

Mary Barra at 2014 spring commencement

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SUMMARY

The speaker delivers a heartfelt commencement address to the Class of 2014, reflecting on the contributions of President Coleman and sharing valuable life lessons for the graduates. Emphasizing the importance of passion, integrity, relationships, and giving back, the speaker encourages the graduates to embrace challenges and maintain connections with family and friends as they embark on their journeys.

- *Acknowledges President Coleman's significant contributions to the University and community.*
- *Highlights the uniqueness of the Millennial Generation, noting their collective influence and spending power.*
- *Stresses the importance of pursuing passions with hard work, as talent alone is insufficient for success.*
- *Advocates for integrity in all aspects of life, emphasizing its value and the importance of honesty.*
- *Encourages building strong relationships, noting that success is a team effort and requires trust and respect.*
- *Advises graduates to address challenges directly and proactively, rather than avoiding them.*
- *Urges graduates to give back to their communities and use their talents for the greater good.*
- *Reminds graduates to cherish their relationships with family and friends and to maintain their faith as they navigate life's uncertainties.*

Thank you. President Coleman, members of the Board of Regents, distinguished faculty and administration, honored guests, parents, families, friends and most importantly, the members of class of 2014!

Thank you for having me here this morning.

I am truly honored to be a part of your commencement exercises.

President Coleman, on the eve of your retirement, I would like to thank you for your tremendous contributions that you have made to the University, to Ann Arbor, and to the state of Michigan.

In 12 years, you have more than doubled the University's foundation, overseen the launch of 49 new degree programs and literally helped change the skyline of this city.

I know I speak for many when I say congratulations and thank you for everything that you have done.

Now as I thought about what I wanted to say

today, I was reminded of a philosophy professor who asked his students "What would they do if they had just one hour to live?" One young woman said she would spend her last hour in the professors class. He was flattered of course and asked her why and she said "Because every hour in your class feels like an eternity."

I promise I won't speak that long. Actually it sometimes seems like an eternity

since I was a student myself. I very well recall the joy of graduation. And recall the promise and excitement I felt about leaving school and starting my career in earnest.

The world has changed significantly since then. Fast forward to today and you, as members of the Class of 2014, you are also members of the Millennial Generation.

Demographers like to talk about you as if you were one monolithic mass of humanity. Well, I have two teenagers one just a year away from starting college himself. So, despite the fact that your generation is 80 million strong making you the largest age grouping in American history I'm well aware that none of you are alike. For example, not all of you are attached to your cell phones 24/7. About one in five of you actually manages to sleep without it. And this may come as a shock, you are not millionaires. Not yet. But you are the richest generation in history, with collective spending power and influence of almost 1 trillion dollars. Not all of you have short attention spans. Let me repeat that. Not all of you have short attention spans. In fact, some of you haven't sent a text or tweet in the entire three minutes I've been speaking. Not all of you speak acronym. HBU IDK FTW. For the parents in the audience, that's How About You? I Don't Know. For the Win! In fact, some of you still use your cell phones to actually make phone calls. OMG! Finally, not all of you believe you will be famous. But thanks to Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, some of you already are. Of course, not everything has changed since I was a student. The skills you have learned here at Michigan critical thinking, problem solving, communications, analysis, and teamwork they are just as essential today as they were 30 years ago. But as I'm sure you know very well, these skills are just the start of what you need for success in today's challenging and fast-paced world. They are the price of admission to today's fast-paced, ever-changing, and ever global economy. To stand out to really make a difference you will also need the kind of skills and qualities that most of us learn from experience and over time. Allow me to offer you half a dozen lessons I have learned since my graduation lessons that have been important to me and hopefully will be to you. First, no matter what you choose to do in life, pursue it with passion and hard work. In my experience, in school and career, at work and at play, there are lots of talented people out there. But talent alone isn't enough. You need something more. One thing that distinguishes those who really make a difference in life, those who really contribute, is passion and hard work. Remember: hard work beats talent if talent doesn't work hard. So, don't be content to work around the edges of your profession. Don't wait to be invited to important meetings, or asked to work on crucial assignments. Instead, do what it takes to ensure that you're in the middle of your business. Speak up. Volunteer. Show your enthusiasm. Knock on doors. As an employee, your enthusiasm will make your job more interesting, and get you noticed. And as a manager, your passion will inspire others to join your team and work as hard as you to accomplish great things. Two, conduct yourself with integrity at all times. In every aspect of your life, be honest. Be fair. Keep your promises. Do what's right for your family, for your friends, for your customers, for your clients, for your co-workers, for yourself. Remember how you get things done is just as important as getting them done. And remember that your integrity is priceless when unquestioned but worthless, or worse,

when it isn't. Your integrity is one of the most valuable possessions you have. Protect it. Cultivate it. Wear it with pride. This is a lesson the University of Michigan has taught for nearly 200 years. And we all do well to remember it every day. Three, build relationships.

Everything we know about the Class of 2014 tells us you are one of the most talented and accomplished classes in this school's history. I have no doubt that many of you will go on to do great things. But remember no one does great things alone.

Success is always a team effort. And as tomorrow's team leaders, you must earn the respect and trust of the people you lead. That means being open, seeking solutions, often listening more than talking. Because people don't care what you know, until they know that you care.

To quote Bo Schembechler: "If you do not like people, you will not take the time to get to know them, and if you don't get to know them, you will have no idea what scares them, what motivates them, what inspires them." Remember, too, you can't build a relationship only when you need it. Like so many important things in life, strong relationships are built gradually and steadily over time. And there's no better time to start than now.

Four, address challenges head on. I'm reminded of the plant manager who asked his lead engineer to explain her hiring process. She said, "Well I fill a bathtub with water and offer the applicant a teaspoon, a teacup, and a bucket. Then we ask him or her to empty the tub." I get it, the manager said. "A go-getter will

use the bucket." "No," the engineer said. "A go-getter will pull the drain plug." If you have an issue in your life at work

or at home, pull the drain plug! Address it head on, and with everything you have address it right away. In my experience, it is much better to get the right people in a room, make a plan, and address that challenge.

Remember that hope is not a strategy. And problems don't go away when you ignore them, they tend to get bigger. Five, give something back.

As tomorrow's leaders, you have a great opportunity to use your knowledge and passion to build a fulfilling life for yourselves. But do more than that. Use your talents to help build better lives for others, as well. I imagine we have a few of you that are Spiderman fans in the crowd. Remember with great power comes great

responsibility. Never underestimate the effect that you can have on others in actions large and small. I noted earlier how the Millennial Generation

is the largest and richest and most technological generation in American history. What I didn't say is you're also the most inclusive and the most optimistic.

Use these traits along with the unprecedented access to information and global communications that we have today to challenge convention. More than any generation in history, you have the power to expose and correct injustice, to rethink outdated assumptions, to truly

make a difference. And remember that while there's certainly a lot wrong in the world today, there's also a lot right. Not everything needs changing.

Some things need protecting and that can be just as important, challenging, and rewarding as changing the world. I hope that each you will find something that you feel strongly about supporting that you will make it an important part of your life.

In that way, you truly can make the world a better place.

Finally, the last thing I want to mention on this special day is to remember your family, your friends, and your faith. Keep your friends and family close. I just can't tell you how important they are. They make your life journey truly rewarding. During the good times, you'll have someone to celebrate with like today. And during the tough times, you'll have someone to turn to for advice, comfort, and love.

Remember that this day is almost as important for your parents and loved ones as it is for you. I can say as a mom it might even be more important!

Be sure to thank them and tell them how much their support and sacrifice has meant to you.

And remember your faith, whatever it may be. Faith doesn't make things easy but it can make things possible. So, a lot has changed in the 29 years since

I sat in your chair. And a lot has stayed the same.

It may feel like you have your life mapped out, but I can assure you things will happen that you cannot even imagine as you sit here today.

Be open to opportunities when they occur especially in the early part of your career. Each new experience will broaden your skills and perspectives. Embrace them. Enjoy them. And sometimes you'll have to overcome them.

But they are the experiences that will make you unique and the milestones that will define your life.

Again, my sincere thanks for the opportunity

to speak to you today. Most of all, congratulations to each and everyone of this year's graduates. This is your life and I am so excited for each and every one of you! Thank you. And Go Blue!