you, would actually don this small blue and white striped freight engineers cap before he would climb up into the area where the locomotive engineer would sit. Bob assumed the role of the train’s engineer.

Bob told me there’s nothing more important to him than making sure our air brake valves work the way they’re supposed to.

I found Bob Worbois to be so passionate and committed to his role at WABCO that he dressed the part during his lab tests. He simply exuded energy and enthusiasm for what he did. And you know what? He made it fun!! He made it exciting. Bob Warbois’ passion, commitment and excitement became contagious to a 22-year old young engineer like me! In fact everybody in the department had it!! Passion and commitment to what you are doing is contagious. Don’t be afraid to catch it!

Bob Worbois taught me to BE PASSIONATE, excited and enthusiastic about what I do! He taught me to BE COMMITTED to what I do! To be willing to say, “I will do whatever it takes!”

And I have always tried to stay true to that advice.

You will absolutely be surprised at how contagious a Passionate and Committed attitude is in the workplace if you just have the courage to show others that what you do matters, how you do it matters, and that you will do whatever it takes to be the best at what you're doing.

In addition to Passion and Commitment, I learned a lot about air valves and regulator designs while at WABCO, and I brought that knowledge to MSA as an R&D engineer. MSA, the Company I have the privilege of leading today, is one of the world's largest safety equipment and gas detection instrument companies. Our products protect people in the workplace.

My role when I joined them was to develop self-contained breathing apparatus that firefighters use. SCBA's, as they're called, are the masks and air tanks firefighters wear to give them fresh air when they're in a smoke-filled room.

For that firefighter, his SCBA delivering him fresh air on each breath is literally a matter of life and death.

By 1987 I had been promoted and was heading up two important projects for MSA. One was an innovative way to share air supplies between two firefighters. I later received a patent on it and it became an industry changing way for firefighters to keep each other safe. The other project was a complete platform change to our SCBA in order to meet tough new regulations that were coming through. It was a stressful time for me personally. Not only did I have these two important projects running, but I was starting graduate school at night and my wife and I had just had our first child.

Passion and commitment in my job meant donning firefighter turnout gear, putting on our new SCBA, getting into a fire training academy, setting up brutal fire conditions, and putting myself and our gear to the ultimate test. I did it with firefighters right alongside me, and with my other design team members alongside them.

I studied NFPA statistics and learned about how many firefighters die each year in the line of duty and for what reasons.

And it was in this crucible that I formed a vision of the type of leader I wanted to be, the type of man I would strive to become and the type of father and husband I would be.

What developed for me became a “Personal Vision Statement.”

It didn’t talk about goals in terms of when I’d get promoted, or how much money I’d make, or what title I’d have, or what kind of house I’d live in.

Rather, it described Bill Lambert in terms of a leader that grew and protected the business under his guidance; a leader that enhanced the lives of the employees that depended on my decisions; it described a man that was a father my children loved and respected and a husband that my wife has fun with and loves her life with; and lastly, it described what was critically important to me, my faith and spiritual growth.

My personal vision statement was a one-page contract with myself. And I signed it and laminated it! And I carried it with me. I referenced my “Vision for Myself” at tough times in my life and in my career, and believe me there were plenty of rough times. I came to depend on my vision statement as a kind of guardrail that would keep me straight when I was tending to veer off the path.

So, my thought for you to consider is: Take time to think about who you were yesterday, you are

today and who you are choosing to be tomorrow.

Don't be constrained by what you've done in the past, or the mistakes and errors in judgement you've made. Look forward and set a vision for yourself. Take the long view of yourself, in everything you do, always.

Today, I have the privilege of leading a strong and vibrant international Company with \$1.2 billion in sales and a market capitalization of \$1.8 billion. I have the privilege and responsibility of leading over 5,300 people in 42 countries around the world.

But it wasn't always that way; far from it.

Remember, thirty three years ago, I was a Penn State Harrisburg graduate just like you, sitting in my seat not far from where you sit today. I was excited, but nervous about what the future would hold. And there was just one person I had to lead; just one person to set direction for; just me.

That direction started with me choosing to be Extraordinary. And recognizing that extraordinary people are: 1.) Passionate in what they do; 2.) Fully Committed to it and willing to

say, “I’ll do whatever it takes;” and 3.) They Set a Vision for who they choose to be, taking the long view in everything they do, always.

My last piece of advice and counsel to you today before I leave the podium is, “Call your Mother! And call your father!” Not now, of course, later.

When I was about your age, University of Alabama legendary football coach Bear Bryant starred in this TV commercial. He was late in his career and it was after his mother had died. Bell South Telephone Company asked Bear Bryant to do a TV commercial for them. The commercial was supposed to be a short 30 second spot; pretty simple – just a little music and Coach Bryant saying in his tough southern coach’s voice, “Have you called yo’ Mama today?”

On the day of the filming, when it came time for Bear Bryant to recite his simple line, he decided to ad lib. He looked into the camera and his last line was, “Have you called yo’ Mama today? I ‘sho wish I could call mine.” That was how the commercial ran, and it got an incredible response. You can watch it on YouTube.

My mother had her first stroke when I was 20 years old and a junior here at Penn State

Harrisburg. She died a few years after I graduated. She never did get to see me do what I love doing, or see my family, or see who I've become as a man, or a leader of a \$1.8 billion Company. My father died just last year.

Your parents love you more than you will ever know. So if you take one lesson away from this talk, take this one: Call your Mama, regularly. And call your Dad, too! You will delight them in doing it, and you'll always be glad you did. I sure wish I could call mine!

Class of 2013, you have accomplished much, but you will accomplish so much more.

Be Passionate, excited and enthusiastic about what you do!

Be Committed to what you do! Be willing to say, "I will do whatever it takes!"

Set a Vision for what you do and who you want to be! Keep Learning! Keep moving forward!

And remember, Extraordinary performers Take Total Responsibility for who they are, where they are, how they feel and how they respond to situations. They take the long view, in everything they do, always!

Congratulations, and thank you very much.