

Penn State Harrisburg Commencement Address  
David Black, President & CEO  
Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC  
May 8, 2016

Thank you Dr. Kulkarni. Penn State administrators, faculty, staff, Board of Advisors, friends and families and most of all, today's graduates. Thank you for allowing me to share your special day.

A special shout out for all the Moms with us today...Happy Mother's Day! To the families that have helped and supported today's graduates, thank you for helping your child, your spouse. Thank you for making the world a better place through the knowledge and the experienced gained here at Penn State Harrisburg.

It's really interesting in preparing for an address like this. You can't help but be a little introspective, "what would I like to hear?" ....or... "what if they hate what I have to say?" when in reality you're thinking, "I hope this old guy is short!" So let's go!

I love speaking to Penn State crowds, because I know I can always get a response by uttering two words: WE ARE...

So I want to touch on three things briefly today.

- Your Penn State Experience;
- Leadership
- Celebrating accomplishments

In a matter of minutes you will be official Penn State Graduates. You will be Penn State Alumni.

Author, entrepreneur, serial blogger Seth Godin, who we had in town a few weeks back, wrote in his book "Tribes," that groups of like-minded people with a common interest are in essence - Tribes.

These are people who share a common goal, an ideal or a passion. They are about faith in that goal, about a belief in an idea and a common community.

I submit to you, that as a member of the Penn State Alumni network, you will be a member of a tribe that will influence and involve you for the rest of your lives....

Penn State Graduates believe in the institution. Everyone, to a person, is very passionate about their alma mater and their Penn State experience.

We all share a belief in Penn State, the idea that Penn State is more than an educational institution. Penn State is part of the fabric of our region and our Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Penn State is part of our community and we are part of Penn State ....because WE ARE....

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the role Penn State plays in this region of Pennsylvania.

This region, our business community is part of the Penn State Tribe. There is more Penn State here than anywhere in the Commonwealth except State College.

Penn State Harrisburg; Penn State Dickinson School of Law and Penn State- Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and College of Medicine. You might say, big deal, so what?

The Harrisburg Region is on everyone's radar as a one of the United States 100 largest, legitimate, competitive regions in the US and Internationally.

Every great region has a great research institution. A great, large University, creating innovation through research. For the 553,000 people in the Harrisburg Region; for the 2 million people in South Central Pennsylvania, that institution is Penn State.

More to point, back my days with Governor Ridge we started an initiative we called "Stay Invent the Future." While we don't use those words today, we actually use "Live the Life you Want" (Google it!). There are opportunities to invent the future of South Central Pennsylvania, in large part due to Penn State.

As a region, we are large enough to matter, but small enough for each and every one of us to make a difference. I encourage you.... I am asking you, to consider staying here. Let's build the future together.

Our organization the Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC is a tribe. We are a group of people who share a common vision for our region, we believe deeply in the future of this region. We need others who share our vision!

We come from a broad cross section of our community that makes us only stronger as a tribe bringing different experiences, backgrounds and talents together..... All are welcome to join our tribe.... but we really want those who believe!

Stay here. Become a leader.

Which brings me to my second point: Leadership: Listen to the Leadership Challenge, the mantra of a book written by James Kouzes and Barry Posner way back in 1987, before most of you were born. This has served me well throughout my career:

A leader must challenge the process; search for opportunities; experiment and take risks

A leader must inspire a shared vision; ...envision the future and ....enlist others in a common vision

A leader must enable others to act; ...foster collaboration and strengthen others

A leader must ..model the way; ...set the example and ....plan small wins along the way

A leader must encourage the heart; recognize individual contributions and celebrate accomplishments

The point is to use those simple words, those tools, your head and especially your heart and lead.

Leadership isn't mechanical. I believe it is driven from the heart. Successful leaders help to create tribes, they bring ideas and people together, create change and they make a difference.

You've attended Penn State Harrisburg and many of you are from here in South Central Pennsylvania. This is our region, yours and mine. A vibrant place in Pennsylvania. Trust me, you heard (read) my bio, I've lived somewhere else. I love my hometown, but it's REALLY, REALLY great here!

My colleagues in the region and here on regional Penn State campuses believe that this region has tremendous potential for growth industries like the life sciences, medicine, signal integrity, agra-business and food processing, professional services – technical, legal, accounting, management and higher education, in large part because..... WE ARE...

What I am doing here today is my job. We sell our region; we sell job opportunities to individuals. We sell locations to businesses; we sell quality of life in this region to families. It is something that is easy for me to do and something I love doing..... I suggest to you, find your passion and lead.

Seth Godin tells us leadership has to do with stepping out of our comfort zones.

How many of you didn't ask a question in class you wanted to, (or should have) because you didn't want to look dumb; or some other lame excuse? Godin says "Leadership isn't difficult; we've been trained for years to avoid it."

Don't wait for something to happen, don't wait for someone else to ask the question.....be a leader, be willing to experiment, to take a few risks; to ask the question.

One point of caution in leadership you need to be aware of: PERFECT IS THE ENEMY OF GOOD. It's a concept with truly ancient roots.

The Leadership Challenge talks about creating a vision and empowering others, brining stakeholders together, which includes compromise.

I was recently talking with a local member of Congress lamenting his displeasure with a budget bill currently under debate. Like so many issues before our government, it has been framed as a wedge issue – something that divides rather than unifies, something designed to become a big issue this fall in time for election campaigns.

Wedge issues define governmental issues; political campaigns; and even our day to day lives. Verizon vs Comcast; Coke vs Pepsi; Iphone vs droid.

Wedge issues involve two or more perfect visions preventing a common vision. Wedge issues fuel the communication explosion as we move more rapidly from traditional media to social media. How many outrageous claims have you read on Facebook or Twitter today? Wedge issues.

My point to you, is that we are better as a country, better as people as principled pragmatists, rather than rigid ideologues. We need leaders to help us to get to yes. We can aspire to be perfect, but we must be good. If you want to be great, you start with good.

Governor Ridge once told me, I had a unique ability make people believe my ideas... were theirs. It's a leadership attribute. It's getting to yes. It's actually better when it's not recognized; more like the legendary Jedi mind trick....these are not the droids you're looking for!

As a leader – find those things that unite your tribe, not divide. Build bridges, not wedges! Find those things that connect, not separate. Good is not perfect, but good is the first step to better!

Point three, Celebrate Accomplishments.

I believe, at its core;... true leadership comes from the heart; leadership is about the heart; connecting the heart of a leader touching the hearts of others. Don't get me wrong, you need good ideas too; you need to bring stakeholders together around good ideas – but a connection at the heart is a strong connection. We all feel good when someone tells us “good job.”

It touches us right here (point)..... It's engaging people, it's and thanking them for what they have done.... It's encouraging others to believe .... raising others up and helping them to build the self-confidence to lead.....

Also remember, there is nothing wrong with celebrating your own accomplishments, you need to celebrate your achievements.

Much of the achievement of goals comes from the celebration of accomplishments. Every small win towards a larger goal deserves to be celebrated – it's how we build momentum towards our big goals!

The Harrisburg Regional business community has hired me to do just that in my professional life. Small wins celebrated leading to bigger goals. I also have a commitment to leadership in my personal life. So should you.

By celebrating your own personal accomplishments you fully appreciate the impact of celebrating accomplishments of others. You will have these moments in your personal life and in your professional careers too. Celebrate them!

Today is one of those days for you.....

Life moves too quickly, we often forget to celebrate our accomplishments in the moment; as well as to touch the hearts of those who share our lives who have helped you to achieve your graduation today.

Celebrate the moment. Let it inspire you to use your Penn State education, your experience, your leadership to make a difference.

Aspire to great things in all things you do. Find goals both personal and professional that you are passionate about and use them to change things for the better.

In your career, make suggestions, contribute ideas in your job, make a difference in your business or institution – take an idea and create your own company.....Ask the question; start the discussion; be a leader, don't be timid.

Get involved in your community; get involved with your faith; get involved in your Chamber of Commerce; find a way to make a difference.

As you make a difference, recruit others to work with you, share your passion, enable others, encourage your tribe and... please... make time for your family.

WHERE EVER THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE LEADS YOU..... Make a difference, be a leader and celebrate accomplishments.

- – one more time- WE ARE..

2016 Graduates of Penn State Harrisburg, thank you for all that you will accomplish.

Today is your day.

Today, YOU encourage the hearts of all of us in this great hall.

Congratulations, Thank you and Godspeed.