

Thomas M. Siebel Delivers UC Berkeley Commencement Address

Congratulations to the 2012 graduates, including those Siebel Scholars who received degrees from the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign this past weekend. Thomas M. Siebel, Chairman of the Siebel Scholars Foundation, delivered the commencement address at UC Berkeley's College of Engineering graduate ceremony on Saturday, May 12. Reflecting upon what has defined the great leaders and innovators throughout history, Tom encouraged engineering graduates to seize the opportunity to make a difference in the world.

Dean Sastry, members of the faculty, graduates, proud parents and family, distinguished guests,
Good morning.

In this important place, on this important day, and in this very wonderful assembly, we gather to celebrate.

I want to join with your families and your faculty in congratulations for your accomplishment. And I want to talk a little bit about what happens next.

I want to talk to you about some decisions that you will make. I want to talk to you about what you can expect, and opportunities that you are likely to encounter. I want to talk about making a difference. About leaving the world a better place than you found it.

There is a story attributed to the great California oil magnate, and UC Berkeley student, John Paul Getty, Sr. At the time, the richest man in the world. When asked about the keys to success by a young intern, he explained that there were three such essential elements.

First, get a great education. Attend the best schools. Study hard. Be prepared. Become an exemplary student.

Secondly, work hard. Be the first to show up for work. Be the last to leave. Tackle every job. Work weekends. Nights. Always do your best. Be a top performer.

The third key to success -- and most importantly -- find oil.

There is some truth in this story.

Think for a moment about the immense opportunities that are before each and every one of you. Your productive careers will span the next six decades. Six decades. Think about that.

In the next six decades, the body of scientific knowledge as we know it will increase by a factor of two to three. You will have the privilege of participating materially in that phenomenon. Some of you will make significant change happen. You will change the world.

You will discover cures for cancer. You will perfect the hydrogen fuel cell. You will harness the power of the stem cell. You will lead the colonization of outer space. You will create new companies. Make new products. Create jobs. Develop new food sources. Foster prosperity. And husband world peace.

The world will be a better, healthier, happier place for what you will do.

Think back upon those individuals who have made a difference in history -- really made a difference.

Think about Francis Bacon, Michelangelo, Louis Pasteur. Think about Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, Isaac Newton, Johannes Gutenberg, Albert Einstein, and Steve Jobs. Think about Sally Ride and Margaret Thatcher. Think about Martin Luther and Martin Luther King.

These leaders are representative of that group who collectively articulated those concepts and principles, the sum of which constitute our very perception of reality.

Those great people brought us gravity, electricity, germ theory. They invented the printing press, movable type, the Basilica, the public library, the modern university, and the Internet. They created our nations, our religions, and democracy. They discovered outer space. And they brought us the very concepts of individual liberty and human dignity.

These people changed the world, each of them. Collectively they, and their like, conceived of the universe as we understand it today. Let's take a look at this group and see if we can identify common traits.

How about education? Well...some were exceptionally well educated. Some – like Einstein – were mediocre students. Many had no formal education at all. Not much in common there.

Work ethic. In general, these people were driven. They were focused. They got up earlier. They worked longer. They were tireless.

They all achieved – they achieved at the highest level – and they achieved at significant personal cost. They made great personal sacrifices.

Perhaps most importantly, it seems that these people were unusually sensitive to what was going on around them. They heard things that other people could not hear. They saw things that others could not see. It was a vision, or a moment of clarity, insight, inspiration. In each case, something special happened.

Whatever you call it, at one or more moments in their lives, they saw something. Something different. And they were able to recognize that it was different. That it was important. And they didn't let the moment go unnoticed. They did something with it. They devoted their lives to it.

Be sensitive to that moment. It will happen to you. Do not let it go unnoticed.

So we have a group of mixed education, tireless work ethic, great vision. Perhaps most importantly however, these people also were very, very lucky – each and every one.

Now don't discount luck. It will be a critical component of each of your successes. Some people say you make your own luck. There is clearly some truth to that. These concepts of work-ethic, vision, and luck seem to be interrelated. Luck, they say, is where preparation meets opportunity. Be ready. Luck happens.

Let's explore this luck thing a little bit further.

There will be a moment in your life when the stars seem to align. You will flip a coin 10 times in a row – and it will come up heads every time. You will look up one day and you will notice that the

wind has been at your back for a week. Something will have been going unusually right for an extended period.

Be ready for that moment. It will happen to you. Recognize it for what it is.

There will be such a moment in your life. Seize it. That is the start of the next company, the cure for cancer, the hydrogen fuel cell, the next big thing.

There is clearly a non-rational process at the core of these moments. It's an idea. It's a vision. It's a feeling. It is something that you know viscerally to be true. Take it and run with it.

Take it. When it happens, take it and run with it. Run with it. Don't listen to all the naysayers, the experts, the authority figures. They will stand in line to tell you your idea is impractical, impossible, and unrealistic. Don't listen to them. You will know it to be true.

This will be the opportunity you have been waiting for. This is what you are here to do. Don't take no for an answer. Make it happen.

One closing thought. Let's talk about ethics. Tomorrow is Mother's Day – a most appropriate day to talk about ethics.

You will have the opportunity to cross the line every day of your life, every day of your professional career – in lots of little ways – and sometimes, in big ways.

Some opportunities will be more tempting than others. Some will seem inconsequential. Some will appear common practice. What's the big deal? Everyone is doing it.

Here's a litmus test that you can use. Ask yourself, what would your mother think? What would she say if you told her about it? What would she think if she read about it? If you use that test to gauge your behavior, you will do the right thing. Every time.

Today is a big day. With credit to Winston Churchill, today is not the end, nor the beginning of the end, but the end of the beginning.

Work Hard. Be attentive. Latch on to good fortune when you see it.

Make it look easy. Do the right thing. Be lucky.

Thank you.