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SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY STUDENT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

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Good morning! I look out at everyone and to say I'm overwhelmed would be an overwhelming understatement. We have scientists, educators, actors and actresses, musicians, business people, PR specialists, psychologists, and more all under this roof! I'm certain that sitting somewhere in this room is a future high profile politician, the good kind, a movie star, and a doctor who will work to cure cancer. This room is filled to the brim with brilliant minds, and the passion and

motivation is palpable. We are united in our pursuit of knowledge and by this great institution of which we are all a part, Southern Utah University.

I used to believe that today was the reward for years of hard work and sleep deprivation; of high stress levels and the resulting acne. Then reality hit. Graduation is not the reward. A 2-hour ceremony in an overcrowded building dressed in medieval garb is the crowning glory of our years of laborious work? No, today is merely a check point of sorts; a time for us to breath a moment before we enter the next phase. Today is the threshold marking our transition into the *real world*. So what then is our reward?

That, my friends, comes tomorrow, and the next day, and all the days to come. Our reward is walking confidently into a job interview. It is the warm memories that will keep us company years from now as we inevitably encounter hard times. Our reward, my

fellow graduates, is the wisdom we gathered and the individuals permanently impressed upon our souls. Our reward, or at least mine, is the liberty and opportunity of tomorrow.

In 15 hours I am boarding a flight to Chicago. In 24 hours I will begin my training at improv Olympic, a studio producing the likes of Tina Fey, Stephen Colbert, Seth Meyers, and various others. Today I am graduating with a degree in Human Nutrition. Friends and family are wondering at this point why I chose to study nutrition, or they ask “Did you really need to go to college if you just wanted to go off and be a comedian?” My response is “absolutely.”

One of the greatest minds our world has seen is quoted saying, “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” Albert Einstein. Our education here at SUU extends far beyond learning how to calculate someone’s BMI or the difference between a prokaryotic and eukaryotic cell. It comes from the values and the experiences that shaped our character and aspirations. We gained an invaluable education during our time here that extends far beyond the walls of the classroom, and I know that we would not feel as confident taking our next steps into the unknown without our college experience.

As aforementioned, I will be studying improv in Chicago and believe it or not, improvisation has some distinct rules. Considering that life in itself is an improvisation, I think these rules can apply to all of us as we embark on our next adventures. And with that, allow me to share.

1. Don’t just say YES, say YES, AND. First make sure your mind is open enough to agree, but don’t just stop there, contribute. We have a responsibility to do this, to contribute, so don’t be afraid to do so. Your thoughts and initiatives have merit. You have merit. Say YES, AND.
2. Make statements. You don’t want to be that person always pointing out the obstacles and shortcomings. In the words of my personal hero, Tina Fey, “Whatever the problem, be a part of the solution.” Use a skeptical eye and notice points of error, but then move on; provide suggestions. Make declarations. And if you mess up and make the wrong call, well then that leads us to the next rule.
3. There are no mistakes, only opportunities. Fact: Chocolate chip cookies, penicillin, and silly putty were all the products of mistakes.

4. We are all supporting actors. If we are all focusing on helping our neighbor, and utilizing our talents to be an integral part of a bigger picture, I assure you this world will be a much better place.
5. Trust. In the world of improv, you are trusting your fellow actors to support you, that they will come through for you if you lay something heavy on them. Likewise, in our real time improvisation, you must trust your people. And if you don't, assess your life and find new people.
6. Listen. To quote the great Jimi Hendrix, "Knowledge speaks, wisdom listens." I challenge us all to listen to our surroundings. Listen to understand not to respond; in doing so, our ability to contribute will be magnified ten-fold.

Basically what I'm saying in all of this is to be an active participant in your life. The diploma we are earning today is not a ticket to Easy Street, but honestly probably the opposite, and we're going to have to improvise. Whatever you do, do it with intention. We have all the tools we need, an informed mind and an impassioned heart and with that, cliché as it may sound, the possibilities truly are endless. The world we are entering is crazy, like real science fiction style crazy, and it *needs* us. Given we'll probably just add to that crazy, but it'll be our own special brand and I know I personally plan to move mountains with it.

Today, as we sport these caps and gowns that not even Beyoncé could rock, we are caused to reflect on everything that's lead up to this moment. I personally think back to my first day of college, I listened to angsty punk music while I did my makeup in an attempt to build my confidence, and I attended the first class of my whole college career with the human who has since become my very best friend. We have all come a very long way.

"It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Thank you Dumbledore. We can choose. We are the captains of our destiny and we have the power to choose love, peace, success, and happiness. And today I wish each and every one of you just that. May your futures be bright and your days be kind. May we all do our part to contribute positively to this grand improvisation called life. May we see the world around us and live with intention and integrity. And with that, I offer my congratulations. All the love, Class of 2017.

