

NICC Commencement Address

December 21, 2007

Dr. Wee, President Wills, Board members, Faculty, Guests and Graduates

It is my pleasure and honor to be here with you tonight on this special occasion.

First of all I would like to say congratulations to all of the graduates. This has no doubt been a long hard journey for you of trying to juggle school work with jobs, family and other personal commitments. I would also say congratulations and thank you to the families, children, parents, spouses and significant others who have contributed so much to these students success. I am sure each of these graduates would say that without your assistance the road for them to graduation would have been a lot harder.

It seems like just yesterday I was sitting here in those seats as a part of the graduating class of then, Area I. 30 years ago (give or take a few years) when I left this college, I could not have realized the path my career would take. As your commencement speaker I feel it is appropriate for me to give you some tools that I have served me well and that perhaps you can use on your career path.

The **first tool** that I can give you is to have *passion*. I believe there are three priorities in life; love of family, love of friends and love of your work. I can honestly say I am very fortunate to have all three in my life. I have a great family and wonderful friends who I cherish very much. I have worked at the same organization for over 30 years.

Though that is a little unusual in today's environment I have been very content at Palmer Lutheran Health Center because I have been respected, challenged and treated fairly. More importantly though, the thing that keeps me going to work each day is the fact that I feel *passionate* about the work I do in healthcare. Some of you will be going into the healthcare field and some of you into other equally important and challenging occupations. No matter what career path you pursue, I hope that all of you will develop a *passion* for the work that you do. For without it, you see, your work will be just a job, **but** with passion, your work will become your career. Let me give you a modern day example of someone who was passionate about his work. His name is Howard Schultz. Have any of you heard of him? Well, perhaps some of you have heard of his company- **Starbucks**. On a trip to Europe he had a notion that the espresso bars he saw in Italy would work here in America. He came back and pursued the idea with *passion*. **The rest is History**. In the 1980's **Starbucks** had 17 stores. By 2004 they had 7500 stores and I dare to suggest that number has grown significantly in the past few years. Today you can go to almost any city, or town for that matter, and find **Starbucks** coffee in nearly every store and mall.

When you have a passion for the work you do it will inevitably affect your *attitude* about life which is the **second tool** I offer you. To succeed in this world you must cultivate a winning *attitude*. I think this is best explained by theologian Charles Swindol when he said, "The longer I live the more I realize the impact of *attitude* on life." Approaching life with the right *attitude* is more important than the amount of money you earn; the skills you possess, or the failures or successes you experience. Swindol continues, "I am

convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.” **And so it is with you.** You are in charge of your own *attitude*. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes because you will make them; we all do. You will learn more from trying and failing than to never have tried. Two people may be faced with the same circumstances and adversaries. One person may be disappointed for a moment but will move on reasonably quickly. Another, given the same circumstances may go into a tail spin and seemingly wallow in their misery. It all comes down to whether you have the mindset to persevere, and even grow from the adversary. What that all means to me is the right *attitude* can make all the difference in the world.

A person with the right *attitude* is a wise person; in fact they dedicate themselves to being *life long learners* which leads me to my **third and last tool**. I challenge you to develop a *love of Learning*. NICC gave me a good start on my education but I could not stop there. I have continued my education to gain more knowledge in the healthcare field. Likewise NICC has given you a good start on your *learning* journey. But it must not end here for you either. H. Jackson Brown wrote several books that I am very fond of including: *Life’s Little Instruction Book* and *Learn, Live and pass It On*. Perhaps some of you have read them. Some snippets from the books that I think are especially good are:

- From a 50 year old, “I’ve learned that you should keep an open mind just not so open minded that your brains fall out.”
- From a 30 year old, “I’ve learned that it’s not WHAT you have in life but WHO you have in life that counts.”

- And from a 19 year old: “I have learned that a good friend is better than a therapist.”
- Brown also writes in his instruction book, “Don’t live life with the brakes on.”
Unless you are willing to try new things, hear new ideas and meet new people all the opportunities in life will pass you by. **Please** do not let life pass **you** by.

Graduates, you are about to embark on a journey filled with opportunity and promise.

With that, I again say congratulations to the NICC class of 2007. I hope that you can use some of these tools that I have offered you as you leave here and begin the next phase of your life.

- Dare to be *passionate* about the people around you and the work that you do. Do not let a moment go by without giving life everything you have and then some.
- Dare to adopt a *positive attitude* regardless of your circumstances. Be good to yourself. Accept that you are not perfect and succeed in spite of your imperfections.
- **Learn** much and often. Dare to go out and make a difference in your places of employment and in your communities.

Finally I will close with this poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson entitled *What is Success?*

What is success? It is:

To Laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty

To find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;

To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived;

This is to have succeeded.

Congratulations graduates and I wish each of you much **Success** in all of your future plans. Thank you.