

**Remarks by Paul Jacobson**  
**Owen Graduate School of Management Commencement**  
**Vanderbilt University**  
**Nashville, Tennessee**  
**May 13, 2022**

Thank you, Dean [Eric] Johnson, for that wonderful welcome. I'm so blessed to be here on this amazing day. Let me start by congratulating each of you in the Class of 2022!

I'm honored to be among the first to congratulate you and help you celebrate. It's really hard for me to process that it was 25 years ago when I sat in the seat that you're in today. It never occurred to me that I would one day be standing here to share with you what it means to have a degree from the Owen school.

When Dean Johnson asked me to speak to you today, I thanked him, and asked him what he thought I should talk about... and he said, "about... eight to ten minutes."

He's a very capable dean and a very smart man, and I shall heed his sage advice.

He's doing great things here, with the full and enthusiastic support of Chancellor Diermeier and the university leadership — not to mention their substantial investment in this great school.

Many things have changed since I attended Owen, and they're about to change even more with the expansion and renovation of Management Hall. It's fantastic, and I was so excited to come here and see the progress.

One thing has not changed, however, and that is the tremendous educational experience.

This really is a special place, one that's unique among the nation's top business schools because of the intimacy of the program.

I found it was just the right size for me... which leads to a more collaborative culture, stronger relationships and better networking than perhaps you'd find at the bigger schools.

That's something I know you'll appreciate even more when you move on from here, and I think you'll find it among your fondest memories as you look back on your experience at Owen. I know I count it among mine.

Although I can't say it's my *fondest* memory of graduate school — that would get me into a lot of trouble, because my first semester here also included my wedding!

My wife and I were married on Thanksgiving weekend in Montgomery, Alabama, and on the following Monday I was back in Nashville taking finals.

In those days, my wife was working for a large retailer...Service Merchandise in Brentwood, Tennessee. Graduates, you will probably have to ask your parents or grandparents about that one. Meanwhile, I was a student worker here in the admissions office.

Today, I've come full circle. You see, I would not be where I am now, CFO of America's largest automaker after a stint at the world's largest airline, without Owen.

And because of what Owen provided for us, my family and I are honored to give back to this great institution.

When I think about being a student working in the admissions office... to now having my family's name on the door, I'm overwhelmed... and I can't help but think, what a blessing. What a gift this school has given me, to prepare me for success so that I can be in a position to give generously.

And that's what I want to talk to you about today, giving generously.

Each one of you is already accomplished in your own right. You wouldn't be here today if you weren't. And thanks to your hard work and the education you've received here, you're in a great position to succeed.

Nearly every day, you will find a situation in which you're called upon to help. And I'm not just referring to making a donation, although those are nice – right, Dean Johnson?

But there is no greater gift you can offer others than your time, your resources, your wisdom... essentially, a part of yourself.

I believe it is our duty to make the world a better place. You will find that, as you navigate life, success is measured consistently by what you do for others.

As you transition today from your academic life to a professional one, remember that this generation and those that follow will rely on YOUR leadership, YOUR stewardship, and YOUR mentorship.

It's one of the most important aspects of my experience that I took from here, and it remains the foundation of my professional mindset.

The number one thing I've learned to value as a leader is helping those around me fulfill their hopes, dreams, and ambitions.

I urge you, and challenge you, to look for every opportunity to help others, especially the students and young people who will one day come to you for guidance, the way you most likely have and will again as you begin your professional careers.

Also, look for opportunities for personal and professional growth – always. The world is changing quickly, more quickly every year. I took a chance to switch jobs and join General Motors, which is undergoing its most profound changes in more than a century.

The automotive industry is accelerating the transformation to electric vehicles, and autonomous vehicles, and it's exciting to be a part of it – and help make the world a better place at the same time.

Even as we face obstacles, we find new ways to navigate the storms, because at GM we have a team that, every day, is collaborating to learn, innovate and persevere.

I strongly encourage all of you to keep learning as well, and always be open to new opportunities... they're out there, scores of them, and they're waiting for your particular skill set. So be open-minded, be patient, and above all, be ready.

You know... Mark Twain once said that the smartest people he knew were river boat pilots, because to be a pilot on the Mississippi River, you had to learn everything you possibly could about the river... and then you had to learn it all over again the next day.

That was because the river's currents and eddies changed so quickly. What you knew yesterday might not be the case by tomorrow. You had to keep up with the river... or the river would overwhelm you.

The currents you will face will include new technologies, new discoveries, new ideas – new ways of doing business. And those currents will move swiftly throughout your life and career.

You have to be ready to adapt... so you can navigate this changing world. It's a little daunting and intimidating, yes, but at the same time it's exciting, invigorating, and filled with opportunities.

And by the way, from where I'm standing, you're all well-accomplished at adapting and facing down challenges already, given what you've endured the last couple of years.

Getting through this school is a tough task in itself, let alone doing so in a global pandemic!

I mentioned the collaboration I enjoyed so much while a student here – I can only imagine how much more difficult it was for you in the midst of COVID.

You have proven that you are flexible, resilient, and determined in the face of disruption.

This resilience will carry you, and bolster you, throughout your lives. You are uniquely prepared for whatever else life can throw at you!

As I've said, the future is full of opportunity both near- and long-term.

All you have to do is embrace it, and face it with the determination and grace under pressure that you already know you have.

I know that if you do that, you'll enjoy the success that this institution has you well-prepared to achieve.

I'm excited for you. And most of all, I'm so proud of each and every one of you.

I, and everyone on this stage and in this audience, cannot wait to see what you achieve, and what you do with the degree that you have earned today.

The sky is truly the limit.

Thank you so much, and, again, congratulations!