

00:05  
- So thank you so much, President Kelly, Chairman Len,  
00:10  
Dean Zeng, Professor Dechan,  
00:13  
Vice President and Provost Sandell, board of trustees,  
00:18  
administrators, faculty, and friends, and to you,  
00:23  
our Suffolk Sawyer School graduates, hello,  
00:28  
and congratulations.  
00:31  
You made it through this past year.  
00:35  
Yay.  
00:36  
(audience clapping)  
00:40  
And you are getting your overdue recognition  
00:43  
and time for celebration,  
00:45  
and I'm so excited to be part of that with you here today.  
00:49  
I'm also so excited and honored  
00:53  
to receive this honorary doctorate.  
00:56  
It has a lot of meaning for me  
00:59  
and it may contain lessons for all of us,  
01:02  
and I'd like to explain a little bit more about that  
01:05  
in a moment.  
01:07  
As I look at you,  
01:10  
I realize that you have all traveled different paths  
01:14  
to arrive here today.  
01:16  
Each of you has had unique life journeys,  
01:20  
and your experiences in the last 12 months have been varied,  
01:26  
but you all share something.  
01:29  
You overcame the interruption of your graduating year.  
01:34  
You stuck with it.  
01:35  
You supported each other.  
01:37  
You pivoted to online and you completed your coursework.  
01:42  
No small feat,  
01:44  
as you were balancing the pressures of your personal lives,  
01:48

the physical isolation, the economic shutdown  
01:53  
and the fear of contracting this novel disease, for which,  
01:57  
at the time, there was no treatment and no cure  
02:02  
and no vaccines,  
02:04  
and then what came next was different for each of you.  
02:09  
COVID took something away from all of you,  
02:13  
and for most of you, many things, personal losses,  
02:19  
illnesses, dreams deferred, lives derailed.  
02:26  
For some, job opportunities or promotions disappeared.  
02:32  
In other cases, dream overseas internships  
02:35  
or studies became unavailable.  
02:38  
Some of you were able to move on to that next step,  
02:41  
but on completely different terms,  
02:43  
like working or studying remotely  
02:45  
and never getting to meet your coworkers  
02:48  
or your classmates in person.  
02:51  
At this time in your lives,  
02:53  
when you stood on the cusp of the next step,  
02:57  
it must've felt like you had rug pulled out from under you.  
03:02  
COVID has left us all completely changed, and globally,  
03:06  
the battle is not over yet, but as we plan for re-entry  
03:11  
into whatever this permanently changed world looks like,  
03:16  
we can acknowledge and mourn everything  
03:19  
that was taken from us,  
03:22  
and we can also focus on what it has given us,  
03:27  
and I mean more than the vaccines,  
03:29  
more than Netflix shows and Snapchat filters for Zoom,  
03:34  
drawing on your education at Suffolk  
03:37  
and the events of the last year, you can practice alchemy,  
03:41  
which, I think, was part of your core curriculum,  
03:44  
and that is you can reframe your thinking and approach

03:47  
and harness what you have learned  
03:50  
to springboard you forward,  
03:52  
and I'm going to practice it right now.  
03:55  
For me, this hood represents a life I missed,  
04:02  
and it also represents a life I gained and lived,  
04:07  
which I believe is the life I was supposed to live,  
04:10  
because it happened that way.  
04:13  
So growing up in northern New Jersey,  
04:15  
taking accelerated classes in high school,  
04:18  
being recruited by leading universities,  
04:20  
I thought I would go straight through to get my PhD  
04:23  
in psychology or JD in law,  
04:27  
beating the record of my two oldest siblings,  
04:30  
then practice in New York City and live in Manhattan  
04:34  
with an apartment-sized dog, and life intervened,  
04:39  
and my journey since then has been one filled  
04:41  
with many twists and turns, a lot of mistakes,  
04:45  
trials and adversity,  
04:46  
and I wouldn't trade it for my original dream.  
04:50  
At each stage, being faced with a challenge  
04:54  
or perceiving a need,  
04:58  
that's led to a change in course for me.  
05:01  
So the one thing I've learned  
05:02  
is that after the decisions are made and the chorus is set,  
05:06  
looking back and regretting are the only things  
05:09  
that are off the table.  
05:11  
What I've learned is that the keys to surviving and thriving  
05:16  
are resilience, recognizing adversity as an opportunity,  
05:24  
embrace of change, commitment to a learning mindset,  
05:30  
prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion,  
05:34

seeing collaboration as a key way to get things done  
05:38  
and constantly seeking purpose and to address needs.  
05:43  
So just want to share a few episodes from my life  
05:46  
where these insights developed or came into play.  
05:49  
So as a rising senior in high school,  
05:52  
a family move to Kentucky resulted  
05:54  
in me suddenly skipping my senior year  
05:58  
and adapting to a new culture in a small southern college,  
06:03  
as a short woman with an Italian last name  
06:06  
and a New Jersey accent.  
06:09  
After graduation,  
06:10  
my financial circumstances led to attending law school  
06:14  
at night at a local state university for a year,  
06:18  
and I made Dean's list,  
06:19  
but then I decided that the work that I was doing  
06:22  
to support the revitalization of our small river city  
06:26  
was worth 100% of my efforts, and I deferred that dream.  
06:30  
So no PhD and no JD.  
06:34  
I saw the transformative effect creating jobs  
06:37  
and economic vitality in an area could have,  
06:40  
and that ignited my passion for economic development,  
06:44  
so I did that for two cities and a national nonprofit,  
06:48  
ending up traveling the country, assisting cities,  
06:52  
states and tribes.  
06:55  
I always felt like I had to work harder and longer  
06:59  
to make up for my lack of a graduate degree,  
07:02  
and my BA from being from a little known college.  
07:06  
When we had our son, priorities shifted again,  
07:09  
and I went into banking, just to stop traveling.  
07:13  
Moving to Cape Cod and joining Cape Cod 5, a mutual bank,  
07:17  
28 years ago,

07:19  
offered me an opportunity to continue to align my work  
07:23  
with my values.  
07:25  
However, I was frustrated  
07:29  
by the lack of diversity in management  
07:32  
in the banking industry and the unconscious bias  
07:36  
that permeated it.  
07:38  
I threw myself into understanding the benefits of diversity  
07:42  
and realize there is rich data that shows  
07:45  
that diverse management teams outperform less diverse ones  
07:50  
every day of the week,  
07:52  
and that more inclusive organizations are higher performing.  
07:56  
This catalyzed, for me, a lifelong advocacy  
08:00  
for (indistinct) and I.  
08:02  
When the president of the bank was close to retirement,  
08:05  
I felt that I needed to finally address  
08:07  
my lack of credentials to get another job,  
08:10  
when whoever took his place would ask me to leave.  
08:14  
As a single mom, and yes, another twist and turn,  
08:19  
I knew that I had to do an MBA on a part-time basis.  
08:23  
I was able to take advantage  
08:24  
of Suffolk's part-time MBA program, frankly,  
08:28  
because some of the courses were offered locally.  
08:31  
I really went into it, just as a papering exercise,  
08:35  
but I got so much more out of it, academic rigor,  
08:40  
lifelong friendships and such a rich experience,  
08:44  
and I am not saying, Jody,  
08:46  
that the fact that I was wrapping up my Sawyer School MBA  
08:51  
got me the job as CEO when the president retired,  
08:55  
but it certainly didn't hurt.  
08:57  
So if you can reframe your experience  
09:01

and take in what you've achieved  
09:04  
with your Sawyer School education,  
09:06  
and the last year of COVID, in terms of resilience,  
09:12  
recognizing adversity as an opportunity, embrace of change,  
09:18  
commitment to a learning mindset, prioritizing diversity,  
09:22  
equity and inclusion, leveraging collaboration  
09:25  
and seeking purpose and to address needs,  
09:30  
you could end up being the most successful class  
09:36  
to ever graduate from the Sawyer School,  
09:40  
and when you think about what your...  
09:42  
Give yourselves an applause for that.  
09:44  
(audience clapping)  
09:47  
Because I believe that.  
09:49  
When you think about what you're facing,  
09:51  
in terms of a world that is changing at a pace  
09:54  
never before seen, your ability to harness these  
09:59  
could turn into your superpowers, and that,  
10:03  
plus the rigor and education that the Sawyer School  
10:06  
and its wonderfully diverse student body has provided you,  
10:10  
will enable you to leverage these learnings you've gained  
10:14  
from this past year for future success.  
10:18  
So getting back to this honorary degree.  
10:22  
I never did earn that PhD in psychology or JD in law,  
10:29  
but this was my life, and the one I was supposed to  
10:33  
and had the opportunity to live.  
10:37  
Your lives have...  
10:40  
Thank you.  
10:40  
Oh, that's so nice of you.  
10:41  
Thank you.  
10:42  
(audience clapping)  
10:45  
Now, your lives have taken, in many cases, a major turn,

10:52

but it's not a U-turn.

10:54

It's a new path to a new life and a new experience,

11:00

and I am so honored to be in your presence today,

11:04

because I know you will unleash all the strength

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and the insights and the commitment that you have developed

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during this time of great trial,

11:19

and the world is better to have you in it.

11:23

I wish you all the best.

11:26

Congratulations.

11:27

(audience clapping)