

**Suffolk University Law School Commencement
Saturday, May 22, 2021
Fenway Park
Commencement Speaker
The Honorable Serge Georges, Jr.
Associate Justice
Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court**

Chairman Lamb, members of the Board of Trustees, President Kelly, Provost Sandell, Deans Perlman and Ferrari and all of our honored guests (including my family up in the box over here, and my family standing to my right, Trustee Ernst Guerrier), the administration and staff of Suffolk University Law School and, most notably, the Class of 2021, welcome.

I'm so honored to be here. I don't normally find myself tongue-tied; mercifully for today I wrote down my remarks. But for an institution that I love so much, that I would do anything for, and students that I would do the same for, to be chosen as your commencement speaker is an honor that I just can't really put into words. For members of the administration that made this possible, that gave me this honor, I say thank you — even though it's really just not enough.

I've had the honor of administering the oath of professionalism to a lot of you on the way in. A few years ago, I administered that oath at the Cathedral Church on Tremont Street, and my message to the incoming class that day was that I had hoped they would find their love of the law in one or more of the different aspects of that subsumed profession. And coincidentally, as I was in a church, I spoke of the love that I hoped they'd find by referencing Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, often read at weddings, that describes all things that love is and is not. How love is patient and kind, and that it isn't proud or boastful.

And now here we are, poised to celebrate your commencement into your marriage with the Suffolk University Law School family as the graduating Class of 2021. And as a fellow alum, I'm humbled to be delivering this commencement address to you all. So let's begin.

I wonder if you all have seen the movie, "Good Will Hunting"? I'm old enough to remember when it was actually shown in the movie theater, so I guess that makes me definitively old. The movie stars Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. They live in Southie, and they both work in construction. Their friendship is just unbreakable.

Damon's character, however, also happens to be a genius, and he moonlights at night at MIT cleaning the bathrooms and sweeping and mopping the floors. And while he does all of this, he

also happens to solve these incredibly difficult physics theorems that a noted physics professor would leave up on the blackboard, problems that are beyond even the most bright of PhD students.

Ben Affleck's character, however, is not a genius. But he understands his own limitations. He's never going to escape those construction sites, but he knows that his friend needs more, that his potential is untapped. Eventually he tells Matt Damon's character that every morning that he arrives to pick him up to go to work, and Damon's character opens that door, that his heart sinks a little bit, because it's another day that he knows that Damon's potential is unfulfilled, that it's going to go wasted. He loves his friend enough to wish he were spending more time doing something else.

And here we are. On a day that some of you may have worried would never come, a day on which your outstanding achievements are being realized, on which you're taking yet another huge step toward fulfilling hopes and dreams that your own friends, your own families, your own teachers have for you.

So you may be wondering whether I would come here and tell you to reach for the stars — to define success as becoming the best litigator you can be, to strive toward a huge salary, partnership at a major firm, or perhaps even finding yourself on the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, or even beyond.

I could. But I'm not going to do that.

Because when the euphoria of today, the excitement of getting here, and possibly the melancholy of realizing that this chapter is over, when that's passed, I'm going to ask you to do something very different tomorrow morning — something that's in no textbook, no alumni website, and certainly no job application.

I'm going to ask you to get up tomorrow and go for a walk.

Let me explain. It was 2005. I was already in my mid-30s, and I was working at a boutique litigation firm, and I was doing just fine. But something didn't quite feel right.

And as if by fate, just as I was trying to analyze what was going wrong, my phone rang, and it was a call from a good friend of mine, Rod Osborne, who was building a new business here in Boston from scratch. He was heading up a national recruitment firm that had just entered the Boston market. He had all the business knowledge and wherewithal to make it a success. But

what he needed were recruiters that knew their way around the Boston legal landscape, who would know who to call and what to say. And the rewards were potentially vast.

So I stopped working at the role that wasn't quite right, and I joined Rod in this new office. And we had a wonderful crew of people there who were the very best at what they did. We had lists of contacts that were so long that our phones began to tire just from overuse. We were all good. We made those calls. And we made commissions for each placement. And it's amazing how quickly those percentages can add up.

So here I was with this opportunity to be wealthy — but I was miserable. So I stopped. I jumped off the treadmill, and I went for a walk.

It took me six months to take stock before I realized that I wasn't driven by wealth or running a business. I didn't care much about artwork in offices. I wanted to go back to what I was, a trial lawyer, which is why I had the sense that something wasn't right in the first place.

They were the most important six months of my career. That walk was worth 1,000 networking events. That walk was worth 1,000 paychecks. I went back into the law with the sense of purpose and destiny. And a little over a year later, I was a partner in my firm. And now, I proudly stand in front of you doing something I love passionately and with ironclad conviction that this is what I'm supposed to do.

But I'm not here to tell you that litigation in a big firm is the answer. It's quite the opposite.

Instead, I'd like to draw out the metaphor of the treadmill. The treadmill pushes you forward. It's motorized. It propels you forward. College, law school, jobs, promotions, mortgages, salary, bigger mortgages, bigger jobs. It pulls you along, giving you no chance to rest, no chance to breathe. For some, it's a breathtaking journey leading to something positive, fulfillment. For others it's a chore, an obligation we just don't have the energy left to fight.

I know you heard me use the word obligation, and that sounds pretty negative. But surely this is a chance of a lifetime, a dream to fulfill. It very well may be. But let's make sure that it's *your* dream. Let's make sure it's *your* route to fulfillment.

Perhaps your teachers pushed you to this point because you were bright? Perhaps your parents encouraged you to take this route? Perhaps you watched too many episodes of "Suits," and you liked the tailored outfits and the penthouse views?

None of these things, I repeat, none of these things are reasons to embark on this journey.

You have completed your studies. You have ticked off the academic box. You have achieved so much. So please, tomorrow, just step off. Look around. Draw a breath. Go to the park. Take a bike ride. Take in a great view, and give yourselves a chance to quantify your definition of success — not in the law, but in life.

Because the law may be wonderful, but it may not be wonderful for you. You may be doing this brilliantly, but for all of the wrong reasons. The Scottish polymath, Walter Scott, observed that “to always be intending to live a new life but never finding time to set about it, is as if a man should put off eating and drinking from one day to another till he be starved and destroyed.”

So if this career path just doesn't feel right, if it feels like a means to an end rather than an end in itself, then you owe it to yourself to not take it.

I understand why taking any job right now might sound like a good thing. You might feel restricted by the pandemic, the job market, the economy. You may think that you have to grasp at whatever you can get.

But trust me. It takes a man of my age to understand this fully. Each and every one of you are free. You are freer now than you will ever be. You are independent, and you have moved on from one life but you've yet to dig the foundations for another.

So take this chance to think. Go for that walk. Ask yourselves some difficult questions. What am I doing? Why am I doing it? Who am I doing it for? I've spoken to you before about patience and kindness and love. I've quoted Corinthians to you. And on your walk, I want you to give yourselves kind, patient, loving advice.

Are you doing this because you love it? Because it will inspire and fulfill? If so, wonderful. I'm happy for you. Go forth into the legal world, light of heart, with the spring in your step. Grasp your own causes and use this incredible, all-encompassing legal system of ours to make the world better.

But I know there's at least one person out here today who will take that walk and will do something much, much more courageous than walking into a courtroom and taking on that complex corporate case. And that's being true to yourself, and saying, despite everything that you have done, everything that you have accomplished, “I need to step away from this treadmill, at least for a while, because this isn't the career for me.”

Perhaps you prefer research to advocacy? There's nothing wrong with that. Not all doctors need to be surgeons. Or perhaps there's something else that you simply love.

One day, maybe 20 years from now, one of you will drop me a line and say, Judge, I've just been appointed to the judiciary, and I'll be so proud of you. Or maybe you just broke out and started your own firm. And again, I'll be equally proud of you. But if one of you emails me to tell me that as a result of this commencement speech in the year 2021 you went for a walk, and you pursued a different life, for love, then I will be even prouder.

So go write that novel. Set up that sandwich stand. Teach 5-year-olds how to dance. Because if that's what makes your heart sing, *do it*. That's more important than any description on your email signature or the size of your bank account. Don't let anyone tell you that you have come this far, so this is what you must do. Only one person should have that right, and it's you.

Don't go through the motions and pass the time waiting to enjoy your retirement. To borrow from the poet Mary Oliver, "Tell me — what is it that you plan to do with your one, precious life?" I've said it before, and I'll never tire of saying it: We are our own greatest impediments to being happy.

So to you all, my beloved Class of 2021, there is no crime greater than to seek wealth and prestige at the expense of your souls. And as far as I'm concerned, and as you all know, I consider you all part of the Suffolk Law family. And I have no wish to be Ben Affleck's character watching you go do the wrong job every day. Life is way too short, and I love you way too much to see you waste it.

So please, as you go forth, remember the most imperative of phrases: *Carpe diem*. Seize the day. Start tomorrow by talking a walk. Whatever your ultimate decision is, we support you. We love you. And today marks your official entry into the Suffolk University Law School family. Congratulations. Till death do us part. It's been my honor. [APPLAUSE]