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Commencement Address
June 13, 1986

I'd like to thank the president of the university and the trustees for picking me for this rather singular, unique honor. And I reflected about why I was picked.

You should know that I was born in Ohio, raised, Ohio, attended Ohio State, graduated from the College of Commerce and Business in 1959. I left law school two years later, not by self-determination. Frankly speaking, it was the result of my own failure as a law student.

So, in reflecting on my selection today, I felt a little humiliated at not being a scholastic heavyweight. And, as many of you, day-dreaming about what it would be like to be singled out, what it would be like to speak at a graduation let alone your own. When the offer was made, I didn't hesitate. In fact, I declined. I felt speaking engagements like these should be reserved for people of national prominence, political leaders, intellectuals. And as a business man, I honestly felt that I was not qualified to speak to the graduates of a major university.

Obviously, I reconsidered. And the reasons were simple and rather selfish. I began to think of myself, if you would, kind of like a Cinderella, dreaming all these years of what it might be like to be in this horseshoe, to speak at a graduation, and I simply decided to seize the fantasy, to seize the moment.

I thought seriously about the task of preparing a talk. And I

began to study other speakers, people that had talked at graduations this year. The journalist Barbara Walters spoke about guts. The comedian Bill Cosby gave a great comedy speech spoofing graduation speakers. The vice president, George Bush, spoke about the future in terms of our ability to master technology and the will of the people. And, as might be expected, a businessman like Lee Iacocca spoke on the national debt.

So in thinking about things that I could say, I went through a couple quick topics. I thought about an analogue, perhaps a funny speech but a poignant one, beginning with "we are the world, we are the children." I was reminded of a great coincidence of this day. Today is the Jewish holiday of shavuot. Five thousand seven hundred forty six years ago, the people of my faith believed that Moses gave us the ten commandments, men's moral responsibilities, the moral of mankind. And I began to think in great seriousness about a speech focused on man's responsibilities and the opportunities that those responsibilities provide.

And as I reflected, I came to the conclusion that, not being a scholastic, not an intellectual, without credentials, not qualified, that it would be inappropriate, and I would not feel comfortable talking to you of your future, about your responsibilities, about the challenges that lay ahead for our great nation.

What I did reflect on was how I felt the day of my graduation, sitting where you are sitting today. And I was thinking that graduation was simply the end, that I was done. I was finished. My education was over. And that in some simple way, life could now begin. And the more I thought about it, I decided that

"graduation" is a terrible word. It has such a final sound. It is so terminal.

What I would share with you is that what I learned at Ohio State is that education is never-ending. And that my relationship, and hopefully yours, with this institution will never end. And that you will continue to learn, that your college experience and mine is part of a continuing life experience and that you today will begin more consciously to want to learn, to want to grow, to want to change.

I've learned that education can be academic---booklearning, organized, scholastic. And it can be social. It can be interaction. It can be observation. It can be scientific. It can be empirical. And it can simply be the exposure to ideas, to things and to people. That simple notion that education is a continuing process of wanting to learn and allowing yourself to learn and wanting to grow, that simple thought nearly evaded me. And that continuing process, that seed of the idea, began here at Ohio State.

If you would, as an entrepreneur, I want to try an experiment today. It may be a bold idea but bear with me because you're all part of it. I believe today can be the commencement for everyone here, whether you are a member of the Class of 1986, a member of the faculty, trustees, family or friends. That we can participate together and share this experience. And so if we begin by believing ---- (power outage)--- experiment. I assure you this is not an electrical one. The experiment that I'd like you to share is a psychological one. And the bold idea that I have is that I believe it is possible that today this

could be the largest commencement class perhaps in world history. That is, if every one of us, faculty, friends and alumni, are beginning, will commit to commence beginning today. To start, to begin, to go forward and to think positively about our future. Our commencement can be the point from which all of us measure the future, regardless of age, sex, degree or occupation.

So let's resolve, each of us, as we're sitting here that beginning today we're going to continue to learn, to grow, and to prepare ourselves for the future, to enrich our lives.

And what I would share with you are my own thoughts.

Let's begin with this as the process. We're going to start now, and we're going to think about the guidelines, things that we believe in that will guide us into the future. And in the same spirit I feel reluctant to tell you what your values should be, what your life's philosophy should be.

But I begin the process by thinking of these guideposts, the values, the things that are important to you at committing to begin to learn. I use myself as an example.

First of all, I continue to believe in God. I believe that we are a reflection of a higher being and, as such, God has given us responsibilities and obligation, a moral code, the ability to simply know right from wrong. And I will continue to do my best consciously and conscientiously to reflect and act in an ethical manner. And this knowledge and this point of view will continue to be a source of strength for me. Further, I will continue to believe in the goodness of man. Simply stated, I

like people. I believe the vast majority of the people in the world are good. And personally, I choose to associate with people that are good, wholesome people, people that simply think about things in the right way. People who know rights from wrong and have the ethic, the courage to speak and act on those rights and wrongs with conviction. I believe in high standards and hard work. And I commit to set higher standards for myself, tougher goals both long and short term, with visions that have dynamics of challenge and excellence--not perfection, excellence. And I am going to work toward those goals with increased focus, determination, consistency and endurance. And I intend to set higher standards for myself, continue to challenge myself in all aspects of my life.

I share with you that I believe in responsibility. I believe that each of us has responsibilities. And that those responsibilities in their broadest form are with us. They simply exist. They can be denied, they can be ignored. But they exist and they are with you.

First of all, I like to feel good about myself. As a matter of simple life philosophy, I believe that God has given each of us skills and those skills should be used to the highest, broadest purposes. Those responsibilities spread from yourself to family, friends, community and country. I believe in citizenship. I believe in being responsible to the institutions that we benefit from and that are part of our lives, be they religious, cultural or educational. I believe in my fellow man, and I believe in thinking of my fellow man. Philanthropy is too large a word. I think it expresses itself in personal charity, volunteerism,

simply caring about people.

And I take great personal pride in reflecting on my discharge of those responsibilities. I believe in learning. And I intend to seek learning and knowledge more aggressively. And that education, that learning in its broadest sense, be it classes, in books, organized academics, individual curiosity, experimentation, observation or just learning simply from life's experiences. Knowing that the world is always changing. And if we study history, our own and the world's, and reflect on that history in an intelligent way, perhaps it will give us insights into that future we are all living in. I firmly believe that if we stop learning, we stop growing. And when we stop growing we begin to die.

I believe in accentuating the positives, eliminating or simply ignoring the negatives, the detractors, the envious, the jealous, the doubters, the nay-sayers. I believe that one looks at reversals, or should look at reversals, as a learning experience, not dwelling on misfortune or failure but trying to learn as much as possible from every negative and moving on. And when faced with disappointment or failure, always getting better, never allowing yourself to get bitter.

And I believe one should always enjoy all the positives, the successes. I think it's important to know when you are winning and when you have won, enjoying every moment in the sunshine and remembering them and savoring them as an energy for future strength--perhaps, simply to laugh and learn, to laugh and have fun when the opportunity is there.

Most of all I believe in dreams, which means I believe in the future. Not superficial daydreams but I believe rather by focusing positively and working toward my goals that my dreams, your dreams can come true.

I believe in taking the risk of dreaming, planning, to imagine, to making a personal commitment to yourself for that future. And then working with all your heart, all your soul and all your passion, showing enthusiasm, demanding enthusiasm of yourself, and taking the risk that if those efforts that you muster don't lead to a success that you're not afraid, that you've shown the enthusiasm, that you've made the commitment, and that you've simply tried.

Today is clearly a dream come true for me. To speak at my university, to speak in this horseshoe. And what I commit to you in the experiment that I talked about, is that I would hope somehow everyone of us here today, this day perhaps every week, every month, every year, perhaps on the anniversary--- every June when the anniversary of this commencement, this beginning, comes around, my classmates of 1986 and all of us could remember to begin, to reconsider, to appraise the future, to evaluate what we believe in, to decide what we are going to do, and to begin to do it, accepting that we never graduate, that we only get to begin. And that each of us can and will be what we believe and what we intend to do.

Congratulations on your commencement.