

1. It is an honor to be here today to celebrate these graduates.
2. When I was asked to give this speech, I immediately searched for commencement speeches to help me come up with something inspiring and memorable to say. I read speeches by Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos and various presidents. I have to confess that I do not remember a single specific piece of advice from any of the commencement ceremonies I have participated in, even the one from my first graduation from this very department, given by then president George H. Bush.
3. Most of the advice I found in the speeches I read focused on two things I expect you've heard many times before: be yourself, and be sure to network.
4. I echo that advice.
5. And yet, I am naïve (or perhaps crazy) enough, to think that something I'll say today will make a particular positive difference as you move forward with your new degrees. But I'll get to that shortly.
6. First - To the parents, uncles/aunts, siblings, sons/daughters of the graduates – Thank you!
7. I thank you on behalf of humanity, because I truly believe that engineers, and especially civil engineers, make the world a better a better place to live.
8. To the faculty and staff – Thank you, too! You have set the example and provided the initial tools for these new graduates to go and make a difference in the world.
9. To the new Graduates – Congratulations! As a fellow UH CIVE Graduate (a three-timer, no less), I assure you that there is significant value in the degree you have just earned.
10. While it is true that no one can take this away from you, you can't think of this value as an inheritance that will last forever. Instead, you must continue to expand.
11. As you enter the work force or continue your studies in graduate school, you are looking to gain experience. But, as the Greek Fable writer Aesop said more than 2,500 years ago, *"it is foolish to try to imitate the skills of others."*
12. Also on experience, in this rapidly changing world, it is not enough to be great at one thing. We must also be good at many other things.
13. This reminds me of a statement I heard from my boss some years ago, after we interviewed a candidate for a Senior Engineering position. He said that the candidate had stated in his resume he had 15 years of experience, but after talking with him, it was obvious that it had been the same year 15 times, rather than 15 years of valuable experience with increasing roles and responsibilities.
14. As you seek experience, look for mentors. You'd be surprised how eager we are to teach what we know. As you gain experience, become mentors.
15. Regarding the advice on being yourself, I'd like to paraphrase Michael Dell, who 20 years after dropping out of college to start DELL computers, said something like this to the 2003 graduating class of UT: *do not measure your success based on the success of others – because maybe, just maybe, that means your set the bar too low.*
16. So, find the areas where you can add value, realizing that engineering is part of a whole.
17. Then, judge your success against your own potential, rather than anybody else's perceived accomplishments.

18. I am now going to tell you a bit of a personal story, to illustrate the big take-away I have for you.
19. I don't know if you can tell, but I am not a native English speaker... My wife says I am not a citizen, but I remind her that while I may not be a **US** Citizen, I am a citizen of Mexico – but I digress...
20. As a non-native speaker working in engineering, I always felt that as long as my technical work was top level, I didn't have to worry about my writing skills – all that mattered was that I could do complex calculations and get the correct answer faster than most anybody. In many ways, that worked just fine, as I did get promotions.
21. As I moved up, though, I began to notice that while I valued employees who could do high technical work, I always had to spend time editing their reports before I could pass them along... That prompted me to notice that maybe my own writing skills needing improving (and they did!).
22. As I moved up even higher and began attending meetings with clients, at first I was only answering very specific technical questions but eventually it became my responsibility to convey new ideas or new concepts. So, I began to place higher and higher value in the way in which information is presented - not just formal reports, but everything (including simple presentations).
23. My students and my employees will tell you that I am quite picky when reviewing graphs. I simply can't stand to see the "*series 1*" legend on an EXCEL-generated plot, or axes with no labels or units.
24. It took me even longer to realize that the difference between a project becoming a reality or dying in the preliminary stages often-times comes down to the way in which the people who understand the concept are able to convey it to the people who will either benefit from or pay for the project.
25. So, here is my big take-away. **Continue to work on your technical skills – they are valuable! But be sure not to ignore communication.** If you are really good technically but not the best at communicating, you'll be forced to have someone else presenting your work. If you are lucky, you'll still get credit for your efforts. Think about this, though: would you really like to have someone else be in charge of your success? I think not!
26. We all have our strengths and our weaknesses. Find someone you trust to help you identify both. Then, work in improving your strengths, and minimizing your weaknesses. Be open to constructive criticism. Take every opportunity to identify what minor change could have a big pay-off and then work on it.
27. And finally, commit to be a life-long learner. Just because you are graduating, it does not mean you should stop learning *on a regular basis*.
28. In Summary: Continue Learning – Network – Seek mentors to guide the experience you gain – And, Don't forget about Communication skills.
29. Congratulations, again!