

Today we welcome nearly 2,000 graduates and 12,000 guests. We have students graduating from all 50 of the United States, six continents and more than 30 countries around the world, making APUS a truly global university!

Today, I would like to speak about transformation, and the extraordinary opportunities that this particular moment in time is presenting to all of us.

But before I start, I want to share that it has been over 20 years since my graduation. I remember a lot of things about that day. I remember I had a throbbing headache from attending a never-ending party the night before, I remember one of my best friends asked to marry his girlfriend, and so the party continued that night, and I remember a profound sense of excitement about being ready to formally start my professional career.

Of all the things I remember, I have zero recollection of what the president of the university said in his speech. So, if I can't make my speech memorable, I will at least try to make it short.

And I'll start with a short story...about four years ago I was invited to a fundraising dinner in Dallas, that was attended by a very interesting group of influential businesspeople, entrepreneurs, and academic leaders. The dinner was inside a very large and luxurious room with round tables. Each table sat about 10 people. At my table, sitting next to me, there was an interesting gentleman who was the president of a very large public university, the largest in its state. During dinner, the conversation covered different topics, mostly about COVID as we were just kind of starting to go back to "normal". The dinner was a five-course meal and, as we were finalizing the main course, this gentleman sitting next to me asked a very powerful question to the table. The question was: if you could travel back in time, and choose any relevant moment in the history of humanity, where would you travel to?

It is an interesting mental exercise to try and think about choosing just one moment in history that you would like to witness. Someone said that he would like to go back to the Roman Empire, a lady said she would like to go back to when Jesus was alive, another man said they would like to see the pyramids in Egypt being built, another lady said the discovery of America, one man said the Declaration of Independence, someone said Alexander the Great and another person said Leonardo DaVinci, which I thought was cool.

In my case, my first instinct was to say that I would also like to go back to the Roman Empire, just as someone said before, but then, after deeper consideration, my answer was that I would like to be in the time that we are currently living. And I didn't say it to sound different or cool; I said it because I truly believe that we are about to witness the greatest evolution, and revolution, in the history of humanity. I am a big believer that the technology advancements that we are just starting to witness will impact humanity in ways that we can't imagine, and will open doors for new job creation, longer life expectation, better quality of life, and additional wealth creation. I am a big believer that you, our graduates, are embarking on a professional journey that will look significantly different than those who went before you.

In 2011, 13 years ago, I came across a study about the speed of transformation, and it was really the first time that I felt truly intrigued by this topic. This study predicted that by 2023, last year, there would be a computer as smart as a person. Back then, this sounded like science fiction but that's exactly what happened with ChatGPT, and with Google Gemini, and many others. This study predicted it, 13 years ago. This study also predicted that by 2045 humanity will reach singularity which means that, by then, computers will be the smartest species on earth and one computer will have several billion times more intellectual capacity than all humans combined. Billions with a B.

There are many brilliant minds that support this fascinating theory. Ray Kurzweil, the leading AI strategist at Google, just recently said that by 2029 AI will surpass human intelligence and that by 2045 humans will merge with the AI they've created. And while some of us might not like the direction we are heading, and some of us might have ethical and moral conflicts with these recent developments, it appears highly probable that the course will remain unchanged.

The reason why I am sharing these potential futuristic facts is because I believe humanity, and higher education, will change more in the next 15 to 20 years than it ever did in the past. And while these new horizons raise a lot of complex questions that need to be dealt with, they also open incredible opportunities for professional development and for using the skills and knowledge you have learned during your academic journey.

The world is changing rapidly. Today, the largest taxi company in the world: UBER – has no cars; the most valuable photo company: INSTAGRAM – sells no cameras; the largest accommodations provider: AIRBNB – owns no real estate, and the smartest chat out there: CHATGPT – does not use humans.

The world is changing, and you will be the ones driving many of these changes. So, my message to you is to never stop learning, to stay hungry, to embrace change, innovation, and critical thinking, and always try to use your incredible talent to positively impact your communities. And, while doing all of this, always try to have fun and choose a career path that fulfills you. In the famous words of Steve Jobs, "Stay hungry, stay foolish."

I will be the first to admit that change is hard. Most people do not like change and most people want to think that things will be as they are, forever. But change is really the only constant in life, and it has been like that since the beginning of civilization. For example, one can think that in about 20 years, in some developed countries, only self-driving cars will be allowed inside the cities. What seemed like science fiction until a few years ago is starting to become a reality. For example, in Phoenix, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the first autonomous taxi companies are already operating. In many cities, like my own, in Miami, when you order Uber Eats, robots bring the food to your house...they do have problems and sometimes they run into the ankles of people, but that is a story for another day.

The idea of only having self-driving cars on the streets might sound crazy to many but let's try to go back in time just 150 years ago, before the first car was invented. And let's think about what most people would feel if someone told them that in 20 years there would be no more horses on the road! Most likely, many would have said that is not possible. But then the car came along, and everything changed.

In more recent times, think about what you would have thought 10 years ago if someone told you that you would be able to airdrop photos and videos from one phone to another, or that you could use face

recognition to unlock your phone, or that you no longer had to go to Blockbuster to get a DVD, and you could watch movies and series all day long without ever leaving the house, or that you could buy an electric car online that is faster than any combustion car and have it delivered to your house. And once delivered, the car could even drive itself to any destination of your liking. Most likely, you would have thought that something that is now common and perfectly possible today was impossible to achieve just 10 years ago.

So, as visionaries and innovators, please don't limit your vision by what is, but always amplify it by what it could be. And, at most times, you will need to do it by yourself because this is what is going to set you apart from others. To conclude on this car example about disruptive transformation, Henry Ford famously said, "If I would have asked people what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse."

Everything changes, and change is the only constant in life. I am telling you this today, but someone much smarter than me said this 2,500 years ago. A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus said, "There is nothing permanent except change". And, more recently, another brilliant man – Einstein – said that "The measure of intelligence is the ability to change."

So, as you move along with your careers, please remember to always embrace change, don't fight it, and use it to your favor. If you do this, it is not a guarantee for success, but you will always be a few steps ahead.

As humanity, we have the privilege of living in the era of the greatest opportunities in history. Sure, there are many complex problems and conflicts out there, but the world has never been wealthier, has never been so advanced in terms of healthcare, in terms of technology, and in terms of education, and the speed of change is just accelerating.

As graduates, I invite you to welcome this incredible moment in history with open arms and open minds, so that you become true protagonists in the immense opportunities that are being generated and that will be generated for future generations.

At APUS, we are extremely proud of you, and we can't wait to see all that you will achieve. As you embark on this next chapter, and I've been talking about change for the last 10 minutes - there's something that will never change and that's your family. However you define it they are the ones that will always be there for you and you need to always be there for them. Everything changes in life except for the love of your family.

Congratulations on your graduation, and I would like to finish with a quote from the brilliant movie Dead Poets Society, which stars Robin Williams as an English professor called John Keating. And this is the most famous sentence of the movie, that John told his students, and I am telling it to you today:

"Carpe Diem. Seize the Day. Make your lives extraordinary."

Congratulations, Class of 2024! The world is yours!

