Hi everyone! I’m so excited to be here...as a former School of Public Health graduate and parent of a current graduate. I genuinely feel like I’m back home again.

I want to give a special thanks to the following people for inviting me:
- Our extraordinary Dean Boris Lushniak
- Two dear friends: first, professor and chair Bob Gold, and professor and our former Dean, Jane Clark
- Also, of course, assistant Dean, Elly Brtva
- Finally, one of my favorite professors from when I was in the school of public health, Dr. Don Steele.

Wow, it’s pretty incredible to think I was sitting in the audience back in 1986 wearing the same cap and gown. And that means two mind-blowing things:

1. I am beyond proud and honored to be here delivering your keynote address.

AND

2. Man, I am OLD.

Let me start by asking a quick question: By show of hands (or yelps), how many of you already have a job lined up?

Ok, now how many of you do not?

Don’t worry. When I was in your shoes, I didn’t have a job either. And things turned out pretty darn OK on my end. And they will for you, too.

With that being said, I want you all—the gainfully employed as well as those anxiously looking—to feel the excitement, the hope, the joy of today. I wish I could bottle up all of these amazing emotions because today really is one of the best days of your life. You have your whole future in front of you. You are filled with big dreams and even bigger ambitions. Hold on tightly to those dreams and let go of any doubts you may feel because the world is truly your oyster—or as I like to say, your whole grain avocado toast.
In whatever capacity you do it, you are about to enter arguably the most important field on the planet. Think about this: People can have everything good in life—a great family, an amazing job, loads of money, luxurious vacations, all the hottest new toys and fancy cars—but without our health, we have nothing. Nada. Zilch.

The simple truth is this: Good health is absolutely vital to every age, race, culture and gender. That being said, my job—your soon-to-be job—OUR job, is THE most important job in the world—and that is incredibly rewarding. We elevate people’s lives in a way no other profession can.

And before you all set out to conquer, I want to impart a few pearls of wisdom that I’ve picked up over the past 25-plus years in the field, to help make your professional road a bit more seamless.

Let me start with a fun fact: Since graduating, I’ve had 16 different jobs, at varying pay scales and levels of responsibility.

Let me repeat that: 16 different jobs! (and that doesn’t even include my waitressing jobs or my hostess gig at Bentley’s! Yes, I was a hostess at Bentley’s and I apologize to any parents I may have seated near the bathroom!)

And for the most part, I loved every single one of those 16 jobs. Why? Because aside from the regular job objectives, I found ways to grow, learn, network, and make a difference.

**Lesson number one: Your first job doesn’t have to be your dream job.**

But no matter what that job is, never coast. Work your butt off and contribute in any way that you can—wherever you’re working and whatever you’re doing. Don’t settle into your comfort zone—you only grow when you’re pushed beyond this point.

And don’t be afraid to fail. As my wise parents have always told me (and continue to tell me) “each and every failure is the beginning of a new success.”
Whenever you feel pressure to find the perfect job, keep in mind Joy Bauer has had 16 different jobs. Here’s another reason to feel confident: You have chosen a field with so much flexibility. You can go into education, global health, hospital healthcare, community-based wellness, public advocacy, media...some of you will go onto graduate school to further your education or even invent things like fitness apps and gadgets. The list goes on.

As for my personal path, imagine this: I had just graduated from Maryland with a degree in kinesiology, and I went on to get my masters in clinical nutrition. I then landed one of my first real jobs: a coveted position as the director of nutrition and fitness for pediatric cardiology at Mount Sinai Medical Center in NYC—I was oozing with smarts and ready to change the world!

I had my very first appointment with the mom of a 10-year-old boy named Ben, who had familial hyperlipidemia (which is a genetic predisposition for very high cholesterol). I prepared like crazy for Ben’s mama, let’s call her Betty. I made Betty shopping lists so she could buy the best brands of low-sugar/high-fiber cookies and cereal...and the leanest cuts of meat and dairy. I created an ambitious booklet filled with uber-healthy dinner recipes (oh, and believe you me, they were delicious!). And I even planned out what she’d be packing for Ben’s school lunch EVERY SINGLE DAY. I obsessed over every detail—after all, I had plenty of time to prepare since Ben was my first (and only!) client.

Then I fantasized about their follow-up appointment in two weeks. Betty would come in with tears of joy streaming from her eyes, reporting how she could “feel” Ben’s cholesterol going down within his body. His energy levels were high. And the whole family was reaping the positive benefits. Betty and her husband had each dropped a few pounds, they felt happier and more optimistic.... the family dynamic was on fire (in the best way possible).... And they owed everything to ME. Betty would sing my praises and recognize me as the miracle worker I was.
Well, that’s not exactly how it played out. Betty did come in two weeks later and she was crying alright, but they weren’t tears of joy. She flopped on a chair, folded her arms and told me that I was a big, fat waste of her time and money. Turns out, Ben wouldn’t eat his healthy lunches and was mooching junk food off his friends every day. And after trying a few of my recipes for dinner, Ben’s dad started swinging by the local Chinese or pizza shop and gobbling down as much as he could before coming home because he knew he’d hate the foods being served. And the “new and improved” groceries in the fridge turned brown and had to be tossed … a total waste of their money.

I learned a huge lesson that day, something none of my textbooks taught me. Which brings me to your

**Lesson Number Two: It’s really hard for people to change their lifestyle habits. So know your audience, listen carefully and be flexible with advice.**

As health professionals, we have all of the answers, but we never know as much as we think we know. For change to happen, we have to influence it. To be influential, we have to listen to people… and then, provide realistic and reasonable solutions. The health field will never be a one-size-fits-all plan.

Thanks to Betty and Ben, I learned to really listen that day and I’ve been doing that ever since… thoughtfully listening… to clients, to physicians, to producers, to writing experts. I am always evolving and sharpening my skills.

On another occasion when I was well into my career, I vividly remember when we were first planning my *Joy Fit Club* series. For those of you who aren’t familiar, the Joy Fit Club is a series on the TODAY show that celebrates people who have lost more than 100 pounds through diet and exercise alone (no pills, potions or surgery). In the planning stages, I was adamant that we should not tack a number on a person’s weight loss—it was much more about the story and their journey (whether they lost 5 pounds, 10 pounds or 20 pounds was not so important). But the senior producer pushed back hard, arguing that viewers really needed a powerful visual transformation in order to feel motivated and inspired. I was horrified… they need to lose more than 100 pounds in order to be in my club? What???

It turns out the producer was right on the mark, and though my intentions were good, I was wrong. Thanks to my ability to listen to someone with wayyyyy more TV experience, the Joy Fit Club has become
one of the longest running series on the Today show and people go crazy for it. We are now down a collective 45,000 pounds.

Even better... I get countless emails, letters and posts after each episode from people we’ve touched and inspired with our transformative segments. Pretty darn amazing. In this instance, I was willing to defer to someone with more knowledge and experience in television and it totally paid off.

The most successful people are those who are willing to change for the good of the mission. Be flexible, be nimble, be willing to listen and evolve.

Finally, my 3rd lesson may be a bit surprising, but trust me on this one.

**Lesson three: Do not let your job define who you are.**

As much as you love your work and as passionately as you may feel about what you’re about to embark on, continue to grow as a person outside of your job.

There have been times when I’ve felt like I’m married to my job. I work really long hours and obsess over every detail. I truly believe in what I do—and the rewards are immeasurable...unparalleled. But I’ve come to realize that life is short and it is so very precious. So my advice to you, is my advice to myself and my own kids... and my nieces and nephews:

Make your OWN health a priority. Drink more water. Read more books. Hang out with interesting people. Ignore more texts (unless they’re from your parents!) Learn to say no when something doesn’t feel right. Take your vacation days. Watch a sunset. Stay in touch with your UMD friends and professors. Laugh more (and worry less).

Each day, you have the opportunity to see the glass as half empty or half full... you know which to choose.

And very important: Go out of your way to do at least one kind or generous thing every day. It will provide a shot of pure happiness in both directions. And happy is happy ;)}
As someone who has sat where you are sitting right now, I know that you have so many great memories to look back on here during your time at UMD. Truth be told, some of mine are far from academic.

But I also know that—even better—you have an amazingly bright future ahead of you. There has never been a more exciting and explosive time to be in the health field. We need you more than ever to encourage and to inspire.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for choosing to be here ... in this very room ... as an accomplished graduate from the University of Maryland’s impressive School of Public Health.

Class of 2017—you got this. Congrats and Go Terps!