Graduates and Distinguished Guests,

I extend to you the best wishes and congratulations from the Ferris faculty who have shared this educational experience with you.

In preparing to say something to you today that you would hopefully find of interest, I decided that I would try to summarize three characteristics that I have found to be of great value in life.

Versatility is a characteristic common to many successful people. In the US Army of the 1970s there were three primary branches of service (Infantry, Armor and Artillery). While at West Point I had been trained in Armored operations (tanks) and I was sure that I would be assigned into that branch of service. To my surprise however upon graduation the Army sent me to the Infantry school. Once I had been properly trained in travel by foot, I was then assigned to my first duty station in the Field Artillery ... as a surveyor. I survived this as you can see but it taught me that even the best of plans often must be adapted. Those who are open to such changes lead less stressful lives.

Self-reliance is the second valuable characteristic that I would encourage you to develop in your professional life. Early on as a new engineering manager in a small company near Chicago, I inherited the responsibility for a number of products that were less than reliable. Initially, I relied on the engineering staff as a source of technical knowledge about those products only to discover that much of the information that I was being given seemed to defy what I thought was sound professional practice (and in some cases scientific laws as well). After participating in several unsuccessful projects based on this type of advice, I decided that I would rely more on what I knew than what I was being told and things started to improve. From that time onward I realized that much of what seems stupid in the world is in fact stupid. Never fail to rely on yourself as much as you rely on others.

A commitment to continuous improvement throughout your professional life is my final recommendation to you today. Nearly all of the classes that I typically teach each semester are those that I have taught many times before and have fundamental content based on science that was developed decades ago. I still, however, routinely spend several hours preparing to teach each class by incorporating new material, technology or revising the class presentation. Improvement is a never ending process. If you fail to seek out ways to improve whatever you do, you are destined to become bored, dissatisfied and obsolete. Please embrace any opportunity to develop a better way to do whatever you do.
In closing I offer to you some graduation thoughts from Dr. Suess:

And will you succeed?
Yes! You will indeed!
(98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)
So ...
Be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray
Or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,
you're off to great places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting.
So ... get on your way!