

Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens' Commencement Speech
School of Social Ecology-June 17, 2012

Good afternoon and welcome to all. To our graduates, faculty and staff, family and friends, and the real winners today, the parents! No one has been looking forward to this day longer than you have! And to our fathers-happy, happy, happy Father's Day! Does this beat another new tie or what! You have finally received a better gift than mom!

First of all, congratulations to our graduates. This is the culmination of a lot of hard work on your part and it is a day for celebration. Enjoy the moment and bask in the satisfaction and pride that only comes when you have worked very, very hard and have successfully accomplished a goal that you set for yourself.

Before you get to walk and collect that hard-earned diploma and before getting on to the celebration, tradition has it that you must first listen to a little advice.

What I would like you to walk away with today, besides your diploma, and perhaps more importantly, is the knowledge that you are uniquely situated in this time and place, uniquely qualified to be successful and to be happy. The only thing left for you to do is to go forth with courage, with resolve, and an unwavering belief in yourself.

Go forth with an optimistic spirit. Let your glass be half full, not half empty. Beyond that, be grateful that you have the glass!

Every day we are all bombarded with negative news. It is part and parcel of our 24/7 news culture. We are told that these are the most challenging of times-more challenging than other generations have faced. Really? More challenging than WWII? More challenging than the Great Depression?

I would suggest to you that every generation has its challenges-yours are no more difficult than previous generations-they are new and unique to this generation just like the generations before. The times we live in define who we are. It is easy when times are good; but we really show what we are made of when times are tough and we are challenged. True leaders emerge; innovations occur; creativity grows.

Some even suggest that the American Dream is dead. Don't you believe it for a second. As for that American Dream, just tell the many immigrants who risk life and limb to come to America still today that the American Dream is dead-it is not. It is alive and well and we are so lucky to live in this great country.

National Public Radio recently ran a piece examining the American Dream. The commentator had this to say, "The American Dream is an implicit contract that is you work hard, you'll move ahead. Play by the rules, the contract says, and children will grow up to have a better life than their parents." Here is the interesting part: according to the Pew Research Center "This faith is almost uniquely American." When you look at European Countries, when Germans or French are asked the same questions about whether it is within all of our power to get ahead, or whether our success is really determined by forces outside our control, most say no, success is really beyond our control.

That is not what we believe in America. We believe in the American Dream. I am an example of how it can work. I was a deputy sheriff-a female deputy sheriff-in the 1970's. If you would have told me I would be standing here today, as Sheriff, well I would have been worried about your grasp on reality. But I am a testament that anything is possible if you have an unwavering belief in yourself. And, I know that there are many of you here today who have your own stories of how you and your family are an example of the American Dream at work.

I am optimistic about our future. I wish that I could start over with you today. We have so many opportunities and such incredible advances in technology, in science, in medicine. These are exciting times. Each of you has an opportunity, and I would add the responsibility, to contribute to the success of our collective future.

So don't let the critics, the naysayers, the glass half-empty crowd dampen your spirit. Go forth boldly and have the courage to try and make a difference. And know that when you do, there will be pundits, the critics, the skeptics, biting at your heels.

General David Shoup, a WWII Medal of Honor recipient and the 22nd Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, had this to say about critics versus those with the courage to risk: "The Galleries are full of critics. They play no ball. They fight no fights. They make no mistakes because they attempt nothing. Down in the arena are the doers. They make mistakes because they try things. The man who makes no mistakes lacks boldness and the spirit of adventure. He is the one who never tries anything. He is the brake on progress. And yet it cannot be truly said that he makes no mistakes, because his biggest mistake is the very fact that he tries nothing and does nothing, except criticize those who do things."

Be a full participant in your life and in your community. The world will always have enough mere spectators and critics.

I would encourage you to be a leader. We need leaders in every aspect of our lives. You do not have to be a CEO to be a leader. You can demonstrate leadership everyday with your family, in your community, and in your work-whatever that turns out to be.

I am a great fan of Abraham Lincoln and his style of leadership. In the book, "Lincoln on Leadership" the author, David Phillips, lists some basic principles which are practiced and espoused by Mr. Lincoln, during one of this nation's most challenging of times. They are sure to bring you success if you practice them:

- Honesty and integrity are the best policies
- When you make it to the top, turn and reach down for the person behind you
- Never add the weight of your character to a charge against a person without knowing it to be true-have the courage to challenge unjust criticism

And finally, if you are a good leader, when your work is done, your aim fulfilled, your people will say, "We did it ourselves."

So, Class of 2012:

- Be a participant, not a spectator
- Believe in yourself
- Be bold, get out of your comfort zone
- Be leaders

Remember, you are part of a larger, global community. Be a critical thinker; challenge the status quo. Challenge yourself. Define your own success. Don't fear change, rather embrace new possibilities. Have a glass half full mentality and come from a place of gratitude in your heart. Embrace your loved ones, because whatever success you attain in life will not be worth it without them. And don't forget to have fun.

In closing, take this piece of advice from 12 time Olympic medalist Dara Torres, who at the ripe "old" age of 45 is preparing for the upcoming Olympics, "Never worry about what anyone else is doing...just swim your own race."

Congratulations and Godspeed.