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: Working with Others.”

Whatever future you choose, much of your success will depend upon your ability to work with others. Unless you choose to live your life as a hermit or never grow beyond self absorption, life is ultimately about others. How do you empower others? One of the measures I look for in working with teams is the transition from you, to we, to I. Allow me to explain... In ineffective groups, I frequently hear one person saying to the team is, “You should...” In essence we look for someone else to do the work. With proper guidance and encouragement, these statements can move to, “We should...” Through growth we have begun to look at how our combined efforts can work toward a shared goal. The most effective groups move one step further, stating, “I can...” Here individuals assume responsibility for the group’s success, contributing time and talents where they are best used.
I suggest you begin not just by treating everyone as equal, but believing that they are. Adopt the Golden Rule, to treat others as you would have them treat you. Instead of telling people what to do, consider asking more often, “How may I help you?” Learn to encourage and trust others. In trusting, think of the gardener who plants a seed, trusting that it will grow. What would be their success if they dug it up every few days to see how it was growing.

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 that one true measure of success is one’s concern for others.

Congratulations and best wishes.