

A Message to Graduates Facing an Uncertain World

## Description

If weâ??ve learned anything in 2020, itâ??s that the traditions we count on can be ripped away. Every graduating high school and college student knows what I mean. You have experienced canceled proms. Virtual graduations. Missed sports seasons. All the milestones that mark the process of growing up and moving on have been disrupted. Many of you even had to leave classrooms and dorms with barely a chance to say goodbye to teachers and friends.

Please realize that many know of your disappointment. None of this is what you or anyone had planned. You *also* didnâ??t plan on searching for work in a time of economic turmoil, or continuing your education to prepare for a future thatâ??s a big question mark. Yet here you are. Like 330 million other Americans, youâ??ve been dealt a hand you didnâ??t expect. We all have.

My experience is the most successful people are the most adaptable. They seem to be able to turn obstacles into opportunities. Use this time as an opportunity to develop a skill set that will best fit the times we are working and living in. It is a rapidly changing world. Those who accept that and adjust quickly will be the best navigators in the sea of change. The crisis weâ??re in right now feels extreme. Why? Because it is. And we will never go back to the way it was. In some ways, that is sad, and in some ways, that is good. We can create a better place for all. You sit at a perfect spot. You donâ??t have long-term habits or beliefs that are hard to change. You are in the perfect position to make yourself and the world better.

No question, the rate of change we face is accelerating. Factors like advancing technology, greater connectivity, and a relentless focus on increasing customer centricity have created a super-complex and fast-moving business world. This is nothing new, of course: Itâ??s been happening over a period of decades.

But when COVID-19 appeared, that rate of change took a quantum leap forward. Businesses had to suddenly reinvent themselves. Employees had to adapt to a new way of working. Leaders had to change everything about how they lead. And needless to say, students had to move to a virtual learning modelâ??literally overnight.

None of this has been easy, but look around: Youâ??ve done it. In under three months, we have reimagined everything about how we learn, work, and live. Itâ??s hard and scary and, certainly, at times, very sad. But itâ??s also exciting, because it shows us exactly how strong we are and what we are capable of doing when our comfortable lives are disrupted.

One of my favorite quotes (and Iâ??ve quoted it a lot over the years) is from Ralph Waldo Emerson: â??People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.â?• It is normal to dislike change. Yet constant change is a feature of our world. Itâ??s neither good nor bad; it just *is.*

People who are able to embrace the discomfort of feeling unsettledâ??and the sense of uncertainty created by drastic and constant changeâ??are the ones who will be most successful. Without discomfort there would be no personal growth. Businesses would never improve and evolve. New products and services wouldnâ??t be invented and brought to market.

The future has *always* been uncertain. Any belief that it was predictable and safe has been shown to be an illusion. And while itâ??s human to fear uncertainty, itâ??s not all bad. Without uncertainty we would stagnate. We wouldnâ??t have to keep learning and growing. We wouldnâ??t be forced to get out of our comfort zone and take risks.

Uncertainty allows us to reinvent ourselves. Sure, sometimes we fail and we have to pivotâ??but those pivots can lead us to exciting territory that we wouldnâ??t have discovered otherwise.

Just by growing up in these times, you are making friends with the unknown. The ability to live with uncertainty will be part of your DNA as you move forward. You will surely be more adaptable, more flexible, and far more resilient than you would have been had you not lived through these times. All of this means youâ??re better equipped to thrive in the workplace of the future.

Right now, a whole generation of tough, agile, innovative people is being created. Resolve to be one of them. Think of whatâ??s happening right now not as a loss, but as a training period for the jobs of the future.

Lean in to the imperfect circumstances. Set your sights high and stay positive. Donâ??t let yourself be ruled by fear. Focus on problem-solving. Keep a beginnerâ??s mindset and stay open to learning. Donâ??t be afraid to pivot. If what you try first doesnâ??t work, try something else. Life *will* knock us down at times. What matters is that weâ??re willing to keep getting back up.

Finally, a word to parents: I, too, am a parent and I know what itâ??s like to worry about my children and grandchildren. We all have the experience of comparing our skill set with the skill sets of our kids. What we donâ??t always realize is that they are going into a completely different world from the one that was waiting for us when we graduated. Their life up until now has been preparing them for itâ??and this crisis is doing the same thing.

Congratulations to the Class of 2020. We admire you. We all make the future up as we go alongâ?¦and I trust you to use your passion, your creativity, your skills, and your resilience to keep building a better world.

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