

*Thank you for inviting me to speak today.*

*I am very pleased and honoured to join you here to celebrate this wonderful occasion.*

*I would like to start by congratulating the graduating class. You should be very, very proud of yourselves for accomplishing this goal. In spite of the growing number of tertiary institutions in Ghana, it is important to remind ourselves that only a small percentage of our population are fortunate to hold degrees. So today, you too join this very privileged group. Well done.*

*To the parents, guardians, and families of those being awarded degrees, I say congratulations. It is your financial, moral, and spiritual support over the years that has made today possible. I am sure you are delighted that your wards have successfully completed this stage of their lives and are now ready to begin their careers.*

*I should also say a big thank you to the dedicated faculty, lecturers and staff, who have managed to transform these students from mere SHS starlets into potential captains of industry and future leaders of our dear country. It is my prayer that, one day, our young friends will remember to come back and show proper appreciation when they receive their appointment letters from Flagstaff House.*

*When I mentioned to a good friend that I had been invited to deliver the guest speaker's address, he was curious to know what had informed this choice.*

*His curiosity then got me thinking about what really qualifies me to offer any kind of meaningful advice to the Class of 2017. This is because it would be a major understatement to say that things have changed since my time on campus.*

*Indeed as I prepared for today's ceremony, my thoughts drifted back to 1991, when my mates and I said our final goodbyes and left the School of Engineering at UST.*

*The world was a lot different then. Ours was a simple, analog existence, which is quite hard to describe to a digital generation, but let me try.*

*In our time, when you had a date, you arranged the time and place weeks before hand, often by way of a handwritten note delivered by an emissary.*

*At the appointed hour, you would turn up at the agreed location, in the blind hope that the other person would also be there.*

*If they failed to show up, you were left guessing as to whether they had been sent on an errand by their parents, they had mistakenly gone to a wrong location, or they had been kidnapped by aliens from planet Mars.*

*You would have to sadly go home and wait another week or so to find out which one of these very plausible outcomes was the reason for the no-show.*

*These days, you would obviously pinpoint the location beforehand, using google maps to eliminate any possible confusion between you and your date.*

*Come the time, there would be a non-stop exchange of messages and images via whatsapp, snapchat, and Instagram, every step of the way, to provide regular updates as you make your respective journeys to the agreed venue.*

*For good measure, you would also share these uninteresting details with all your friends around the world, whether they wish to know about your rendezvous or not. Pictures and video clips of the date would then clog the inboxes of all your contacts before, during and after the encounter.*

*Again, in our days we simply prayed and proceeded to eat the carbohydrates, also known as food, that was placed in front of us.*

*These days, no decent meal is complete unless a picture of the food, fully adorned with genetically modified vegetables and drenched in oil, is taken and sent around the world via facebook, accompanied with a suitable emoji that reflects the mood of the grateful consumer.*

*By the way, in our days when you took a picture you did get to see your handiwork immediately. That would be too exciting. The snap, as we called it, would be on a roll of film. You would have to use all the other exposures on the roll, which meant some 24 or 36 more snaps later, before you sent the fully exposed roll to a studio to be developed and printed. That was when you would see the picture you took several weeks before.*

*You can therefore understand my amazement when a young friend of mine said she had never heard of Kodak, the global giant that dominated the film industry and actually produced the first digital camera in the 70s.*

*I could go on with the comparisons, but I am sure you get my drift.*

*A lot of what is common place today is possible because of something which happened in the late nineties, several years after I had graduated.*

*That was when the real revolution occurred – the IT revolution. It was around that time big money fell in love with technology and the two ‘got married’ in Silicon Valley, setting off a chain reaction which has changed the world forever.*

*Since then, billions of dollars in investments have been pumped into relatively small companies and start-ups, converting them into global giants and making it possible for internet browsers, search engines, mobile phones, communication devices, and the ubiquitous personal computer to evolve from simple laboratory experiments into mainstream everyday items.*

*For the digital generation that has grown up with mobile phones, laptops, and the internet, real time communication and instant access to information are a way of life.*

*Just over a couple of decades ago, all of this this was simply unimaginable.*

*So please believe me, when I say to you - this is a wonderful and exciting time to be a fresh graduate. There are really amazing opportunities, begging and waiting, for those who are prepared and willing to seize them.*

*I know that by simply listening to the natural born pessimists in our society, it is very easy to conclude that most of you will pick up your degrees and promptly join the unemployment society, where you shall remain all the days of your life. Whether that happens or not is an individual choice you will have to make.*

*However, let me challenge you a little. Whether or not the job hunt works out for you, start a small venture, some endeavour which does not need any capital. Something simple, such as picking up the neighbourhood kids from school, taking care of residential properties for non-resident Ghanaians, or even establishing a small cleaning service for elderly homeowners.*

*I promise you, I guarantee you, that because of technology you will generate business leads from people you have never met and with time that little business will grow in ways even you could never have imagined.*

*Because of technology, all kinds of ventures that were previously impossible are now very compelling and making fortunes for their owners. All that is required is a little effort, imagination, initiative, discipline, and a good dose of persistence.*

*And that, my dear friends, is where the problem usually lies – the self-control to remain focused, the discipline to consistently deliver on your promises, the single-mindedness required to specialize, and the stamina to stay the course.*

*It takes a lot of commitment to grow a business slowly. It is much easier to go after the latest money making scam that is in fashion. Long term commitment is even more difficult in a digital era where everything is expected to happen within seconds. But commitment always pay off.*

*So I return to my friend's question and my sober reflection on what qualifies me to advise the Class of 2017 besides the fact that I have been invited to do so, and also that I am older than most, if not all, of you.*

*Consider this - while things have changed, a lot still remains the same. And that is because even though technology has considerably changed the world, human beings ourselves have not really changed that much.*

*We are driven by the same curiosities, weaknesses, passions, ambitions, and feelings that have made and destroyed civilisations since the beginning of time.*

*I am sure we all have an example of a modern day Judas, who would easily betray their boss for an I-phone 7, and for 30 I-phones, would definitely betray an entire country.*

*Similarly, you must know a modern day Samson, who would promptly share a password or a national secret in return for instant carnal gratification, regardless of the physical attributes of the Delilah making the request. As we were in the beginning, so are we now.*

*It is because of these predictable, time tested, characteristics of mankind throughout the ages, that I boldly offer my counsel.*

*Nevertheless, please let me preface my advice with the obligatory caution made famous by investment advisors the world over- all of what follows have worked very well for generations past, but past performance is no guarantee of future results.*

*So with that caveat in firmly place, I shall begin -*

- **Advice 1 - Save for your pension as soon as you start working** – I know that sounds ridiculous and I am sure many of you will be quick to remind me how difficult it is to save money that you don't have. However even if it is GHS20 a month, find a trustworthy investment scheme and start putting money away. Retirement will come sooner than you think. Before too long, it shall be your turn to stand here and deliver a similar address, and you will wonder how quickly the years have passed.

*The nature of my day job, and my firm belief in real estate, compels me to also advise you to make home ownership your number one priority. You should plan, work hard, and save to ensure that you acquire at least a decent parcel of land, with good title I hasten to add, within 5 years of graduation. I am happy to offer free consultation on this assignment, as my graduation gift to all of you.*

- **Advice 2 – Consider every job as an interview for your next job.** Most of you will undoubtedly get your dream job straight from University and will always be on the fast track to the top.

*A small minority shall, unfortunately, have to make do with some tedious, low paying, nail breaking, frightfully mundane job with some non-name establishment. Please perform that role with a big smile and all the enthusiasm you can muster.*

*Learn as much as you can, take time to understand the industry dynamics and why such a business exists in the first place. Pretend it was the job you always wanted. Treat every client*

*you serve like a potential employer, because they could be just that. One day, from that lowly position you will land your dream job and it will all make sense. I should know – that is exactly what happened to me.*

- **Advice 3 – Time is precious.** *You will lose money and make it back, many times over. You will lose a dream job and get an even better position later on. The one thing you will never get back is time, so please do not waste it. Personally, I have found a good way to track time is by always making sure I have a long list of to-do items for each week. These lists regularly prompt me that I have things to do, whenever I find myself having a drink and simply staring into space.*

*My dear friends, it is very easy to spend an entire lifetime in front of the television set, watching some pointless drama from a distant land where all the women are slim and beautiful, all the men are tall and strong, and where all the kids are smart and well-mannered. Those hours you spend admiring those screen heroes are lost forever.*

*Whenever you catch yourself doing that, slap yourself on the wrist, switch off the set and take a trip to your local market. Walk around for while, and remind yourself what the real world looks like. I repeat, time is precious, spend it wisely.*

*Hang out with older folk and find out from them what they wish they had done in the twenties, they will give you some ideas on how to spend your time.*

- **Advice 4 – Strive to justify your degree.** *These certificates - the grades you have sacrificed so much for, the sleepless nights, the irritating course mates, the long lectures, the demanding project work, the tough exams, and the unbearable room-mates and their dodgy visitors who only show up at night – these certificates that you proudly pick up today, shall invariably end up on some dusty shelf and will have little or no bearing on what happens next in your lives.*

*From tomorrow, what will matter is how you can propose practical solutions to real life problems. Indeed, tomorrow morning, when you go to town, please don't be disappointed if nobody seems to care that you have a newly minted degree from University of Ghana.*

*It is only when you can convince people that you understand their pain, that you can work with them and explain why their businesses are failing, when you can introduce them to a new way of thinking and offer technologically driven solutions - that is when they will appreciate the relevance degree you have toiled for. That is when they will insist that their children should also strive hard to attend this great university.*

*Work hard to bring practical meaning to all that you have learnt here in campus.*

- **Advice 5 – Never burn your bridges.** *You will quickly realise that Ghana is a very small place. As a matter of fact, the entire world is a very small place and getting even smaller.*

*Always make sure that you do the right thing, leave a good impression, and work hard so that your employers and associates are happy with you and would gladly have you back if asked to.*

*All too often, some young graduate will misbehave and storm out of a job thinking that they have a better position and brighter prospects with another company. They are later horrified to realise that their current and former bosses are either old mates from school, attend the same church, are next door neighbours, are cousins, or worse still, are married or were married, or about to get married. Trust me, they will compare notes and discuss your future.*

*You should believe that everyone and every opportunity that comes into your life does so for a reason. One day it will all come together and you will see why God such sent such relationships your way.*

*As such, I encourage you to nurture all relationships and never burn bridges, even the ones you don't need or particularly like.*

*Advice 6 – **Constantly assess and upgrade yourself** - My business school professor shared this advice with our Organizational Behavior class. Simply put, the skillset that serves you well during one stage of your life and gets you to the next level, may not necessarily be the same skillset that lets you succeed at that new level.*

*Let me explain. Some of you got to university because you were model SHS students. You stayed out of trouble, ate what was served at the dining hall, practically lived in the library, obeyed school rules to the letter, and you kept quiet in class.*

*Having successfully arrived on Legon campus, it was possible to get along fine and get good grades by not fidgeting or talking in class, by diligently taking notes, not asking questions or challenging the status quo, never being part of any club or society or movement. Even your roommates barely knew who you were and could never be sure whether you were on campus or had gone home.*

*Come exam time you would simply reproduce everything you have been taught and pick up a good grade. There were definitely some guys like that in my engineering class but I do not know if there are any people like that in your class.*

*Take this from me. You are about to enter the university of life and that institution has a slightly different set of rules.*

*Depending on where you find yourself, you may realise that sitting quietly at the back, not asking questions, not being part of anything - those same attributes that gave you good grades, may not be the best approach to get you ahead.*

*From tomorrow, you shall be required to take your destiny into your own hands, do what it takes to be noticed by speaking up and changing the direction of things in your favour. You may have to fidget a bit, stir things up a little, even challenge authority and do things for which you would have been reprimanded in your earlier life.*

*You will have to reach deep inside to reinvent your personality and acquire a new skillset in order to succeed in a competitive, unforgiving, fast changing, and aggressive world where nothing is handed over on a silver platter.*

- *Advice 7 – **Find your passion and pursue it** – Some of you came to this university because it was expected of you. Given the pressure from parents, family, and friends, you could hardly have done otherwise. Now that you have picked up the degree, it is important to identify what you are really good at, what really excites you, and pursue it.*

*For a good number of you, the degree you offered is in line with your true area of interest. You are lucky, you may carry on.*

*But for others, your real dream lies in a totally different field of endeavor. If you sincerely believe that that you can become a world star doing something else, other than what you have studied for, and you want my advice– then I say please go pursue that dream*

*When the young Rowan Atkinson completed a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering at the world famous Oxford University, he could have spent his life designing circuit boards and you may never have heard about him.*

*However he pursued his true talent in comedy and is now a global icon, immortalized by his depiction of Mr. Bean, the world famous character even 4 year olds in Ghana can easily identify.*

*Similarly, after picking up an Ivy League degree from the prestigious University of Pennsylvania and getting a coveted job with the Boston Consulting Group, the young John Legend could have settled into a routine, albeit rather well-paid job, as a management consultant. He however quickly concluded that his true interest and passion, was in music and so he quit his job and pursued a path that has made him a world star.*

*When I interview national service applicants, I often ask the question – what is your passion, what excites you, what would do if money wasn't a problem? I am often saddened by the blank, expressionless faces that stare back at me.*

*My friends, passion is what will drive you to success. Passion will make you keep trying when the going gets tough. Passion is everything. You must find your passion.*

*My last advice – **Set Ambitious Goals** – In my quieter moments, I often go online and get the latest update on the Voyager programme. This is a NASA mission launched in the late 70s to send two spacecrafts, Voyager 1 and 2, beyond our solar system. These unmanned crafts have since completed orbits around all the outer planets, have gone around Pluto and are on their way into deep space.*

*I have already described the rudimentary nature of computing science in the pre-digital world, so you must appreciate the effort it took to launch these objects into space and then control them from earth for almost 40 years.*

*The mind blowing bit is that almost 40 years later, Voyagers 1 and 2 are still out there somewhere beyond Pluto, travelling at over 30,000 miles per hour, through interstellar space and sending back to earth signals and pictures from the beginning of time.*

*I would invite you to think about that for a minute. The level of ambition, the degree of effort, the sheer extent of collaboration across various disciplines required to deliver such an accomplishment. How do you even start with a blank sheet of paper and build a set of calculations that sends an object into deep space when you don't even know how place looks like?*

*That always challenges me to be up and doing. Why does this challenge me? Because I ask myself how it is that kids who went to studied maths and engineering just like I did, can achieve launch interstellar crafts while I struggle to figure out my mobile phone.*

*Now you can give excuses about differences between their advanced system versus our basic environment– but my response to that will be who built their advanced system in the first place.*

*I would encourage you to find your Voyager mission - something that gets you constantly challenged to move on. Spend time reading the life stories of national and international business titans, inventors, activists, and leaders. Understand how they set out to change the world they came to meet.*

*You should ask yourself this question - if a fellow human being, with or without a degree, has built such a legacy – what am I doing with my degree?*

*Surely somewhere in your studies, you would have been told to think outside the box. You would later have been told that, actually, there is no box. Ladies and gentlemen, that is really the case. There is no box so please don't box yourself in with some imaginary boundaries.*

*Plan big things for your life. Dream big or wake up.*

*My dear friends, the long suffering tax payers of this nation have made a significant contribution to your education. Please make sure you never forget that.*

*I wish you all successful careers in your respective fields of endeavor.*

*I wish you good health, abundant wealth, and true happiness. Whenever in difficulty, pray to God and may God always answer your prayers.*

*God bless us all and God bless our homeland Ghana.*

*I thank you.*