I wish to welcome you to Stevenson University—our Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, parents, family, friends, and especially our students. What a great, memorable day.

Recently, someone visited me in my office. He was excited about something that had happened in his career and he wanted to share his success with a college professor that he had 25 years earlier. What struck me about this is the transformational power of higher education. But more specifically, it reminded me of how important it is to be able to recognize those who have influenced our lives.

Almost as important is the acceptance that each of us can make a difference in the lives of others.

In the recent movie, The Iron Lady, Margaret Thatcher contrasts the great success and strength of the United States and its emphasis on principles rather than history and tradition, which is the practice in England. Principles whether in life or at work are essential to consistent and powerful action. As you consider now what your next steps might be, I want to encourage you to decide to make a difference in life. I want to ask as you leave here today to go make a contribution.

But what makes this challenging is understanding what is most important to us as people. Emerson wrote: “To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. That is to have success.” So pay attention to what is critical in life.

If you are to find wisdom, you need to understand the balance between day-to-day things and your ultimate goals. John Wooden, the legendary coach of the UCLA men’s basketball team said he never spoke to the team about winning or losing but rather about a set of core values.

As much as we wish career and material success for you, your actions should help create and foster the Stevenson spirit which is made up of values we attempted to teach you here:

- Promoting a sense of community
- Fostering learning
• Instilling integrity and
• Achieving excellence.

Like you, I have friends who have wealth, but have not found an effective relationship between their possessions and their values. In looking at what is happening in the world, we see people frequently making the mistake of embracing too many material possessions or shutting off from life, therefore denying the opportunity to grow. We become either consumed with success or we drop out of life. Neither extreme is sensible. The most valuable approach is finding the relationship between the two.

Think about this observation: All important things in life are almost completely out of our control—other people, our families, life and death. Hardly anything important can be fully influenced. I lost a friend recently. A life and living is not something we can control. We can however identify and use our values which are essential to giving meaning to these important moments. When we come to these points or have these important insights, we realize how our lives can get out of harmony.

Thomas Merton wrote: “Happiness is not a matter of intensity, but of balance and order and rhythm and harmony.” Try to find satisfaction in helping those who are needy who have less than you do and you will find the balance we all need. America is a tremendously generous nation. As a society we seek to have an impact not only close to home but also around the world. There is a reason why so many volunteers arrived in the Deep South after the tornadoes or assisted in New Orleans or in Haiti. So find a pressing social problem whether it be a child with a terminal illness, or Special Olympics, or Habitat for Humanity, or volunteering in a hospital. Find someone who has a greater need and it may transform your life as well. You may become that person of influence like the teacher I mentioned earlier.

Albert Einstein wrote: “A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depends on the labor of others, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in some measure as I have received.” Throughout the ages, important values such as wisdom and scholarly knowledge have been passed along through the culture by elders or by mentors or by masters. Yet if we don’t communicate with and respect elders, how is this wisdom to be passed along.
At the end of our lives, few of us would say, I wish that I spent more time in the office or on my career. This point again focuses on our need for balance. Let me be clear. We believe that hard work is important and certainly success is essential. But so is the relationship between success and values. So is focusing on critical human elements as well. Yours and others.

Nelson Mandela spoke, adapting a Marianne Williamson quotation: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us … It is not just in some of us, it’s in everyone. And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

I encourage you today to realign your life to focus on the energy in you that produces the important values I mentioned earlier.

Let me finish with a quote from J. K. Rowling, author of Harry Potter. She wrote: “It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” So provide service to the community. Be a big brother or big sister. Learn from and respect the elders in your family and in your community. Nurture your spirit by focusing on being your best. Challenge yourself. Focus on what is positive in other people, in our country, in the organizations that employ you.

Remember that the purpose of career success is to create a meaningful life—yes, filled with riches, but also filled with a powerful legacy of making a difference.

Finally, we see great things and significant success for all you. Remember your Stevenson journey. Remember the knowledge, wisdom, and career competence you have learned here. Work hard, visit us often. Try to have an impact on the world by knowing what is important to you deep within your heart. Go out and make a difference.

Good luck to you all. We wish you great success and happiness.

Thank you.