

Good morning to all of you at University of the Pacific. Graduates ... families of graduates ... friends ... faculty and administration ... regents.

Thank you, President Eibeck, for that kind introduction. And many more thanks to you and the university for the great honor that you've given me today. That was truly unexpected ... but truly appreciated.

Some of you may know that Pam and I have known each other for quite a while, from her years at my alma mater, Texas Tech. So the invitation to speak to you today really was one of those offers I couldn't refuse. You may not know this about President Eibeck, but she doesn't take no for an answer. Your president is very persuasive ... along with being a very good friend.

I promised her that I'd keep this short. I once asked for a short introduction and the University President got up and said – “Our speaker today is Ed Whitacre – the less you know about him the better.”

So, from here on, my role here today is to brag on you a little ... to say some words of encouragement ... and maybe give you a few things to think about and to do. And do all of that in a short time, because most of you want to get on with your day – am I right?

So bear with me just a very few minutes.

Let me start by saying what a privilege it is to share this milestone with you. It's a proud day for you. It's the product of a lot of hard work and lots of other things – sleepless nights ... financial worries ... concerns about your future. Am I in the right major? Did I pass that exam? Is my GPA high enough? Can I get a job?

And now you've done it. You're getting that degree.

You know, there will be just a handful of times in your life that you'll be able to point back to and say, “That's one of the best things I ever did.”

This is one of those times.

Regardless of where your career may take you, the degree that you've just earned opens up opportunities you just wouldn't have otherwise.

So, let me start by extending my sincere congratulations.

And I want to especially congratulate those of you who are the first generation of your family to earn a degree.

I'll tell you a little story. I grew up in a town called Ennis, Texas. My American dream when I was in high school was to go to work for the railroad and stay there until I retired. I'm named after my daddy -- Edward Earl Whitacre. And he dropped out of high school, took a job with the Southern Pacific Railroad, and worked there for 50 years.

That's what his daddy had done ... and all but one of my uncles did the same thing. So I figured I would too. Being a part of America's railroad tradition was a point of pride in our family. The railroad is still in my blood. It is part of who I am and where I came from. I am proud of that legacy. But in the end, the railroad did not define me.

At our dinner table, questions started to come up about plans after high school. And, of course, my plan was to go to work for the Southern Pacific.

But my mother had other ideas. And I can still remember her words: "Oh, no, Edward, you are not going to work for the railroad. You are going to go to college." Until then I never even considered college. But my mother thought that I had potential that went beyond Ennis and beyond the railroad. So, I got a college education and life took a different turn.

I never would have thought I'd be a chief executive -- not once, but twice -- for two of the biggest companies in the world (AT&T & GM). And I surely never dreamed that any university would ever give me an honorary degree!

So, I've learned just how much your dreams can change and grow.

And I have a special place in my heart today for those of you who are the first in your family to take the walk you're about to take today. Because I was, too.

I graduated 50 years ago, and it's gone by in a flash. I have to admit that I remember quite a bit about my graduation from Texas Tech ... except I can't really recall who gave the commencement speech.

Another good reason to keep my promise ... and keep this brief and to the point. A student once told her professor that if she had one hour to live, she would like for it to be in the

professor's class. The professor was flattered and asked why? Her response was "Because every hour in your class feels like an eternity."

My first piece of advice to you is this: Don't see this day as the end of your education. It's not. In many ways it's just beginning. You can't let yourself stop learning. Successful people never stop learning.

Mark Twain said river boat pilots had to be really smart and keep learning because river currents and eddies changed the river so quickly that you had to keep up with the river channel every day ... and then re-learn the river the next day or you'd be at the bottom of the river.

It's the same way in life – you can't be a learning dropout or life will overwhelm you. You will face new technologies, new discoveries, new ideas – so you have to keep learning. I know that this University has a very strong reputation for great teaching ... and for lots of close interaction between students and professors. So, I suspect that when it comes to lifelong learning, you've had some very good role models. Follow their example.

You've shown today by earning a degree that you have ability – But to be truthful – ability isn't enough.

Your degree opens new doors to you. But it isn't a guarantee of success. From here you need passion and energy. Being successful isn't about playing it safe. Success involves taking chances ... taking risks ... and sometimes, making mistakes. The trick is to learn from your mistakes and keep moving.

You know what I just said about lifelong learning? That goes double for learning from your mistakes.

The Wright brothers were passionate and energetic. They took some chances and worked through failures because they dreamed of flying – even if that first flight was only 40 yards ... about half the wingspan of a 747. But they stuck with it. And they changed the world.

So that's my second bit of advice: Find your passion. And pursue it with all the energy and enthusiasm you've got.

It might be business ... it might be arts ... or history ... or engineering ... or any number of things -- but find your passion and go for it.

I didn't know I wanted to be the CEO of a car company at 67 years of age – but it happened.

The world needs your passion ... and your passion can change the world.

My next piece of advice is to be persistent. Persistence is the real key to success. Persistence pays off – never give up – hang in there and pursue your dreams. You will have detours, times of frustration. But when times are tough ... hang in there, keep searching ... and enjoy your search. Your dream is out there. So don't give up or settle for less.

Along the way, always treat people the way you like to be treated. That's important to do no matter where your life takes you. But it's especially important if you're in a position of leadership. And I have no doubt that many of you will be one day.

When you're a leader, you have to put people first. You can't accomplish anything without them. People want to be a part of something bigger ... they want to count ... they want to feel that their thoughts and ideas are considered. A good leader does that for people. And it really turns them on when you engage them ... outline your plan in simple terms ... and turn them loose to own it and execute it.

Dwight Eisenhower once defined leadership as the art of getting others to do something you want done because they want to do it. And, for me, that starts with treating people the way you want them to treat you – with respect for who they are ... what they think ... and what they can contribute.

And lastly – give thanks ... every chance you get. When you walk across this stage today, someone is walking with you. Somewhere along the way somebody inspired you. Someone sacrificed for you. Someone helped motivate you -- a parent, a teacher, a mentor, a friend.

Even if you pulled yourself up by your bootstraps – chances are someone helped you get those boots.

So, keep your family and friends close ... and be especially thankful to them today. Before I finish up, I have a request of all of our graduates. I make it on behalf of all the mothers ... and fathers ... and grandparents whose eyes are on you today. Please find some time, if you haven't already, to say a special "thank you" to them for all they have done to bring you to this day.

Years ago, when you first came into their lives ... they couldn't help noticing that you were the best-looking kids on the block. And, as I'm sure you know ... they've still got the baby pictures to prove it!

Today, they are very proud of the strong, good and gifted men and women you've grown up to be. And so am I. Tomorrow is Mother's Day and your Mother is your Mother for the rest of your life. My advice – do what your Mother says.

So, keep learning ... find your passion ... be persistent ... treat people the way you like to be treated ... give thanks.

Oh, and one more thing: As Will Rogers liked to say, "Never miss a good chance to shut up."

Once again, my congratulations ... my best wishes to all of you ... and my thanks for letting me be a part of this special day.