

REIMAGINING THE FUTURE

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Commencement Address
Manchester Community College
Thursday, May 29th, 2014

Congratulations!

Tonight represents the culmination of a long process of hard work and achievement, which is meaningful for each of your lives in different and miraculous ways. It is now a time for celebration... but also for reflection.

You have inherited the promise and potential of all that a community college has to offer. The question is “What will you do with it?”

For just as important as the completion you celebrate tonight, is the certainty of a new beginning.

With the experience, wisdom and tools you have received at Manchester Community College, you now have the opportunity to dwell in new possibilities that may not have been open to you when you began your journey at this college.

So I would like you to reflect on the question: How can YOU **reimagine the future** in the face of new possibilities, in ways that will advance positive change in the world, not only for yourself, but for your families, your communities, our planet?

With the hope that sharing what I have learned will help you in this endeavor, I want to tell you about how Manchester Community College helped me to reimagine my future.

When I entered Manchester Community College in 1980, I didn’t know much, but I knew one thing. I knew that I wanted to build a better future for myself and my family, which would also influence the world in a positive manner. I am sure that many of you are feeling the same way tonight.

I wasn’t exactly sure how that was going to happen. At that time, I was a very young mother and wife with three children. My husband and I were broke, without a lot of prospects for either ourselves or our children.

This was not a fun place to be.

But I had dreams – the first step to reimagining my future. So I came to MCC, which was right around the corner from my house. I could drop off my children at school before classes and pick them up on my way home. I could take out a student loan to

pay the tuition. And I could begin to explore the possibilities of a life that was different from my past.

I thought I would major in accounting and someday, if it worked, I would go UCONN and become a tax lawyer. But something magical happened along the way.

Here, supported and encouraged by talented faculty and staff, I discovered worlds of knowledge that I had previously been unaware of. It ignited a thirst to know more than my basic studies in accounting offered.

My experience extended well beyond the classroom. I met a community of people intensely interested in helping other to reimagine their futures. As a result of their encouragement, I ran for Treasurer of the Student Senate, organized a lobbying trip to Washington, coordinated a Political Awareness Day at which hundreds of people registered to vote and served as a Legislative Intern in the State Legislature under the guidance of people who would become my lifelong mentors and friends.

When the Dean of Student Affairs suggested that I could go to Washington, I never dreamed that in just six years, I would be working in the White House, during the final term of a President whose financial aid policies I had opposed.

As that incident suggested, times and opportunities change.

As my future unfolded, in addition to my role as a wife and mother of three young children, I became...

Valedictorian of MCC.

Truman Scholar.

Graduate of Yale College.

Graduate of Harvard Law School and Harvard Kennedy School.

Special Assistant to the United States Trade Representative in The White House.
Lawyer.

Executive.

Real Estate Developer.

World traveller.

Entrepreneur.

Architect of Scientific and Healthcare Institutions.

I am now also a mother of three grown daughters - a cinematographer, a surgeon and an executive in international technology development – whose lives would have been very different without the possibilities provided to me by this College.

One of them is with me here tonight and I am glad that she can celebrate both your achievements and the achievements she was able to realize herself... as a result of the reimaged future that MCC enabled for all of my family.

I am also now a grandmother of four grandchildren, all of whom are citizens of the world with dual citizenship, and two of whom speak three languages.

So how did all of this happen? Did I foresee this when I stood on this podium during my graduation at Manchester Community College 32 years ago and encouraged people to pursue their dreams? Was the simplicity of that message then, enough to **reimagine our future**?

Hardly. Dreaming was only the first (and easiest) step.

My life became a never-ending series of adventures and challenges. With each new step, came new possibilities to influence the world in a larger manner, opportunities to aim a little higher, and with that, risks to evaluate, choices to make... changes to incorporate.

Thoreau once said, "In the long run, we only hit what we aim at." And with each successful step, my aim rose slightly from where I stood before.

There were tough points along the way. Betrayal by people I trusted, the loss of people I loved, financial setbacks, serious illness in my family.

Times filled with fear, loneliness, grief ... and unspeakable challenges. Times when I lost myself in what St John the Evangelist has called the "Dark Night of the Soul."

Over these last 32 years, I came to understand that reimagining the future was not just about dreams, but an ongoing process of understanding my priorities in the face of opportunities and challenges.

- It was paying attention to my own intuition,
- Making **conscious** choices about where I could make a difference,
- Showing up determined to do my best every day,
- Facing every problem head on, and
- Persevering through whatever difficulty....

Knowing that I could not dictate the outcome, and surrendering to a higher calling.

I wasn't always graceful in the midst of learning all of this, and I had to forgive myself and remind myself of Emerson's exhortation often.

"Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities have crept in; forget them as soon as you can.

Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.”

I also came to realize that what is important is not what happens at the pinnacle of success. What matters is the choice you make when you are flat on the mat.

Do you give up, or get up?

During my most difficult periods, I was often reminded of Theodore Roosevelt’s observations regarding the man who is in the arena, who strives valiantly, who comes short again and again, but who spends himself in a worthy cause. And whether he succeeds or whether he fails, does not matter so much as that he tried.

As I continued to get up and try, a funny thing happened. An entire universe opened up filled with unexpected possibilities and people who believed in me. With each new step forward, I found myself entering a new world that I could not possibly imagine... the world of a reimagined future blessed with the lessons from all of the experiences I had had, and infused with new blessings already on their way.

It took many days, it took years ... but eventually it did come.

It was then I realized as Emily Dickenson wrote, “We never know how high we are, till we are called to rise; and then, if we are true to plan, our statures touch the sky.”

You will all face your own unpredictable adventures and challenges in the days and years ahead as you strive to **reimagine your future**. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination and commitment. I hope that in the midst of them, you will remember those who have gone before you and take heart in the lessons I am sharing.

So How Does One Reimagine the Future?

There is a piece of refrigerator wisdom I have posted in my kitchen, which is called The Giving Manifesto, by Sloane Davidson. It goes like this.

GIVE! Give a little. Give a lot. Don’t feel guilty for what you can’t do, feel empowered for what you can.

Support causes that you care about... that your friends care about.

Have an issue you’re passionate about. Have three!

Don’t be afraid to change your mind.

Be present. Be intellectually curious!

Be radically and fundamentally better as a human being. Donate your time, money, resources and network.

Don't wait for permission... or someday. Someday is today!

Let yourself be uncomfortable in new surroundings. Create space to be loved, inspired, humbled.

Embrace change.

Create a movement.

Be the hero of your own story.

And finally as Ghandi said, "BE the change you wish to see in the world..."

This is how we **reimagine the future**. I wish you all the very best as you journey forward to create your own!