

Olivet College Commencement 2015
President's Remarks
Steven M Corey, PhD
May 16, 2015

Great Careers, Great Lives, Great Communities

Let me first begin by extending congratulations to our graduates. Over the course of the next hour or so you'll be transitioning from Olivet College students to Olivet College alumni. This represents the culmination of a tremendous amount of work, significant accomplishment, and is the result of a long series of decisions and commitments you've made over the past several years that have led you to this point here today. Congratulations!

I extend my congratulations for these accomplishments, but also for our decision to embark upon and complete an educational journey that has set you up for levels of future success that many others simply won't experience. In this regard, I want to talk with you today about Great Careers, Great Lives, and Great Communities.

Great Careers

First, Great Careers. Simply put, college graduates are employed. Yes, there are occasions when college graduates join the ranks of the unemployed but, when you look at the overall landscape, this is rare and tends not to last. Federal statistics indicate that the unemployment rate for college graduates was only 3.8% in 2013 as compared to over three times that rate for those with only a high school degree at 12.7%. When you review the rates going all the way back to 1975, this trend is consistent and reinforcing. In fact, there are very few times when the highest levels of unemployment of college graduates ever exceed even the lowest levels of unemployment for others. This is to say that even during bad times, college graduates tend to do better than others do during the best of times. Now that's job security.

But it's not just about having a J-O-B, college graduates are also much more likely to report higher degrees of satisfaction with their job and vocation. You are more likely to report significantly greater engagement at work, where engagement equates to being intellectually and emotionally stimulated by and connected to your work. As the quote commonly attributed to Confucius states, "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life." Your college education not only empowers you to have greater choices, but college graduates are also more likely love the choices they make.

A recent report released by Gallup and Purdue University indicates that this attainment of positive engagement at work, that is again a positive intellectual and emotional experience at work, may be more about HOW you were educated than it is about WHERE you were educated. There doesn't seem to be a connection to how elite the college is, how big it is, or how much money the college had, (many of the typical things that go into the ratings of colleges). And,

while there seemed to be a slightly higher level of positive engagement for graduates of private nonprofit colleges than others, this difference wasn't all that great either.

So, what did they discover? They discovered that the chances that an employee reports that they are positively intellectually and emotionally connected at work is related to three factors about HOW they were educated; it's not where, it's how. These three factors are: 1) an educational experience where they had a faculty member who cared about them as a person; and 2) that made them excited about learning; and 3) had a mentor who encouraged them. [repeat 1, 2, 3] Employees where these three things are true were twice as likely to report positive engagement in work; that's a 100% increase over the rate of others. This isn't even close.

Now, I don't have specific engagement at work statistics for Olivet College graduates, but we do know that the majority of our students and graduates report that they have had faculty who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and had positive mentoring relationships while at Olivet College. This is good news for our alumni and for you here today that are about to become alumni. I'm glad Olivet College could play some role in helping you to prepare for a successful experience in work and vocation.

Great Lives

College graduates report significantly higher levels of satisfaction with life in general. They also have a much more positive outlook on their futures than do those with less than a college degree. Earnings are higher, illness is lower and measures of physical and mental wellbeing are higher, life spans are longer, and a whole host of other positive lifestyle characteristics are much more likely to accrue to college graduates than others. An increased opportunity for great careers and great lives, congratulations; you've still got work to do, but you're on your way.

Great Communities

Now, at Olivet College we also learn that with personal success also comes a responsibility for one's self and for contributing to the wellbeing of others. Your graduation here today is certainly success. And, as I've just shared with you, your probability for success at work, in career, and in life, is high. This is why college, and more specifically this kind of college experience that you've had here at Olivet College, is so important,... important for you and for our society. But, I want to remind you that it doesn't stop here.

I want to continue to challenge you to commit yourselves to making a difference in the lives of others. Some of you will choose careers where this is the primary focus. All of you can commit to using the personal success you're undoubtedly going to experience and use that advantage to do things that make a difference in your communities. Commit yourself to volunteerism and community service in an area of passion for you and in a way that makes your community and our world a better place.

Conclusion

So, congratulations on your graduation today and may you find tremendous success as you embark on the next set of adventures in your lives. You've got something special in an Olivet College education that many others don't have. Take pride in it. Enjoy it. Use it to its fullest potential to advance yourself, your families, and your communities in the years to come.

God bless each one of you.

Thank you.