

Sheryl Sandberg Gives UC Berkeley Commencement Keynote Speech

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(audience applause) - Thank you, Marie. And thank you esteemed members of the faculty, proud parents, devoted friends, squirming siblings, congratulations to all of you. But especially, congratulations to the magnificent Berkeley Class of 2016. (woman screams) (audience applause) It's my privilege to be here at Berkeley, which has produced so many Nobel Prize winners, Turing Award winners, astronauts, members of Congress, Olympic gold medalists, and that's just the women.

(audience cheers) Berkeley has always been ahead of the times. As Chancellor Dirks said, in the 1960's, you led the free speech movement. Back then, people used to say with all the hair, "How do we even tell the men from the women?" Today we know the answer. Man buns. (audience laughs) Early on, Berkeley opened its doors to the entire population.

When this campus opened in 1873, you had 167 men and 222 women. It took my alma mater another 90 years to give a single degree to a single woman. One of the women who came here in search of opportunity was Roselyn Nuss. Ros grew up scrubbing floors in the Berkling boarding house where she lived. In high school, her parents pulled her out of school to help support the family.

And it was a local teacher who talked her parents into putting her back into school. In 1973, she sat where you sit today, and she became a Berkeley graduate. Ros was my grandmother. (audience cheers) She is one of the major sources of inspiration in my life.

I was born on her birthday. And I am so grateful to Berkeley for recognizing her potential. And I want to say a special congratulations to the many who today become the first in your families to graduate from college. What a remarkable achievement. (audience cheers) Today is a day of celebration. A day to celebrate all the hard work that got you to this moment.

Today is a day of thanks. A day to thank all the people who helped you get here. The people who taught you and nurtured you, cheered you on, and dried your tears. Or at least didn't write on you with a sharpie when you fell asleep at a party. (audience chuckles) Today is a day of reflection because today marks the end of one era of your life and the beginning of something new. A commencement address is meant to be a dance between youth and wisdom.

You provide the youth. Someone comes up here to be the voice of wisdom. That's supposed to be me. I tell you

all the things I've learned in life, you throw your cap in the air, you let your family take a million photos, and hopefully post them on Instagram, and then we all go home happy. Today's gonna be a bit different. We'll still do the caps and you still have to do the photos, but I'm not gonna tell you today what I learned in life.

Today I'm going to try to tell you what I learned in death. I've not spoken about this publicly before, and it's hard, but I promise not to blow my nose on this beautiful Berkeley robes. One year and 13 days ago, I lost my husband, Dave. His death was sudden and unexpected. We were in Mexico celebrating a friend's 50th birthday party.

I took a nap. He went to workout. What followed was the unthinkable. I walked into a gym to find him lying on the floor. I flew home to tell my children that their father was gone. I watched his casket being lowered into the ground. For many months afterward, and at many times since, I was swallowed in the deep fog of grief, what I think of as the void.

An emptiness that fills your heart and your lungs, constricts your ability to think or even to breathe. Dave's death changed me in very profound ways. I learned about the depths of sadness and the brutality of loss. But I also learned that when life sucks you under, you can kick against the bottom, find the surface, and breathe again.

(audience applause) I learned that in the face of the void, or in the face of any challenge, you can choose joy and meaning. I'm... (audience cheers) I'm sharing this with you today, in the hopes that on this day in your lives, with all the momentum and the joy, you can learn in life the lessons I only learned in death.

Lessons about hope, about strength, and about the light within us that will not be extinguished. (audience applause) Everyone who's made it through Cal has already experienced some disappointment. You wanted an A, but you got a B. Let's be honest, you got an A minus but you're still mad.

(sparse laughter) You applied for an internship at Facebook, but you only got one at Google. (audience laughs) She was clearly the love of your life, but then she swiped left. (audience laughs) Game of Thrones, the show, has diverged way too much from the books, and you're mad because you read 4,352 pages.

(sparse cheers) You will almost certainly face more and deeper adversity. There's loss of opportunity, the job that doesn't work out, the illness or crime which changes everything in an instant. There's loss of dignity. The sharp sting of prejudice when it happens. There's loss of love. The broken relationships that can't be repaired. And sometimes, there's loss of life itself.

Many of you have already experienced the kind of tragedy and hardship that leaves an indelible mark. Last year Radhika, winner of the University Medal, spoke so beautifully about the sudden loss of her mother. The question is not if some of these things will happen to you. They will. What I want to talk about today is what you do next. About the things you can do to overcome adversity no matter when it hits you or how it hits.

The easy days ahead of you will be easy. It is the hard days, the days that challenge you to your very core, that will determine who you are. You will be defined, not just by what you achieve, but by how you survive. (audience applause) A few weeks after Dave died, I was talking to my friend Phil about a father-son activity Dave would not be here to do.

We came in with a plan to fill in for Dave, but I cried to Phil. I said, "I want Dave." Phil put his arm around me and said, "Option A is not available, so let's just kick the shit out of option B." (audience cheers) We all, at some point, live some form of option B. The question is, what do we do next?

As a representative of Silicon Valley, I'm pleased to tell you that there's data we can learn from. After spending decades studying how people deal with setbacks, psychologist Martin Seligman found that there are three keys, personalization, pervasiveness, and permanence, that are critical to how we bounce back from hardship. The seeds of resilience are planted in the way we process the negative events of our lives. The first P is personalization, the belief that we are at fault.

This is different from taking responsibility, which you should always do. This is the lesson that not everything that happens to us, happens because of us. When Dave died, I had a very common reaction, which is to blame myself. He died in seconds from a cardiac arrhythmia. I pored over his medical records asking what I could've or should've done. It wasn't until I learned about the three P's that I accepted that I could not have prevented his death.

His doctor's had not diagnosed his coronary artery disease. I was an economics major. How could I? Studies show that getting past personalization can make us stronger. Teachers who have students who fail who believe they can do better, revisit their methods and have future classes that excel. College swimmers who underperform in a race, but believe they can do better, do.

Not taking failures personally, allows us to recover, and even to thrive. The second P is pervasiveness, the belief that an event will effect all areas of your life. You know that song Everything is Awesome? This is the flip, Everything is Awful. There's nowhere to hide from the all consuming sadness. The child psychologist that I spoke to encouraged me to get my children back to their routine as quickly as possible.

So ten days after Dave died, my kids went back to school and I went back to work. I remember sitting in my first Facebook meeting in a total haze, thinking what is everyone talking about and how could this possibly matter. And then, I got drawn into the conversation and for a second, the briefest of all seconds, I forgot about death. That second helped me see that there were other things in my life that were not awful.

My children and I were healthy. My friends and family, some of whom are with me today, were carrying us, quite literally. The loss of a partner often has severe, negative financial consequences, especially for women. So many single mothers and fathers struggle to make ends meet, and don't get the time off they need to care for their families. I had financial security, the ability to take the time off I needed, and not just a job I loved, but one where I was encouraged to spend all day on Facebook.

(audience laughs) Gradually, my children started sleeping through the night, crying less, and playing more. The third P is permanence, the belief that the sorrow will last forever. This was the hardest by me for far because for so long it felt like the overwhelming grief would never leave. We often project our current feelings out indefinitely.

We're anxious, and then we're anxious that we're anxious. We're sad, and then we're sad that we're sad. Instead, we should accept our feelings but know that they won't last forever. My Rabbi of all people actually told me, and this is a quote, that I should "lean into the suck." Not what I meant when I said, "Lean in."

None of you need me to explain the fourth P, which is of course pizza from Cheese Board. (sparse cheers) But I wish I had known about the three P's where I was your age, because there are so many times they would have helped me. Day one of my first job out of college, my new boss figured out that I did not know how to enter data into Lotus 1-2-3. That's a spreadsheet. Ask your parents later. (audience chuckles) His mouth dropped open, and he said in front of everyone, "I can't believe you got this job without knowing that."

And then he left the room. I was sure I was getting fired my very first week of work. I thought I was terrible at everything, but really, I was just terrible at spreadsheets. Understanding pervasiveness would've saved me a lot of anxiety that first week. I wish I'd known about permanence when I broke up with boyfriends. It would've been a comfort to know that that feeling wasn't gonna last forever. And if I was honest with myself, neither were any of those relationships.

(audience chuckles) And I wish I had understood personalization when boyfriends broke up with me. Sometimes it's not you, it really is them. That guy really didn't shower. (audience chuckles) And all three P's ganged up on me when in my 20's I got divorced. At the time, I thought that no matter what else I did, I was a massive failure.

The three P's are common emotional reactions to so many things that happen to us in our careers, in our personal lives, in our relationships. You're probably feeling one of them right now about something in your life. But if you can recognize your falling into these traps, you can correct because just as our bodies have a physiological immune system, our brains have a psychological immune system, and there are things you can do to help kick it into gear.

One day my friend Adam Grant, the psychologist, suggested that I think about how much worse things could be. This was completely counterintuitive to me. I would've thought that getting through something like death was about finding every positive thought I could. "Worse?" I said to him. "Are you crazy? How could things be worse?" He looked at me and said, "Dave could've had that same cardiac arrhythmia driving your children."

The minute he said it, I felt overwhelming gratitude that my children were alive. And that gratitude overtook some of the grief. Finding gratitude and appreciation is key to resilience. People who take the time to list the things they are grateful for are healthier and happier. My New Year's resolution this year is to, before I go to bed, write down three moments of joy.

And this really simple practice has changed me life, because no matter what happens each day I go to bed thinking of something cheerful. Try it. Try it tonight when you have so many things to be joyful for. Although maybe before you go to Kip's and don't remember what they are. (audience laughs) Last month, 11 days before the anniversary of Dave's death, I broke down crying to a friend of mine.

We were sitting, of all places, on a bathroom floor. I said, "11 days. A year ago he had 11 days left, and we had no idea." And then through tears we asked each other how we would live if we knew we had 11 days left. As you graduate, can you ask yourselves to live as if you had 11 days left?

I don't mean blow everything off and party all the time, although I've already said tonight's an exception. I mean live with the understanding of how precious every day would be, because that's how precious every day actually is. (audience applause) A few years ago, my mom had to have her hip replaced.

Before that, she walked without pain, but as her hip disintegrated, every step she took was painful. Today, years after the operation, she's walking without pain, but she's grateful for those steps. Something that never would've even occurred to her before. I stand here today, a year after the very worst day of my life, the worst day...the worst day I can imagine, and two things are true.

I have a huge reservoir of sadness. It is with me always. It is right here where I can touch it. I never knew I could cry so often or so much. But for the first time, I'm grateful for each breath, in and out. I'm grateful for the gift of life itself. I used to celebrate my birthday every five years and my friend's birthdays sometimes.

Now I celebrate always. I used to go to bed every night worrying about all the things I did wrong that day, and trust me the list was long. Now I go to bed trying to focus on that day's moments of joy. It is the greatest irony of my life that losing my husband helped me find deeper gratitude.

Gratitude for the kindness of my friends, the love of my family, and the laughter of my children. My hope for you, is that you can find that gratitude, not just on the easy days like today, but on the hard days when you will need it. (audience applause) There are so many moments of joy ahead of you.

The trip you always wanted to take. A first kiss with someone you really like. Finding a job you believe in. Beating Stanford. Go Bears! (audience cheers) All of these things will happen to you. Enjoy each and every one. I hope that you live your life, each precious day of it, with joy and meaning.

I hope that you walk without pain, and you are grateful for each step. And when the challenges come, I hope you remember that deep within you is the ability to learn and grow. You are not born with a fixed amount of resilience. It's a muscle. You can build it up and then draw on it when you need it. And in that process, you figure out who you really are, and you just might become the very best version of yourself.

(audience applause) Class of 2016, as you leave Berkeley, build resilience. Build resilience in yourselves. When

tragedy or disappointments strike, know that you have deep within you the ability to get through anything, and I mean anything. I promise you do.

As the saying goes "We are more vulnerable than we ever thought. But we are stronger than we ever imagined." (audience applause) Build resilient organizations. If anyone can do it, you can. Because Berkeley is filled with people who want to make the world a better place. Never stop working to do so, whether it's a board room that's not representative, or a campus that's unsafe.

Speak up, especially at institutions like this, that you hold so dear. My favorite poster at work reads "Nothing at Facebook is someone else's problem." When you see things that are broken, and you will see things that are broken, go fix them. (audience applause) Build resilient communities.

We find our humanity, our will to live, and our ability to love, in our relationships with each other. Be there for your family and friends. And I mean in person. Not just in a message with a heart emoji. Lift each other up. Help each other kick the shit out of option B.

And celebrate every moment of joy. Go Bears! (audience cheers)