

Suffolk University Sawyer Business School Commencement
Sunday, May 20, 2018
Blue Hills Bank Pavilion, Boston
Graduate Commencement Speaker
Boitshoko Phalatse

Oh, man, it is a full house this morning. Go Rams. I learned this last night. And to all the double Rams in the house you've got to make sure you tilt it a little bit because then people might mistake the horns for something else.

Good morning and welcome President Marisa Kelly, Chairman Lamb, Dean O'Neil, faculty, my fellow graduates, family, friends, and guests who have traveled from afar to celebrate this auspicious occasion. I'm truly honored to be part of the 2018 commencement ceremony.

I recall during one of our MBA induction sessions, Dean Benham commenting that this is where you come to reinvent yourself. And I've carried this message with me throughout the program. We are all here today because we aspire to be better versions of ourselves, to live an impactful life with a purpose that leaves a positive legacy. I take comfort in that, as we embark on our journeys, and are thrown detours along the way, we can hit that rewind or replay button, and indeed reinvent ourselves.

I often get asked about my passion and involvement in social impact. I grew up in a single parent home, in an environment plagued by crime and economic hardships. And I do this work because I truly believe that I'm a product of positive transformation through education, and more importantly, of the power of afforded opportunities. And I can think of no one better suited than the one that has lived through the circumstances to advocate and give myself to those at the base of the pyramid, wishing to prevail, despite socially challenging distractions.

When I left South Africa, my grandfather said to me, Boitshoko, now, you go out there, and you come back and liberate us. If that front door is shut, you go around the back. And if that back door is closed, you go through the window. You listen to me. You go through that roof if you need to. Very smart man.

In the words of my grandfather, I'd like to say to you today – this is only the beginning, despite the challenges and setbacks – you fight for your dreams and hold onto your passion and faith, and go through that roof if you must. Take control of your dreams and be accountable for them. Our family and friends are here as our cheerleaders. But you own the dream. Enjoy the journey

and trust the process, including the stepping stones that are disguised as stumbling blocks, and celebrate the small achievements, for this will give greater meaning.

I don't want to leave the stage without acknowledging our tremendous support system. For many of us, Suffolk became a home away from home, and it certainly helped that it is conveniently located in the heart of Boston for those trivia and karaoke nights and those many bottles of wine when we all thought we needed a miracle to have passed that finance exam.

To our professors who set the bar high and pushed our boundaries, I can't tell you the number of times I went to query a grade with a professor, and the response I got was, your paper was good, but you can do better.

To Professor Matava, who said, if you believe in something, you can't sit at the back of the room. You need to take risks. And yes, you might ruffle some feathers. But that's okay.

To Professor Thomas, who tore up my resume into pieces, showed it no mercy, figuratively, but also almost missed the train home so sitting with me for hours cleaning it up. This is the second time we mention you. It's not looking good, Professor Thomas.

To Professor Bhatia, who always encouraged us to think neutral, to laugh, breath, meditate, and innovate. I could use all morning demonstrating the passion and dedication of every professor.

The Class of 2018 salutes you.

We have a saying back home, "O motho ka batho," meaning, you are because of others. To the Suffolk community, our family, our friends, we would not be here without your tireless support. And for that, we say thank you, siyabonga, re a leboga, asante sana, baie dankie, muchas gracias, xie xie, merci, efcharisto! And I just learned one more this morning, dhanyavaad.

To the Class of 2018, go out there and be the agents of change you wish to see around you. Our blood is blue and gold now. Let us wear this brand with pride. And I can't wait to brag about you all as you make news headlines. Congratulations.