

**Suffolk University Law School
Class of 2020 Commencement
Sunday, May 23, 2021
Fenway Park
Keynote Speaker
The Hon. Serge Georges, Jr., JD '96, HLLD '21
Associate Justice
Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court**

Good evening, everyone. I can't tell you how happy I am to be here.

President Kelly, the provost, faculty and staff and the administration, and most importantly, the Class of 2020: Good evening to you and your families. I'm so happy to be sharing your moment, although deferred, tonight with you.

Now, if I understand this correctly, this is the last commencement ceremony of this weekend. This is the last one. I see you're pretty excited. [LAUGHTER] Now, what is that that they say about the best? They save it for last, and so here we are. [APPLAUSE] We have saved the best for last. [APPLAUSE]

Here we are in this absolutely cherished Boston landmark. I grew up in Boston, and I can recall my dreams about standing here, albeit not in a robe, but in cleats and a pair of white pants. I must confess that I'd hoped that the choice of America's most beloved ballpark for this ceremony would involve my throwing out a ceremonial first pitch. But even without that, I'm glad to be here with you.

It's been a long weekend. As you just heard, this is actually my second commencement address. Yesterday I spoke to the class of 2021 from the law school, and in case you're wondering, they looked a lot more tired than you do.

Now, I'm a very lucky man. There isn't any question about that. I've done OK in my life and my legal career, and you would probably have expected that I would have advised all of those budding lawyers to work hard and to be a credit to their profession, and to be grateful for every day that they spend doing such important work.

Well, that wasn't exactly what I said. In fact, I suggested to them that they do the opposite. I suggested to them that they go for a walk. And on that walk, I asked them to think long and hard about their future. I asked them to make sure that this was absolutely how they wanted their lives to pan out, and not be afraid if the answer was no.

Because there is one thing much, much worse than being 25 years old and coming to this huge realization that you are embarking on the wrong career. And that is to be 65 years old and reflecting that you've just spent four decades living the wrong life for you.

It may surprise you, that even though I love my job and I'm honored to have been chosen to do it, that I would consider yesterday to be a success if one single person from that class comes back from that walk and decides to pursue a different dream.

Which brings me to you wonderful people — younger, and with even more doors open to you. Some of you are on the road to a career in law, or maybe to be an accountant or in the military or technology or communication. You are at a wonderful moment in your lives, a moment where you can plot your own course, where the world is yours for the taking, and where you are bound by very few ties. And when you wake up tomorrow, there's just one simple thing that I ask you to remember from this Suffolk alum. It's that it's OK to say no.

Now, let's dwell on that for a minute. Because saying it like that probably sound counterintuitive, and pretty negative. But it's not. It won't have passed by any of you that you are Class of 2020, graduating here today a year later, in May of 2021. You have waited all of this time. It's symbolic of a world in which so many people have deferred a year of their lives.

So I imagine that you've got to be bursting with impatience to make your mark on this adult life, to build businesses, improve lives, and to add value. You must be desperate to knock down doors, jump on flights, and to cash in all of these qualifications that you have. And with the vaccine rollout in full swing, and the prospect of better times ahead, all that pent-up frustration must be pretty explosive right now, and that would be understandable.

So let me give you a little piece of advice that you may not want to hear. The biggest mistake you could make now is to rush.

Because although you may not feel like it right now, you've spent your entire lives rushing: rushing through the system from nursery school to junior high, middle school, through your senior years, and to college, fueled by this constant diet of tests and assessments and deadlines. And on the whole, you have done an absolutely marvelous job. You've leapt over all of those hurdles that have been laid out for you on the United States educational conveyer belt, and you've made it to this day when you get to dress up, throw your hats in the air and celebrate your success. And you should.

But just before jumping onto the next conveyer belt, this is a fine moment, but it's also a dangerous one. Because from your perspective, that conveyer belt is moving fast. And it may feel like you have to jump on, to get moving, to leap into your future. But please don't do so without thinking, without questioning your true motives, and trying to imagine a day when you will look on this moment as the day you made a choice that potentially had more impact on your lives than your choice of partner — or even your choice of baseball team.

This choice of career will in all probability take up more of your time than any other relationship that you have. It will impact your mood. It will impact your lifestyle. It will impact your health. It will also impact your bank account. But also more importantly, your sense of happiness and fulfillment.

And at this stage of your lives, it's so easy to make a call based on everything and anything other than what is right for you. You all are the graduates of the arts and sciences. Your skill set can translate into almost anything, to grad school or law school, retail, philanthropy, transportation, technology. Embrace that choice. Embrace your freedom to choose, because next week, you'll wake up, and you'll be 50. Which is no bad place to be. But it comes with responsibilities that you can barely imagine right now, and it comes with the heavy realization that it may be too late to start again.

Looking at me standing here, I'm sure will come as a huge surprise to you that I love to eat. I love eating with my friends, and before the pandemic some of our favorite nights out would be eating at buffets with a whole ocean of textures and foods and smells from every bowl. But when we first visited, I would grab the first tasty dish that I could find, the first one that I could see, eat too much of it and find there wasn't enough space to try anything else. I realized that I had missed the best options by going too hard, too soon.

These days I look harder. I plan more than one course at a time. I take a pause before jumping in, and that makes for a much, much better meal.

I don't need to tell you that that story has less to do about my appetite and more to do with the choices facing you right now, because the biggest mistake that you can make is to jump in and do the wrong thing. And by the wrong thing, I mean something that isn't truly authentically you.

Trust me. I did it in my 30s when I was tempted by crisp, green bills, and I stopped practicing law to become a recruiter. And let me tell you, if money's your thing, you may find it there. You can call up contacts, introduce them to new firms and get paid whenever they make a move. It's a great life, for the right person. But in retrospect, I knew before I took that opportunity that I was the wrong person.

And let me tell you, you'll never stop dreaming. Hell, even before I was so excited about being here and having the honor of speaking to you, I still got a little wistful about what it would be like to be here playing baseball, because the grass is always greener.

I started dreaming out loud recently when chatting with a very dear friend of mine, Rod Osborne, who happens to be here. He's sitting up there in a box with the rest of my family. It was something that he said to me that made for the start of what I wanted to say to you all.

We were discussing our lives and our jobs, and I said to him that although I love what I do, I was reflecting on the lives led by partners in big law firms, with huge second homes on [Martha's] Vineyard, with private boxes at the ball game, and fleets of high-performance cars. And like the

good friend that he is, Rod told it to me like it is. I woke up the next morning to a text message from Rod. Let me read some of it to you.

“Serge, I have to warn you about something. Don't fall into the trap of looking at your peers and get frustrated about what your life isn't. No one can move forward looking over their shoulder and second-guessing their life. You're doing something meaningful and memorable with your life. And that's worth more than money.”

I read it, and I felt a little ashamed. Actually, I felt a lot ashamed. He's right, of course. I've got a great life. I wake up every day excited. I go to bed having been challenged in the best possible ways. I was born to do what I'm doing, and I love it. And that's worth savoring. Even without a life on the Vineyard.

I'm not sure if standing here inside this grand old stadium that I'm allowed to say that one of my equally beloved teams is the Boston Bruins. If not, I apologize. But the bruin, of course, is a bear. Which reminds me of a chat I had with another friend recently when he observed that we, as human beings, are the only creatures on earth who spend so much of our time trying to be something else. Take a big brown bear, he said. She doesn't walk through the forest wishing she was a person or a dog or a horse. She's quite happy being just a bear, and that means she can focus 100% on being the very best bear she can be. She hibernates like a bear, hunts like a bear, eats like a bear. She's completely true to herself and, he added, there are times when I wish I were more like her. I think there's an important lesson there.

When you look ahead, dreaming and making plans, make sure they're your dreams and your plans. Don't choose your next steps because you won an award or because you want a new car or because your parents made it clear that's what they want for you. Don't make decisions based on what sounds good in a bar or looks good on a résumé. And don't do it if it doesn't inspire you, because it will only not bring out the best in you. You never want to wake up one day and resent your life.

You may already have a job or be starting a new course of study, but remember how young you are. Assuming you're not even yet 25 years old, your brains haven't even stopped developing. Don't do something because someone else thinks it's right for you. Please. Do it because it is you. And if it's not, please don't be afraid to say no. Because if you are true to yourself, you will never suffer from the imposter syndrome. You will never be resentful. And most importantly, you will never regret the life you have chosen.

I will give that same advice to my own children. Be yourselves. Do what truly makes you happy, and don't be afraid to say no. Sure, change is possible, but it's much easier to make the career decision that is right for you right now.

Today doesn't mark an end. It can't. It's your commencement, which means the beginning, a fresh start where all the choices are all yours to make. And I promise you that you will never regret those choices if they set you free and enable you to be the very best you that you can be.

I cannot tell you how much I wish you good luck. I cannot tell you how much I root for you. But now's the time. Go get 'em. Congratulations. [APPLAUSE]