

Commencement President's Remarks
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Behaving and Communicating with Honesty and Integrity

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.

In thinking about my remarks to you today, I was considering the values of Olivet College, your experience here over the past few years, and the current context of the greater society you're about to enter as new graduates, emerging professionals, and future leaders.

We're all familiar with the college's motto, Education for Individual and Social Responsibility, and the core principles and values of Olivet College that we encapsulate in The Olivet College Compact. While each of the seven elements of the Compact are important and integrally linked, I'd like to highlight the sixth today, which says, "I am responsible for behaving and communicating with honesty and integrity." [repeat]

It's my observation that we are nearing a crisis of honesty and integrity in leadership within our society today. Analysis of last year's election revealed significant mistrust in leadership resulting in a willingness of the American people to consider the previously unthinkable. Mainstream candidates struggled to gain traction; candidates typically considered to be on the fringe moved to the forefront. While the final two candidates certainly had their core supporters, post-election analysis reveals that most Americans really didn't prefer either candidate. Since, we've witnessed unprecedented avoidance of commonly accepted ethics standards, conflict of interest concerns, character attacks from all sides rather than meaningful policy debates with the wellbeing of the citizenry in mind, and, frankly, outright lying that has become so commonplace that many are concerned we're becoming systematically desensitized to it.

Moreover, this is not just limited to national politics. We've unfortunately seen similar repetitive breaches of leadership throughout the business and other sectors, from Enron to Lehman Brothers, both of whose ethical lapses were so significant that they brought down the entire firm while shattering the economy. Wells Fargo Bank, where leaders provided financial incentives whose obvious and natural consequences led to widespread fraud that padded Wells Fargo's profits and their CEO's pay to the detriment of their clients. Then, there's Penn State and Baylor Universities where leadership looked the other way when faced with gross misconduct by staff and students who were victimizing others, all to supposedly "save" the reputation of their institutions, which in reality turned out to damage everyone involved, including their victims and their institutions. Now, more recently, there's United Airlines where a passenger, a physician, was battered and dragged off a plane and it took the CEO days to finally acknowledge that this action was wrong and to apologize.

This is not normal. It cannot be allowed to become the new normal or standard for leadership. We must expect more and you graduates here today are part of the solution.

Olivet College is committed to effective leadership that is grounded in the principles of The Compact and, in particular, behaving and communicating with honesty and integrity. Throughout your life and in the years ahead, some things will come and go. Hold on to your integrity. It's one of the most precious and valuable things you have, for yourself and for our society.

Many of you have heard me say this before and today is an especially significant and appropriate time to do so, "Congratulations! You are a success." You're on your way. As a college graduate, you will have an opportunity for successes that most others in society, and certainly the world, will not have an opportunity to achieve. You have the opportunity to become the leaders of others, your families, your church, your businesses and organizations where your and others' careers will blossom and grow, and the civic organizations in your local communities and around the State.

We need leaders who are committed to leading with integrity. The Oxford Dictionary defines integrity as, "The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, such as 'being a [person] of complete integrity'." The alternate definition is, "The state of being whole and undivided, such as 'upholding the territorial integrity and national sovereignty'." The keywords here are: Honest. Strong moral principles. Being whole and undivided.

Commonly accepted characteristics of integrity in leadership include:

- Having a moral and ethical foundation.
- Presenting and maintaining a positive focus and outlook.
- Being consistent and congruent at all times; being authentic.
- Living and leading for others instead of for yourself.
- Holding others accountable, but most importantly, holding yourself accountable.
- Doing the right thing, even when nobody would know.
- Challenging systems that encourage dishonesty or reward unethical behavior.
- Avoiding self-serving behavior and leading to serve others.
- Standing up for what's right, even when there's risk in doing so.
- Being thoughtful about the commitments you make and then keeping your word.
- Respecting others; treating others the same you would want to be treated, especially those you disagree with.

So, let's acknowledge your current success and I'm confident that you're going to have even more success in the years ahead. You are going to have many opportunities to impact others through your careers and opportunities for leadership, based on that success. So, what kind of leader are you going to be?

Ground yourself in a commitment to integrity and ethical behavior. This is something that you must hold dear and firm. You'll be tested. You'll find numerous examples of others who won't

share this same commitment. These others will question your commitment and may even challenge you. Don't give in. Stay steady in the truth that while this might not always be the easiest or most expedient path, it's the right path. A commitment to integrity and ethical leadership will serve you well and well serve our society. Commit to it yourself and demand it of others. We need you.

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.

May God bless each one of you and this great college.

Thank you.