

It is great to be here this afternoon. I am delighted to celebrate such a wonderful, hopeful day at St. Mary's. It seems like only about 153 years ago when I, myself, graduated from college.

Now, graduates: Allow me to address you first. You look stunning – seriously – the view from up here is spectacular. You are surrounded by people who love you and are so proud that this day has come. You have worked hard, dedicated your time and energy. It is wonderful – and you should enjoy every moment.

Parents, families and friends: Graduating from college is a team sport. No one gets to this finish line by themselves – so congratulations to you too. Just look at the brilliant strong young women you are launching into the world. We all owe you a debt for your commitment to this next generation. Your dedication and sacrifice has given the rest of us hope – real hope – because the world will be in the hands of these talented young women. Well done – and thank you.

I thought long and hard about what to say to you today. You are taking a major step and I know that I need to really put myself out there. So, I have decided to violate a fundamental rule of adulthood and impart to you the five essential secrets of being an adult – secrets that no one is supposed to tell you but you really need to know. Ready?

Secret #1: Adults are really not certain of anything – no really – I mean we know almost nothing with certainty. Parents – I know that many of you are horrified that I let this particular cat out of the bag, but let me say: Your smart daughters would have figured this out by themselves over the next decade or so anyway – so let's just get it done this afternoon.

In my own life, it took me far too long to figure this out. When I was young, I got distracted by adults who would swagger or bluster. I assumed that anyone who was that forceful **MUST** know what they were talking about. Of course, as a law student, I took actual classes in blustering and swaggering – so I got better at it myself – but I still would occasionally get confounded by the real pros.

For example, about 17 years ago my colleagues and I at First Book asked the publishing industry: What if we built a system that distributed all of the excess

inventory – millions of books every year – to schools and programs serving children in need?

A large number of adults told us that it was impossible. I distinctly remember one person telling me that it was – and I am quoting here – “a ridiculous waste of time.” Now here is where I made a mistake: I believed them – and I delayed building the National Book Bank. But we re-grouped -- and we kept coming back to the same conclusion: This could work. And it did work. The First Book National Book Bank is the central vehicle for charitable gifts from the US publishing industry.

I made a commitment to myself to never, ever get distracted by swaggering adults again.

Years later we launched the First Book Marketplace. There was another long line of people who said that it was a bad idea. But this time, I didn't take the bait. We have now provided more than 100 million books to children – we are building digital platforms, stepping into the arts – and going global.

I never will again believe in bluster—and neither should you.

It is important at this juncture to note that there are adults who openly discuss and think – and invite you to do the same. I know that you have professors here at St. Mary's who have taught you to search for answers. I have met a few of them today. These are the ones to follow – these are the ones to trust.

Secret #2: You are going to fail. I know, I know – it is a heck of a thing to announce on this beautiful day celebrating your success.

Now don't get me wrong – you are going to be a big success in the long run – and success is a lot of fun – but the truth is that failure is more interesting and more important. Because the truth is that although you can fail without ever succeeding – it is impossible to succeed without failing. Every famous person who has ever succeeded has failed – and usually very significantly – before contributing their success to the world.

This secret has been at the heart of every major scientific success. Thomas Edison, the Patron Saint of Failure, famously said, after his 10,000th failure at

finding a filament material for the electric light bulb: “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” This secret is important for a couple of reasons:

1. You can stop fearing failure.
2. You can also enjoy your failure – and so can everyone else. So, don't be selfish – share your failure – it will make other people feel better about themselves and, let's face it, you will give us all a good laugh.

I once attended a performance of the Bolshoi and as the lead dancer made his big entrance, he fell on his face. I am not proud of myself about this – but I felt pretty graceful for the next couple of days. Now, he was a pro – and he did not let this stumble hold him back – He stood up and gave a flawless performance. And you should not let it hold you back either.

Secret #3: Grit Trumps IQ. Our entire educational system has been focused on IQ for eons because it is something that we have gotten very good at measuring, but the truth is that it turns out not to be that important as far as long term success goes. Researchers have been confounded by the fact that having a high IQ does not correlate to success – and finally one woman, named Angela Lee Duckworth, started performing wide-ranging analysis and she has discovered that, while it is certainly handy to have a high IQ – grit is by far the better indicator of potential. She defines grit as: “perseverance and passion for long-term goals.” You are all blessed elevated IQ's – which will give you a leg up – but your task now is to find your passion – and get gritty – and no one will be able to stop you.

Secret # 4: Community is everything. Build it and Be a Part of it. I spoke to Maureen Parsons, president of your student body and when I asked her what she loved most about St. Mary's – she did not hesitate. She said that she loves the community. She mentioned the professors who are there for you – even when office hours are over – and the classmates who have your back. She talked about how the community had a lot of fun together (Finney's) and how you supported each other during challenging times – and even tragedy.

So, St. Mary's has taught you what community means. Do not forget this lesson. The institutions you will encounter will likely not have communities that

are as strong and supportive as St. Mary's. They will need you to build them up – at work – at home -- with people who are kind and smart and have a great sense of humor.....wait -- let me reorder that – build with people who have a great sense of humor and who also are smart and kind. For heavens sake – prioritize the sense of humor. It sustains everyone.

Secret #5: The most powerful force in the world is empathy. When I had my first child, I was talking with my mother – trying to get some wisdom regarding child-rearing. I asked her – “What is the most important thing that I should teach my son?”

Her response was significant. She said: “Empathy – teach him empathy because if a person is really able to see the world through another's eyes – to feel their pain or worry about their struggle – that person will be incapable of getting through their life without acting on those feelings -- and those positive and powerful actions together will ultimately change the world.”

I have a breath-taking confession – that I (as a daughter) hesitate to make — let alone in public but – here it is: My mother was right. I know, I know...

Empathy is powerful because it demands action. This world is a needy place and we cannot afford the luxury of inaction. The new pope chose the name “Francis” after St. Francis of Assisi. Now there is a guy who advocated action. One of his quotes captures this philosophy: “Preach the Gospel always and if necessary, use words.”

Pledge yourself to empathy. It will require you -- when you can -- to take on monumental action on behalf of others – but it also requires you to take smaller actions every single day: hold the door for the person behind you, smile at somebody who never gets a smile. Just do it.

Our world needs you desperately. There are incomprehensible issues confronting our country and our planet. The world does not need more swagger. It needs community builders. People with the strength of empathy and the action it demands. Go change the world.

I am forever grateful to be included in this happy, happy day. Thanks so much.