

**Suffolk University Sawyer Business School Commencement**  
**Sunday, May 20, 2018**  
**Blue Hills Bank Pavilion, Boston**  
**Commencement Speaker**  
**Paul S. Grogan**  
**President and CEO**  
**The Boston Foundation**

Well, the only problem with what's been said to far is living up to it. It's pretty daunting. But Dean O'Neil, President Kelly, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished faculty, parents and families, alumni, and most importantly, the brilliant, intrepid, and soon to be graduated Class of 2018, congratulations.

Commencements are inherently bittersweet occasions. You have accomplished something that you justly celebrate. Today you're going toward big things, but you're leaving some things behind as well.

In my own case, I have some ambivalent feelings about my own commencements. For instance, my high school commencement, I was in a competition with another student to be the student speaker at commencement. I was so confident that I would be selected that I went ahead and wrote my speech in advance. And they picked the other kid. I've been brooding about it for decades. But here's the good news. I kept that speech. I have it here with me, and I'm going to deliver it to you today. Just kidding.

You know, there's a lot of good news in the world and in the particular world we inhabit of Greater Boston. You know, obviously the timing of when you come out of school into the economy is always a chancy thing. But you are very, very favored in that particular respect, unlike your older millennial friends and relatives who graduated in the depth of the great recession just a few years earlier.

You're graduating into an economy with a historically low unemployment rate. And the research shows that most Suffolk grads will stay in the Boston region, which means that you'll leave here with a degree that carries weight in one of the most dynamic regions in the world. But there are some problems with this. Boston is also a full participant in what one author recently called the new urban crisis. We've reaped a new crop of problems that all in one way or another have to do with inequality. As college students in one of the most expensive cities in America, I think you already know this firsthand. Our housing is too unaffordable. We underinvest in public transit. And we do not make the investments we need in the inner city to open opportunity to children being raised there. But coming up with promising solutions only gets us so far. Lasting social change often involved conflict. As my old boss, the late, great mayor of Boston, Kevin White, used to say, if no one's mad at you, you're not doing anything very important.

And this brings me to the first bit of advice I'd like to leave you with.

Number one, be unreasonable. In 1903, George Bernard Shaw wrote, the reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself.

Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man. Why is this so? Well, powerful interests conspire to keep things the way they are. They are fiercely resistant to change, because they benefit from the status quo. Some of you are graduating with degrees in public administration and going into public service, and you'll have your encounters with large, unresponsive bureaucracies, and a failure to confront the real problems we have. Housing is a great example. The reality is, there's no way for Boston and similar cities to meet the housing crisis without dramatically increasing density in neighborhoods that have long been accustomed only to single family homes. We're going to need courageous public servants who can stand up to this pressure, and citizen activists who can slowly reshape public opinion in their communities toward progress.

Number two, don't let economic success be the extent of your ambition. The famed New York Yankees catcher and manager, Yogi Berra, once said, I don't make predictions, especially about the future. But I'm willing to forecast a lot of economic success for this group. You're graduating with, as I said, a prestigious degree in an economy which handsomely rewards educational credentials. And given that this is the graduation of the business school, that advantage multiplies. Many of you will make excellent livings, and a good living in America puts you at the top of the world food chain. Some of you will have the opportunity to make enormous amounts of money. And don't get me wrong, I think that's great. There's no doubt that the prospect of personal reward in this economy creates much of the dynamism and success and entrepreneurship we enjoy. But there's just too much wisdom that says material success is not enough to satisfy the soul. I can't tell you how many successful people I know who arrive in late middle age with a sinking feeling that they haven't made a difference in people's lives. So I implore you to volunteer, to vote, to donate to charity, the Boston Foundation is a good one to think of. But moreover, to be an active citizen, and for that matter, to fight on behalf of your fellow neighbors who don't enjoy the full promise of American life.

Finally, this brings me to my third and final piece of advice. Be prepared to be lucky. This comes from E.B. White, the famed essayist and author of *Charlotte's Web*. He offered it as advice to a young man who was about to move to New York City. The full quote is, if you're going to New York City, be prepared to be lucky. But I think this applies to all of us, not just those headed to the Big Apple. You know there's a permanent argument among philosophers as to whether human beings make their own lives, or rather are in the grip of forces beyond our control. Are we captains of our fate? Or mere ships upon the ocean? E.B. White doesn't resolve this for us, but rather acknowledges the likelihood that whatever happens as the result of the interplay between what we do and what is done to us. And moreover, that expecting the best probably enhances your prospects.

Colin Powell said similarly, optimism is a force multiplier. I saw this at work dramatically in my own life, when I was unexpectedly called upon with very short notice to give a keynote speech at a major civic event here in Boston, because the expected speaker had to cancel. I scrambled to put something together, and in the end, it apparently went very well. There was someone in the audience who, impressed by the speech, ended up playing a role in opening up a major career opportunity for me. So, credit me, maybe, with a good speech, but no one would have heard it had fate not intervened. And this experience led me to develop another version of E.B. White's

dictum, namely, quote, if you're asked to say something in public, try to do a good job, because you never know who's listening.

So to recap, be willing to be unreasonable, don't let economic success be the limit of your ambitions, and most of all, be prepared to be lucky.

Class of '18, all the best.