

Keynote speaker: Transitions are times to reflect, learn

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2734/keynote-speaker-transitions-are-times-to-reflect-learn/>

E. Alan Hartman, a business professor, former College of Business dean and former interim provost at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, gave the commencement address at the University's afternoon ceremony May 15.

Here is the transcript of his speech:

“Before I begin my comments, since I have you all here, I wanted to take this opportunity to say something about our leader. In the fall of 2000, Richard H. Wells became our 10th chancellor. Today marks his 10th spring commencement. Well, actually it is his 20th because we do two commencements in the spring.

“In addition to working with Chancellor Wells, I worked closely with three of the chancellors who preceded him, so I am uniquely positioned to comment on his leadership. I cannot see his face; is he looking concerned yet?

“I want to mention just a few of the accomplishments under his leadership: We increased enrollment by almost 2,000 students to 13,300 — we effectively added a ‘St. Norbert’ and or two ‘Ripon colleges’ to our campus. We are the largest of the comprehensive universities in the UW System. We significantly increased the number of academic advisers, faculty members, career services professionals and tutoring support. Even though our budget was reduced by over 13 million dollars, we began the Student Titan Employment Program, which provided an additional \$500,000 for students to engage in high-impact learning activities with faculty and staff.

“While the above were accomplished through the efforts of many, his most visible accomplishment — those steel girders you passed on the way into Kolf today — he played a pivotal role. Those girders are the bones of the first new academic building on our campus in over 40 years. It was his efforts that resulted in approval from the State Building Commission and his efforts that obtained local funding for the new academic building. We would not have that building were it not for Chancellor Wells. Please join me in thanking Chancellor Wells for his 10 years of great leadership!

“Congratulations, graduates! Family members and friends, I know how proud you are of your graduate today. Both of my daughters and my wife are graduates of UW Oshkosh, so I know how proud you feel.

“When I asked the students in my small business class what they wanted to hear from me at commencement, most of them said they would prefer I say nothing; apparently they had enough of me. One of the students, Riley O’Hearn, suggested I talk about transitions since virtually everyone here today is going through a transition — students to not being students, parents from watching your child deal with college will now watch that process in the work world. Riley also implied that transitions are something I should know about given I have made three in the last three years.

“Transitions provide the opportunity to reflect on the past and to prepare for the future. I know that each of you is reflecting on the past — your first day on campus, your first and last classes, the new friends you made, your first night at Kelly’s, your first visit to the library, first A on an assignment and possibly your first college date. Parents, I am sure you are thinking about how you felt when you son or daughter began college. Many of you, I am sure, had concerns for your child, and look here, he or she is graduating.

“I will leave the reflections to you, as they are by nature personal. Today, I want to focus on preparing for the future and what it will bring. I have found that ‘Star Trek,’ the modern-day morality play, provides great views of the future, both literally and figuratively.

“I am sure you have heard the phrase ‘start with the end in mind.’ This adage seems to work for some folks in developing in their careers. They know exactly what job they want in the end, whether it is CEO of a business, or superintendent of a school district or CEO of a hospital. Many of the leaders in the book ‘From Good to Great’ appear to have evolved into the CEO role. They were hard-working, humble and focused; they did not begin by seeking the CEO role. So if you are not sure where you want to end, you are in some very good company, including me.

“This is particularly important because most of you will have several different careers over your lifetime. I saw a statistic yesterday that indicated you are likely to have 10 different jobs before you are 40. As in ‘Star Trek,’ when Chekov had to leave his post, Uhura would seamlessly step in. When Commander Data left his post, Ensign Crusher would take over. That is your future: flexibility and seamless transition of jobs.

“I have four pieces of advice and three challenges for you. While I try to offer advice only if asked, I believe the advice I am about to give holds true for all careers and all organizations — schools, health care and business.

“My first advice is when a principal or a head nurse or a supervisor asks you to take on a special project at work, take advantage of it. Do not begin with ‘will I get paid more for this?’ When Captain Kirk would turn to Spock and ask him to solve a problem, Spock did not say, ‘Will I get promoted to captain if I do?’ Or when Captain Picard turned to Number One and told him to ‘make it so,’ Number One did not say ‘will I get more money if I do?’

“Take the opportunity to spotlight yourself. Yes, there is a risk here that the project might not work out, but if you work hard and show commitment, you will be appreciated. That will pay you long-term dividends in the organization. Also, you will gain experience from doing the project that will serve you well in the future.

“The second piece of advice is to expand your options. When you are considering another job, one key criteria you should consider is will this job expand or contract my future opportunities? In ‘Star Trek,’ they always sought more options. Captain Kirk did not believe in no-win scenarios. Even jobs that may appear to be a good opportunity because they pay more may not expand your skill base. Be wary of those jobs, whether in healthcare or education or business. You will find that folks who are most negative about their lives are those who feel they have no options; they feel trapped. Do not become one of them.

“Get involved in one volunteer activity in your community. First, much has been provided to you. Even if

you paid for your own education, you paid only a portion of what it is worth. Remember that someone with at least a bachelor's degree earns over a lifetime a million dollars more than someone with a high school diploma. You should share your time, talent and treasure with others not so fortunate. Second, it will provide you with opportunities to expand your skill base. Finally, it will often let you see others who not as fortunate as you, hence, reducing the likelihood you will fall into the 'woe is me syndrome' when things do not go as you wanted.

"Finally, whatever your profession, as you make decisions, it is important to consider both the past and the future. This advice comes from many different places. I have had the honor of knowing many Native Americans, not the least of whom is my grandson who is part Chippewa, and I learned about the seven generations from members of the Oneida tribe, as we provided them management training.

"I think I learned more than I taught.

"When making a decision, you must consider the three generations that preceded you, your generation and the three generations that will follow — how will the decision affect them and what would they think about it? 'Star Trek,' too, has the prime directive to not interfere with the natural progression of a civilization — its future. Also, family businesses often take a long-term perspective in decision making in contrast, at times, to publically traded companies, which often are concerned about earnings for the next quarter.

"S.C. Johnson CEO Sam Johnson once said that as a family business they too were concerned about the next quarter — the next quarter century. Clearly, we need to be more focused on the long term, regarding use of resources, financial decisions and commitment to employees.

"Every generation is faced with its challenges, and you are no different. Overcoming these challenges will make you and our great country even stronger. As you read in the newspapers, your three professions are in the spotlight with concerns about educational attainment (as a country, we are anywhere from second to 11th, depending on the educational measure), questionable business practices (CEOs making 475 times the average worker and financial institutions, straying from their core services to consumers and industry), and, finally, healthcare (of the industrialized nations, we spend the highest percentage of our gross domestic product on healthcare yet have the highest mortality rate).

"These challenges are long-term, require participation by everyone in solving and are difficult, but I am confident you will help us overcome these challenges because you are in an elite group. Only 27 percent of U.S. population has a bachelor's degree or higher.

"You are the leaders for the first half of the 21st century.

"Thank you for listening, and live long and prosper."

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