

Good afternoon.

President Decker, Chair Pitlow, Members of the Board of Trustees, graduates, faculty, staff, family, and friends. It is an honor and a privilege to be here with you today, as we celebrate your achievements and mark the beginning of a new chapter in your lives.

I want to thank Franklin University for inviting me to speak at this auspicious occasion, and for bestowing upon me an honorary doctoral degree. I am humbled and grateful for this recognition, and I hope to live up to the high standards of this institution.

Franklin University is a remarkable place, with a long history of serving the needs of adult learners, providing flexible and online education, and offering applied and in-demand programs. You are part of a proud tradition of excellence, innovation, and impact. You have learned from some of the best faculty in the world, and you have been supported by a dedicated and caring staff. You have also made lasting friendships and connections with your fellow students, who have enriched your experience and challenged you to grow.

You have worked hard to get to this point, balancing your studies with your personal and professional responsibilities. You have overcome obstacles, faced uncertainties, and adapt to changes. You have shown resilience, perseverance, and determination. You have earned your degree, and you deserve to celebrate your success.

But as you know, this is not the end of your journey. It is the commencement, the start of a new phase of your life. A phase that will bring new opportunities, new challenges, and new possibilities. A phase that will require you to apply what you have learned, to continue learning, and to contribute to the world in meaningful ways.

As you embark on this new phase, I want to share with you advice that has helped me in my own journey. Advice that I hope will inspire and motivate you, as you pursue your dreams and goals.

First, be curious. Curiosity is the fuel of learning, the spark of creativity, and the source of innovation. Curiosity leads you to

ask questions, to seek answers, to explore new horizons, and to discover new things. Curiosity keeps you open-minded, flexible, and adaptable. Curiosity makes you a lifelong learner, who never stops growing and improving.

Second, be courageous. Courage is the ability to face your fears, to take risks, to embrace challenges, and to overcome difficulties. Courage enables you to pursue your passions, to follow your convictions, and to stand up for what you believe in. Courage empowers you to have influence, to lead by example, and to inspire others.

Third, be compassionate. Compassion is the feeling of empathy, kindness, and care for others, especially those who are suffering or in need. Compassion drives you to help others, to serve your community, and to make the world a better place. Compassion connects you with others, builds trust and respect, and fosters collaboration and cooperation.

Curiosity, courage, and compassion are the three C's that I have tried to live by, and that I encourage you to adopt as your guiding principles. They will help you to achieve your personal

and professional goals, to overcome any obstacles that you may encounter, and to make a positive impact on the world.

As you strive to live by the three C's, you can look for inspiration from some of the remarkable and courageous people who have changed the world with their curiosity, courage, and compassion. Let me mention a few of them, who come from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and fields of endeavor, but who share a common vision of a better humanity.

The story of Hot Chicken Takeover is a story of passion, perseverance, and social impact. It is also one of curiosity, courage, and compassion.

In 2013, Joe DeLoss and his wife Lisa visited Nashville and fell in love with the local specialty of hot chicken. They decided to bring it to their hometown—Columbus, Ohio. They experimented with their own recipe and started serving friends of friends in their backyard. They then moved to a pop-up restaurant in a parking lot, where they attracted a loyal following. They launched a crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter to buy a food truck, which was funded by the

community. They also began hiring people who faced barriers to employment, such as former inmates and homeless individuals.

They opened their first brick-and-mortar location in the historic North Market in downtown Columbus, followed by two more locations in Clintonville and Easton Town Center. They also expanded to the Cleveland area with a location in Crocker Park, and now a total of eight locations here in Ohio.

They continued to pursue their mission of being a fair chance employer, providing training, mentoring, and support to their staff. They also donated to various causes and organizations that help people in need.

Hot Chicken Takeover is more than just a restaurant. It is a social enterprise that aims to create a positive impact on its customers, employees, and community through their curiosity, courage, and compassion.

Sara Blakely, the founder of Spanx, revolutionized the shapewear industry with her innovative products. She started

her business with \$5,000 and no experience in fashion or manufacturing. She faced many rejections and challenges along the way, but she persisted with her vision. She showed curiosity by researching the market and finding a gap, courage by pitching her idea to skeptical buyers and investors, and compassion by donating millions of dollars to women entrepreneurs and causes.

Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, transformed the company's culture and performance with his inclusive and collaborative leadership style. He encouraged his employees to adopt a growth mindset and learn from failures. He also invested in cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and social media, which boosted Microsoft's innovation and revenue. He showed curiosity by exploring new technologies and opportunities, courage by making bold decisions and changes, and compassion by fostering a diverse and respectful work environment.

Another one is Oprah Winfrey, the media mogul and philanthropist. Oprah was curious about the stories of people, and she used her platform to give voice to the voiceless, to

inspire millions, and to educate the public. She was courageous in overcoming poverty, abuse, and discrimination, and she became one of the most influential and successful women in the world. She was compassionate in her generosity, her support for various causes, and her creation of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa.

These are just a few examples of the many leaders who have embodied the three Cs in their lives and actions. They have shown us that curiosity, courage, and compassion are not only virtues, but also powers that can transform ourselves and the world.

But you do not have to be a famous leader to practice the three C's. You can start right where you are, with what you have, and with who you are. You can be curious about yourself, your passions, your talents, and your potential. You can be courageous in pursuing your goals, overcoming your challenges, and expressing your authentic self. You can be compassionate in understanding others, helping others, and collaborating with others.

You can be the individual in the arena, as Theodore Roosevelt described in his famous speech at the Sorbonne in 1910. He said:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the one who points out how the strong stumble, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to those who are actually in the arena, whose faces are marred by dust and sweat and blood; those who strive valiantly; who err, who come short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends themselves in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if they fail, at least fails while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

My friends, you are in the arena. You have dared, and you have achieved greatly. You have faced the trials and tribulations of your academic journey, and you have emerged victorious. You



have earned your degree, and now you are poised to create your place in history.

But your arena is not limited to this university. Your arena is the world, and the world needs you. The world needs your curiosity, your courage, and your compassion. The world needs your ideas, your actions, and your impact.

So, as you leave this place, do not be afraid to enter new arenas, to face new challenges, and to seek new opportunities.

As you go forth from this day, remember that you are not alone. You have the support and the love of your family and friends, who have been with you every step of the way. I want to take this opportunity to thank my own family, who have always been there for me, through thick and thin. They have given me the strength, the encouragement, and the inspiration to pursue my dreams. They have also taught me the value of humor, which is essential in life, especially when things get tough. As Mark Twain once said, "Humor is the great thing, the saving thing after all. The minute it crops up, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations, and resentments flit away, and a sunny spirit takes

their place." So, Lynda, Caroline, and Chase, thank you for making me laugh, and for laughing with me, and sometimes at me.

You also have the guidance and the wisdom of your mentors and teachers, who have shared their knowledge and experience with you. You have the network and the resources of your alma mater, which will always be your home.

You also have the responsibility and the opportunity to use your education, your skills, and your talents for the greater good. You have the potential and the power to make a difference, to create change, and to shape the future.

You are the leaders of tomorrow, the hope of today, and the pride of Franklin University.

Congratulations, Class of 2024. You have made it. You have done it. You have graduated.

Now, go out there and make your mark. The world is waiting for you.

As the late John Lewis, a civil rights icon, and a hero of mine, said, "Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Thank you.