

# ANN ROMNEY

## SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

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Good morning. Thank you, President Wyatt for such a warm introduction. Members of the faculty and staff, students, parents, family and friends, I am honored to be here with you on this special day.

Commencement is both an ending and a beginning. For the Class of 2014, today is the end of your college years and the beginning of a lifetime of important achievements, exciting adventures and meaningful relationships for which your entire education, secular and spiritual, culminating in your years here at Southern Utah University has prepared you. There are so many possibilities and opportunities ahead of you. And for the first time, the next steps in your life are not set out for you on a predetermined course. For some of you, that thought is exhilarating; for others, a little less so, and you might feel as if you're a train that's been going full speed ahead and suddenly... you're out of track.

I remember how I felt at my graduation. It was the end of the turbulent Sixties and the beginning of the troubled Seventies. I was already a new wife and mother. I remember as I sat where you are sitting now; I had a very clear realization that I had no idea what was next for me. Perhaps some of you feel that way right now.

I know that you are also graduating during troubled times: the economy is still anemic and good jobs are hard to find. But this I can tell you: there is adventure ahead. My guess is that most of us older folks would gladly trade places with you if we could. Life at this stage is thrilling and utterly amazing.

I have so much I want to tell you and so little time. I have decided to offer eight simple pieces of advice that I wish someone had given to me at my graduation.

### NUMBER ONE:

Your friends from Southern Utah University will last a lifetime. On the other hand, I'm sorry to say, much of what you have learned here will not.

I took Latin for three years. My dad had taken it himself. After all his years of study, he said that he only remembered one simple phrase, which he learned in the first week: *Agricola Portat aquam*. Funny thing, after my three years of Latin, you know what I remember? *Agricola Portat aquam*. My kids laughed when I told them that story. But you know what they remember from their Latin? You guessed it: *Agricola Portat aquam*.

One of our son's favorite comedy sketches was by Father Guido Sarducci from late night TV. He said he was going to start a five minute university. In five minutes, he said, you could learn everything that the average college graduate would remember five years after they graduated. So for his economics course, you needed to remember only these three words: supply and demand. For his course in business, all you needed to remember was this: buy something and then sell it for more than you paid for it. For Spanish class, he boiled it down to this: *¿Cómo está usted?* followed by: *muy bien*. And by the way, his five minute university cost only \$20. A real parent pleaser.

Now of course, you'd better remember more than what Father Sarducci predicted. Your faculty has worked hard to ensure that.

But while your lessons grow foggy, your friendships can remain bright.

As a new graduate, I imagined that my friends from school and college would inevitably be supplanted by new people I would meet. How wrong I was. My high school and college friends have brought me a lifetime of association and enjoyment far beyond anything I could have imagined.

Lynn Moon and I played field hockey together, rode horses together and she even went out on a date with Mitt before I did. We've stayed close for over 40 years. She and her husband were some of our strongest supporters in our political campaigns.

Your wealth in life will not be measured by your balance sheet, because you cannot take it with you in the end. Life's wealth is comprised of the friends and family you hold dear. Do what it takes to keep your friendships from Southern Utah University alive and well.

## **NUMBER TWO:**

If you want to get ahead, if you want to achieve success, do someone a favor. In fact, do favors for lots of people. Some of the most successful people I know are those who go out of their way to do nice things for other people.

Joe O'Donnell is one of the most successful and powerful people in Massachusetts. Because he got into Harvard on a football scholarship, he figured there was no way he could compete with other Harvard graduates in the business world. But there was something about Joe that was unique: he naturally went out of his way to help others.

He would spend hours of his valuable time talking with you when you were in need of counsel, or giving your kids career advice, making arrangements to help a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend's sick baby get into the right doctor. It didn't matter who you were, Joe would go out of his way to help you. And because of that, today, he has friends from presidents to janitors.

Going out of your way to help other people is simply applying the golden rule: treat others as you want to be treated. It will make you feel good, and it may also lead to earning some gold.

### **NUMBER THREE:**

Another word about success and getting ahead in the world: Do your present job well. Mitt's dad was one of the most successful businessmen in America. He was a three-term governor and member of the president's cabinet. This was the advice he gave to young people starting out. Don't worry about a promotion and don't fixate on what comes next. Instead, do the job you've got as well as you possibly can.

I know that there are self-help books that tell you to plan every step of your career. They may work for some people. But Mitt and I lived by his Dad's counsel--we never could have imagined where our life's course would lead. We simply did the very best we could on the job at hand.

### **NUMBER FOUR:**

Parenting is probably the most important thing you'll do in life and the hardest. Too often, young people put off parenting, thinking they can't have a career and family. I believe you should make time to be a parent as it will teach you to truly serve others and work for something beyond yourself.

During Mitt's campaign for governor, he decided that he would spend one day a week doing someone else's job. He worked in an emergency room, he worked on a farm, he cooked sausages at Fenway Park, he loaded garbage on a garbage truck, he laid asphalt for a parking lot, and he worked in a day care center. I asked him which job was the hardest. Without hesitation, he said that far and away the hardest job was working in the day care center.

Parenting is dirty diapers, but it's also counseling, teaching, doctoring, investing, praying, analyzing--it's as challenging as any other job you may choose to do. And it is more rewarding and exhilarating than anything else I can imagine.

### **NUMBER FIVE:**

Don't judge other people, and don't judge yourself as the only person facing problems. As a young married person, I'd sit in class or at church and see all the other folks looking so happy and carefree. I felt that my problems were mine alone. But some years later, I was given the responsibility of counseling and caring for other women in my congregation. And what I found was that almost everyone was carrying a bag of rocks on their back--it might be a problem child, a health issue, money challenges, or marriage trouble. Everyone is burdened with challenges. Don't judge people harshly--they are probably carrying a heavier load than you imagine. And don't feel alone--everyone might not have the same problem(s) as you, but everyone has problems.

## **NUMBER SIX:**

Live a purpose driven life. Pastor Rick Warren wrote a national best seller of that title. His point was quite simple, if you live your life solely for yourself, for good times and fun, your life will be shallow, empty and unfulfilling. An abundant life is one that is lived for a purpose greater than one's self.

Tom Monahan got a check for a billion dollars when he sold Domino's Pizza, which he started. What people don't know is that he gave virtually all the money to Catholic charities. But many years before that, when the company first became really successful, he began to buy things, expensive things. He bought scores of vintage cars. He even bought the Detroit Tigers baseball team. What he found was that these things, living for ego and pride and self-gratification, were empty and unfulfilling. Tom was an orphan who had been raised by Catholic nuns, and after realizing that money couldn't buy happiness, he decided to sell all the things he accumulated and devote himself to his church. And he still does to this day. This, he told us, is what makes him happy.

Other people devote themselves to their university, their community; to their politics, or their family.

Living for something greater than ourselves has made all the difference in the world to Mitt and me. In 1998, Mitt and I were living in Boston. Mitt's business was doing very well, but I wasn't. I had just been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. My right leg was numb... I was losing my balance and stumbling... I was very fatigued and unable to do much. Beyond anything else, I was frightened. The disease was progressing rapidly, and I had no idea how debilitated I would become.

Then the phone call came from our friend Kem Gardner: Would we consider coming out to run the troubled Salt Lake City Olympics, then mired in scandal? Now objectively, that was crazy. I was very sick... Mitt was running a very successful business... The timing was terrible, and it made no sense at all. And yet, we went. We left everything behind. It was crazy. It was also the best move we ever made – because it came with a higher purpose.

The Games were highly successful. We made friends we will treasure for a lifetime. And I found that the therapy and blessings I received in Utah helped put my MS in remission. In fact, I was able to run the Olympic torch into Salt Lake City just prior to the opening ceremonies.

## **NUMBER SEVEN:**

Do something you love every day. Take an hour to find joy every day.

When I was a young mother and feeling overwhelmed at times, I learned that it was critical to find time for myself. For me, it was picking up the game of tennis. I absolutely loved it. It got me out of the house for an hour, I got exercise, I made wonderful friends, and I was able to whack the tennis ball instead of whacking the kids. I came home a much happier mother. Find something you love - cultivate it - and your life will be richer.

## **AND FINALLY, NUMBER EIGHT:**

The Bible works, so do what it says.

You may not believe, like I do, that the Bible was inspired by God. But if not, you'd surely have to admit that it was written by some of the greatest philosophers and thinkers in history. Either way, it's worth paying a good deal of attention to what it has to say. And what I've learned is that following what it says makes life better, happier, fulfilling, and abundant.

It tells us to leave our parents' home and to cleave unto our spouse. Your parents will wholeheartedly agree with that one. As a matter of fact, it used to be that the American dream was to own your own home. Now, the American dream is getting your kids out of the home you own.

The Bible tells us that to find ourselves we must lose ourselves in the service of others. Over my lifetime, I have known some very unhappy people--I've found that the best cure for unhappiness is going out and doing something for someone else.

The Bible tells us not to love money, and it gives us a way to make sure that doesn't happen. When Mitt got his first salary, we went to tithing settlement with our bishop. The check Mitt wrote was so large that I cried for joy that we were able to give so much. I think Mitt also cried, but for a different reason.

And the Bible records the admonition of Paul, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." If you lived by that charge, you would enjoy the sublime serenity and peace that Paul experienced.

The lessons taught in The Bible and the gospel are meant for you, for your happiness here and now.

And so, I offer my congratulations to you and to your parents today. A new adventure awaits. May God bless you to make the choices that will bring lasting friendships, earned successes, and enduring happiness.

Thank you.