

Thank you so much for that kind introduction. Welcome Graduates, families, Faculty and Honored guests. I am very humbled to join you on this momentous occasion of celebrating your graduation from Penn State Harrisburg. I still fondly remember my own graduation day from Penn State Harrisburg, although it was at a much smaller venue with a much smaller audience! I can tell you that my degree set the stage for the rest of my career!

This is a day you won't forget, for many reasons. First, it represents a great milestone in your careers. For some of you it is a final chapter in your academic career, and for others a milestone as you continue your education. Whatever the case, take time to enjoy today's achievement! You not only showed the persistence, resilience and resolve it takes to achieve academic excellence, but you did so in the context of a pandemic, global economic challenges, supply chain crises, and more recently, inflation. Not to mention General societal anxiety about the world and political events. Despite it all, here you are today and I hope you are soaking it all in.

The many lessons you learned during your time here at Penn State Harrisburg will serve you well as you move forward in your career. I would like to share some of the lessons I have learned along the way as well, because they might just resonate.

First rule of thumb—know thyself well! There are going to be a lot of opportunities coming your way, and it is important for you to think carefully before taking or leaving an opportunity ...whether to say yes or no. Let's talk about the No's first. Remember to think through your reasons before saying no to an opportunity; if the risk benefit is not in your favor—well, that is an easy one. If there is a baby on the way, it might not be the best time to join a startup if you are dependent on a paycheck that might be delayed or not come at all! If the opportunity does not align with your personal passion, for example you did something similar before and it just was not a good fit...another easy one. Does the organizational culture mesh with your values and what is important in your growth and development?

Think about your new leader's style for leadership, and whether you can thrive under them. Please do your research and make sure the basics for mission, values, and opportunity to thrive and grow are met; but don't say no, please don't say no just because you haven't tried something before..or because you are unsure of yourself. Because it's the "yes's" that in the end will mean so much more than the "no's" when opportunities come along. Remember that the yes's will sometimes push you into uncomfortable places, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. Challenging and testing yourself, growing and learning, having new career experiences CAN feel uncomfortable.

There is another thing to remember about feeling uncomfortable, beyond the challenge of the new. We are reminded that we are human, and that there is a place and a need for humility. Seek first to understand. Explore yourself as much as you are exploring and learning in your career. Self-awareness, and honest self-reflection will be skills that will serve you well throughout your life and your career.

Second lesson: Remember to take care of yourself in a holistic sense, and that means body and mind; and remember that life is and always will be about more than your work. Having a healthy work-life balance might seem self-evident, but – and this is a big but – sometimes it seems easier to just keep working instead of finding that balance. It is a chronic issue that I have had to be VERY intentional about. And for some reason, it took me until I was into my 50's before I recognized that I had missed important times with my family, that I had not taken better physical care of myself, and that time for self-reflection is imperative to grow and thrive as a person.

Before I move on to the final lessons, let me tell you a bit of my story and the things I have learned and hopefully I can save you the time it took for me to learn them, and maybe some of the anxiety or tears.

Since I can remember as a young child, I was interested in the medical field. But my early career led me to medical technology and my first job was as a blood banker. I loved working in the lab and learned everything I could about how to “run the lab.” Within 2 years, I found myself accepting a leadership opportunity that frankly, I was very hesitant to accept. For the life of me, I can’t exactly remember why I did, but in retrospect, am very grateful for the decision to say yes to that opportunity.

In reality, I was too young and inexperienced to be offered the role, and I could have easily used that reasoning to say no, but really, none of the criteria I noted above applied. I know that hindsight is 2020, but somehow I wound up the courage to say yes, and I am glad that I did!

At 24 years old, I found myself managing folks much older and more experienced than I was. I was responsible for maintaining certifications in our lab that were needed for our hospital accreditation and I was responsible for meeting all the regulatory requirements for an interstate shipping license for blood products, and overseeing the procurement of blood from donors and preparing the blood products. Talk about being immersed in a learning opportunity. The self-doubt at times was overwhelming, but through feeling “uncomfortable” I learned some important lessons on leadership. I had to lean on my team, and they were amazing. I learned that leading by example in whatever role you have is incredibly important. And that strength in

leadership often times requires humility, vulnerability, and kindness....and, most importantly, INTEGRITY.

As it turned out, my mentors at the time were instrumental in helping me manage through what we now know as “imposter syndrome” and to create a path forward. My mentors were and are critical to my personal success and growth. One of my mentors at that time was the hospital CFO, who encouraged me to earn my MBA. He reminded me that medicine was a business, and if I was to lead and grow in my leadership roles, this was a critical need. My options for schools were plenty, but not as plentiful as today, and of course there were no “on line” options back in 1986 when I started—in fact my husband and I bought our first personal computer from Radio Shack in preparation for starting graduate school.

Penn State Harrisburg kept coming up as the best option; well-regarded program, diverse student backgrounds, and right here where I was working and living. It was an amazing experience, and many of my fellow students became personal friends. But it was my advisor, who took particular interest in the fact that I was moving toward a hospital leadership role yet chose an MBA instead of Healthcare Administration for my degree. Here was a marketing professor, who cared enough to ask me “why”; I explained that I might not stay in the hospital world, and that frankly, I was always looking for ways to interact with patients and doctors—and as we explored my reasons, I

came to the conclusion that this MBA was not my final stop in my academic career, in fact my goal was to become a physician, and to use my business degree to start and build a successful and sustainable career, be it a practice, or an academician, this MBA would be of great benefit. My husband Mike was incredibly supportive of this goal—and between him and my advisor, I was asked multiple times a week what I had done on my checklist in order to accomplish this goal of becoming a physician. I found out how important it is to surround yourself with folks who are going to encourage and support your dreams, not call out facts around acceptance rates and chances of failure. I already knew those statistics and didn't need to be reminded. But to keep moving forward instead of dreading impending failure, I needed their wisdom and encouragement.

I went on to medical school and have had a successful career in medicine, both in practice, leadership, and administrative medicine, but back then—I was not sure at all that this was going to work out. First, I ended up being accepted to several medical schools on my first try, and the timing worked out that I was able to finish my MBA in December and start medical school the following fall. I chose Penn State University College of Medicine for the same reasons I chose Penn State Harrisburg for my MBA; outstanding reputation, strong academics, and it is right here where my life was happening—but make no mistake, my Penn State MBA was instrumental in my acceptance to

medical school, just as your Penn State degree will open more doors than you will be able to walk through---

This is why the answers to those questions about when to say yes and when to say no are so critical—consider these carefully, but don't hold yourself back just because you haven't tried something before or you are doubting yourself; and don't forget to trust your gut—learn about culture and values—these are critical things to consider, other things about the job can be learned, and as I said earlier, may provide stepping stones to opportunities beyond.....

It was not my personal wisdom that led me down the path of my academic and professional careers, it was the wisdom of my mentors and colleagues, and of course my best friend—aka my husband Mike—that pushed me to do more than I thought I could do. I wish I could say that it was all about inner strength and profound courage, but in reality, I think those attributes are only a part of my story.

So what other life lessons did I take away and are helpful to share with you today? Number 3: Mentorship is incredibly important, and remember to give back more than you take—and that means taking time to meet with mentees, develop relationships and help them to move forward and navigate difficult or unclear paths.

Rule of thumb, keep 2 mentees in front and 2 mentors in back and mentorship does not have to apply only to career, you can also mentor with other interests and aspects of your life experience. Through the work of mentoring and relationship building you will grow....and sometimes in ways you don't expect.

For example, Mike and I were asked to become parent mentors for new and expectant parents of special needs children-only because we are the parents of a son with special needs. We thought this was amusing, because at that time WE were still looking for mentors to help us, but, as it turned out we had a lot to offer—that our mentees valued and appreciated—and guess what? I am sure they are going to pass it forward.

The fourth lesson: be kind.

I learned early on that some people falsely equate strength in leadership with being tough, even heartless. I have found truly successful leadership involves kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion and empathy, demonstrating strength of character, and integrity---this matters so much in terms of who you can recruit to join your team, who stays with your team, and the quality and quantity of work that gets accomplished. It also influences the teams that want to recruit you.



Kindness does not reflect weakness ... in fact, just the opposite. Sometimes kindness reflects self-control and strength of character, and it does not matter if you are in a leadership position or not; you each have the opportunity to lead by example with kindness.

The Fifth Lesson: I name this rule to my mentees, the Jen Chambers #1 rule of leadership and life, always (followed by 10 more “always”) take the high road. This ties back to integrity and leadership. You WILL see others take a different path, just know that short term gains for the wrong reasons rarely lead to sustained success, and then there is the thing about being able to look in the mirror.

The final lesson is one I share with all of my mentees and that I hope I live by example. Give grace. We are living in such unprecedented times right now, and people in your life, friends and colleagues alike, may be “showing up” in different ways. You don’t always know what others are experiencing in their lives and frankly, we don’t always understand our own feelings or behaviors. Give grace to those around you, it will come back some day.

So in a nutshell ...

- a. Own the strength it took for you to get here today, and honor the friends and loved ones that helped you get here. None of us travel this road alone.

- b. Know thyself well. Consider the pros and cons of every opportunity, but don't let fear hold you back. Growth comes through new opportunities and it's ok to feel uncomfortable, as long as it is helping you to grow.
- c. Take care of yourself, body, mind and soul. They all matter, and if you neglect even one, it will catch up to you later.
- d. Look for inspiring mentors and try to become an inspiring mentor, as both of these will help you learn and grow.
- e. Always (x10) take the high road. Live and lead with kindness, thoughtfulness, integrity, strength of character, empathy and compassion; better results come from you and your team when they see how you demonstrate these qualities.
- f. And last but not least, remember to give grace. We don't always know what others are going through and the grace you give might be the most important thing you can do for them.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to be here today to share in your accomplishment. I congratulate you all for your success in earning your degrees; You are an amazing class and I wish you all the success you deserve in your career and in life! Thank you.

Oh, I almost forgot.....WE ARE.....