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PSU-SSET COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Congratulations graduates. You've found your way across the finish line today under exceptional circumstance and you should be proud of your achievement - graduating from the greatest University in the world. In addition to celebrating your achievement, today is a day to thank the people in your lives who've supported your success. So, on your behalf, I thank your families, friends, professors, and countless others who've helped you get to this point in your life. Without the support of others, we could never achieve our greatest potential and I expect you've had significant support to reach this milestone.

I'm confident you're well prepared for the next stage of your professional and personal lives, but I was personally skeptical about my prospects when I sat in your seat over 25 years ago. If you told me then that I would be speaking at Penn State Harrisburg's School of Science, Engineering and Technology graduation at the tail end of a pandemic and practicing as an intellectual property attorney, I would have thought you absolutely crazy. That being said, I find myself here today based at least in part on my ability to adapt and change when faced with opportunities and challenges. I expect you already possess the ability to adapt and change based on your experiences over the past year.

I was an only child who grew up on a farm in Northeast Pennsylvania, the first in my family to graduate from college and was concerned about my job prospects and future when I graduated from Harrisburg. Job prospects at that time were challenging but I was excited to put my engineering education to work. Despite best efforts, I was unable to find a job. A Penn State graduate was, to my good fortune, willing to take a chance on me and I adapted and changed my plan from searching for a job to attending graduate school at Penn State in University Park. There I met one of my mentors, Dr. Renata Engel, who gave me a chance to further my engineering education and I graduated with a Master of Science degree. By the mid-90s, the job market was much improved, and I was able to find a position as an engineer in Hartford, CT working on

aircraft engines. After a year in Hartford, I was again faced with an opportunity to adapt and change.

During my time at University Park, I met my future wife, Haley. She was finishing her degree in secondary education while I was starting my career as an engineer in Hartford. We were married the summer after Haley graduated but her Pennsylvania teaching certificate provided little opportunity for teaching in Connecticut, so we adapted and changed our plan, moving back to Pennsylvania where I accepted a position as a structural engineer at Boeing Helicopter outside of Philadelphia. We had a comfortable life working and living outside of Philadelphia but after several years at Boeing, we decided to again adapt and change our plan; or more accurately, I decided to change my professional plan.

In 1999 I started law school at Temple University and through 4 years with the great patience and support of my wife, I worked as an engineer during the day and attended law school at night. I've been practicing intellectual property law ever since and have not left behind my science education from Penn State, as I continue to work with great scientists and inventors every day.

I tell my own brief story both because it's easy to talk about yourself and to provide concrete examples to a room of scientists that adapting and changing your work and life plans can have positive and successful outcomes. Don't be afraid to take chances and adapt your plans. I'll admit that I cherry picked the changes from my own life that were successful, and I've had my fair share of failures, like starting an engineering PhD program before law school that fizzled. But by and large, my experience with adapting and changing my work or life plan has been positive and you're uniquely positioned to make similar adjustments after living through a tumultuous senior year.

Congratulations again. I wish you all the best of luck in your future and urge you to grind toward your goals but know that adapting and changing your plan can bring great rewards. You've been uniquely prepared for where you're headed, even if you ultimately end-up somewhere unexpected.

