



**University of New England
2008 Commencement - College of Arts and
Sciences and College of Health Professions**

May 10, 2008

JOHN R. MCKERNAN, JR.

President Ripich, Chief Justice McKusick, Dr. McKusick, distinguished guests including my wife, Olympia, ladies and gentlemen.

It is truly a pleasure to join with such accomplished company to receive an honorary degree from this distinguished institution – the University of New England -- and to deliver your 2008 commencement address.

I love ironies -- and today there is a particularly enjoyable one.

You see, when I was sworn in as Maine's 70th Governor over twenty years ago in January of 1987, the theme of my Inaugural Address was the imperative of improving education and heightening the aspirations of our children if Maine was to become what I called "the Opportunity State."

And I addressed that necessity by saying, and I quote:

"I can think of no better way to help raise the aspirations of Maine children than by relating to them the successes of other Maine children.

I want children in Piscataquis County to know about two brothers, twins, who grew up in Parkman, 50 years ago. I want them to know that those brothers, raised on a dairy farm and educated in the town's one-room schoolhouse, worked hard, set high goals, and achieved them.

The children of Parkman should know that one of those brothers [Victor] is now a world-renowned geneticist. And they should also know that his twin, Vincent McKusick, who happens to be seated to my right, is now the Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court."

I recount this story today-- twenty-one years later-- not just because of the irony that President Ripich would ask me to be your commencement speaker in the year that the McKusicks would also be receiving honorary degrees, but because their life stories are still instructive for all of us here today.

They are examples not only of success in terms of position and accomplishment, but indisputably they illustrate how we *can* make a real difference in the lives of others.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that success was to “know that one life has breathed easier because you have lived.” Well, by any measure, both McKusicks in their careers have exemplified Emerson’s definition many times over. And all of you receiving your degrees today have the opportunity to do the same – especially as you are now among those who statistically will have a significant advantage across multiple facets of your life.

With more education you will see more opportunities. Those with associate’s degrees will on average earn 1.3 times what a high school graduate will earn; those with bachelor’s degrees will earn 1.9 times; with a master’s degree 2.3 times; and with a doctoral degree 3.2 times the earnings of a high school graduate.

And the reason for the differences is that we now live in the “knowledge age.” Over 80% of the jobs being created today in America require an Associate’s Degree or higher, so to fully participate in the modern economy, post secondary education is essential.

Yet only 37% of the current workforce has an Associate’s Degree or higher. Therefore, as you earn your degree today, you are positioning yourself to be successful in this new era with the credentials necessary to qualify for the new jobs in 21st Century America.

You dreamed about this day. You strived mightily to get here. Like the McKusicks, your varied backgrounds demonstrate that whatever one’s circumstances growing up: “if you can dream it, you can achieve it.”

As Chairman of a company with 83 college campuses and nearly 100,000 students, I am frequently asked what advice I give graduates of our schools about how to have successful careers. I thought I would share some of that advice with you here today.

First, as someone once said, think of a goal as a dream with a deadline – and I would add that setting high goals is a prerequisite.

But you should also heed the views of the seven thousand employers we survey every year on what they’re looking for when hiring recent college graduates. And I break them down into five key elements for getting a job; and, then, five for advancing in your career.

First, for getting a job:

#1. There’s an old saying that 90 percent of life is showing up. Well, when it comes to the interview, it’s essential you show up *on time*. Sounds funny, but you’d be amazed how many people don’t!

#2. If you’re a guy, wear socks! Preferably matching ones! I guess if you’re looking to be a lifeguard in Biddeford Pool, it’s not necessary; but in most situations, it helps. For all of you, dress for the interview the way you’ll be expected to dress at work.

#3. Don’t start off asking how many weeks vacation you get!
Because...

#4. The key to your success in the interview will be demonstrating how you can add value to the organization you're trying to join. That's what the person interviewing you is trying to determine. Worry about the amount of vacation time after you're offered the job! Finally,

#5. Be positive. Organizations are looking for contributors.

Or, to put it another way, as Mark Twain once said, "Don't go around saying the world owes you a living, the world owes you nothing, it was here first!" I guess that makes the point!

So now you have the job, how do you move up the ladder?

#1. Show up for work on time!

#2. Be positive! Starting to see a trend in this advice?

#3. Search for extra tasks you can perform to help your team, like volunteering to stay late to finish a project. Organizations are always actively searching for people with initiative that they can count on.

#4. Be nice to people you don't have to be nice to! It speaks volumes about your values. Actually, that's wise advice for life in general, not just while you're on the job. And finally,

#5. Keep enhancing your skills. We're in the knowledge age and in a global economy.

The degree you are receiving today will help you launch your career, but to advance will require a continuation of your education with additional certificates or degrees. The American economy is now technology driven. Those who continue to enhance their skills will be the ones who will advance.

So those are my ten key elements of advice on how to successfully approach your career – which really can be summarized by guidance I once received—and that was:

"It's your attitude as much as your aptitude that determines your altitude!" You clearly have the aptitude or you wouldn't be graduating today from U.N.E. So as you set your goals and work to achieve them, remember that your success, or your "altitude," will be determined as much by your attitude as by your obvious aptitude.

My final thought is this: As you advance your careers and achieve your dreams, remember the Emerson definition of success: helping other lives "breathe easier."

In that light, consider counseling those who are younger than you to also dream big dreams, and impress upon them that with educational achievement—as you have demonstrated—their dreams can also come true.

You will discover that sharing with others the benefits of establishing high aspirations and fulfilling them will not only be personally enriching, but will also add a dimension to your success reflective of the immense contributions we honor the McKusicks for here today.

I have no doubt you can do it, and I look forward to following the contributions I know you will all make in the coming years.

Again, congratulations; and good luck Class of 2008!