One Last Lesson: Who Are You?
Commencement 2005
College of Business
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As graduates you represent the collective hopes and dreams of our institution. Each of us at Ferris State University, faculty, staff, administration, and yes, fellow students, look to you as the result of our collective efforts. In some ways for me this occasion feels similar to the emotion one sometimes experiences as a parent at graduations, weddings, and when someone is leaving home to set out on their own. These are major crossroads that help define life. As a parent, friend, colleague, and yes, as teacher, you look at someone that you’ve tried to help guide, grow, and evolve and wonder if you’ve done enough, if there is some last piece of information or advice that you might give that might make a difference. Is there something that you’ve forgotten to say or do that will help.

My experience in those situations is that one looks into the eyes of that student and discovers that they’ve changed and that a relationship that has been defined as teacher and student has become one of friend or colleague. However I hope you’ll forgive me if I the spirit of the academy and as expression of our university’s hopes for you if I try to deliver one piece of advice, something I’ve entitled “One Last Lesson: Who Are You?”

In the final analysis, who we are communicates far more eloquently than anything we do or say. Ultimately a life spent making a difference is much more than your career and professional success. A measure of your personal effectiveness will be found in the relationships you create and sustain. Achieving a balance among your career, your family, and your friends is one of the keys to happiness. Helping others is a shallow existence if it is only an approach for the workplace and does not extend to those you love and cherish.

As you consider and create your future I hope you’ll retain an insatiable curiosity for the present and an unshakeable hope for the future. In this vision for the future, don’t be afraid to dream about the limitless possibilities you can create through the lives that you touch through this journey. See this as a shared rather than solitary experience, seeking to include rather than exclude those that truly
matter to you. You yourself have already been a beneficiary of the support of so many others—family, friends, teachers, and many others, who provided assistance, not asking what they would receive in return. This life’s lesson is that satisfaction comes not from what we receive, but rather from what we give. I urge you to give generously of yourself.

On behalf of our University I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. Pause for just this brief second and bottle all the emotions of this moment. As each of you sets out on the next step on your life and career you will face times of challenge, heartbreak, and disappointment. In those times when you might consider giving up, I’d encourage you to remember today’s spirit of achievement and to remember how you have become who you really are.

Congratulations and best wishes.