

41st Commencement, Friday, May 17, 2013, Westchester County Center, White Plains, New York.

Thomas J. Schwarz, President Remarks:

Good afternoon. In looking at this week's events in history, two struck me as having a particular relevance to today's festivities. First, in 1845 rubber bands were patented. And in 1958 *Velcro*® was trademarked.

When I think about you who are graduating today you share striking similarities to the characteristics of rubber bands and Velcro.

In the face of the 2008 Great Recession you stretched like rubber bands to make ends meet. You took on extra jobs, some of you received extra financial help but you held it together. Like Velcro® you grabbed on to the task at hand and succeeded. And you tightened up and didn't let go so you are here today.

In being here today you should not be just receiving your recognition, but it should be you standing here, telling us about how you succeeded. I will tell you what I think the collective you might say:

First, we were not afraid to leave our comfort zones. We came from 25 states and 13 countries. There are two veterans, 20 EOP and 10 MAP graduates. Roughly 80% of us received financial aid including loans. 21% of us are the first in our families to go to college.

We challenged ourselves and as Yogi Berra would have said, when we got to the fork in the road, we took it. We mastered fear, embraced it and succeeded. Our first lesson is: we ALL had fears, we didn't let fear stop us. We did not snap.

Our second lesson: sometimes we wound up with lemons, but we made lemonade. We understood what was important to us as well as those with whom we were dealing. And by recognizing what was important to others, we were able to go from lemons to lemonade – from obstacle to accomplishment. Like Velcro® we did not let go.

Our third lesson: we acknowledged our weaknesses and dealt with them. Maybe we didn't write well – we found help. Maybe we leaned on the advising center or the learning center. Or we asked a professor for help. But most importantly, we recognized when we needed it. And, if we made a mistake-

which we all do, we acknowledged it. And, we have seen enough to know that to cover up our mistakes makes things even worse. We have held it together.

I want to add two more lessons that you have learned, but perhaps are too close to, to perceive clearly.

Fourth, recognize that the inconsequential has consequences. Recently I looked at an artwork at the Neuberger Museum. In the piece are the following words “Nothing is Just Nothing”. There are obviously two ways to read that clause. One is effectively zero equals zero. The other is to see it as a double negative which then means nothing is something. You chose the latter.

If you treat every apparently inconsequential moment, an apparent “nothing” as if it were a “something” moment, it will have consequence. Nothing will not be just nothing. The other side of that is, as a famous theologian once said, “Not to decide, is to decide.” If you try to make a moment of potential consequence inconsequential by avoiding a decision, it will have consequence. Do not be a passenger in your own life.

I want to add one more lesson, a fifth. Don’t let the ‘*Nattering Nabobs of Negativism*’ get you down. Don’t let the glass is half-empty people get you down. Use their negativism as fuel for your journey. It’s free, there is plenty of it and if you use it as a spark to move your personal vehicle down the path you will leave them behind sputtering. STRETCH YOURSELF and when you find someone or something worthwhile then stick to it!