

Congratulations class of 2016! Both on graduation as well as making me feel old. I want to thank the Dean and the faculty for this wonderful invitation.

It's been 16 years since I first landed on campus here and my world instantly changed - between making lifelong friends, challenging coursework and professors who became mentors, I wouldn't trade the experience for the world.

For most of us, our childhood is filled with a healthy dose of curiosity. Remember, that time when you first thought the sky was crying or when you felt confused and maybe a little sad right after your silly uncle stole your nose? For me, the curiosity quickly went from how and why things work to how do I *make* something work. When I was around 7 years old, I was highly fortunate enough to watch Star Wars. About a week later I was sitting in my room, in deep thought, about how I was going to...build my own droid to help me become a hero.

I remember being deep in the process of removing the stuffing from inside the raccoon and breaking open the radio when my mother walks in with a noticeable look of concern. "What in the world are you doing, Andre?" "I'm building a droid robot to go on adventures with to save the world!" -- short pause from my mother -- "well, do you know how to build a robot?" And without missing a beat, I replied: "no, but I'll figure it out!"

The moral of the story there is that even though I did not have all the answers, I knew I would eventually move forward to the next step and figure it out. And that's what I want to impart to everyone. You have ideas and aspirations to make a difference in our world -- keep in mind that you will figure it out but you have to move forward to the next step. *With the tools we have access to today and armed with the public health education you've received here, the playing field is wide open for you to become a changemaker, an innovator and a health maker.*

These things all merged together for me in 2007 when I decided to create the Pulse + Signal blog to highlight and share my thoughts on the emerging innovations and just plain cool things happening in the public health world - I didn't really see it being done anywhere else, so I just started it. This is how innovation & entrepreneurship happens: you see a need, feel compelled to apply your unique perspective and get to work on putting that solution into the world. Especially in health, it's so important to make sure we are solving actual pain points.

So with that in mind, I want to give you 3 important points or what I call "currency types" - exchanges of value - for a meaningful body of work that ports into every aspect of your life:

Margin in Your Life (time):

- Every second of every minute of our lives has the ability to get filled up. More than likely, at this moment, your responsibilities in life are fairly low. Finals are done, you are sitting at graduation and looking forward to me finishing my address soon so you can go celebrate. But - as the years go on, trust me, that level of responsibility will change. It will be ridiculously easy to get overwhelmed and overbooked. As I'm encouraging you to create new solutions in our world, one of the most important things you can do for yourself is to *build in* time to think, process, come up with ideas and act on them. If you're constantly overbooked, you will be too physically and mentally drained to do yourself justice.

Learning to Interact with Others (people):

- One of the things I learned early in life was the power of creating a connection with others. In public health, we're aiming our collective intelligence and resources at building sustainable solutions for communities. How can we do that effectively if we're not paying attention to what is ailing those in our communities? Knowing how to listen, engage in dialogue and help co-create solutions -- especially with people from diverse backgrounds/perspectives -- is absolutely vital to the success of the work we want to do. With any kind of change, having trust and relationships is essential to go along with information. If we don't give ourselves the opportunity to learn the diverse perspectives & pain points of the people we're serving then we will lose.

The Courage to Do (action):

- So Seth Godin - marketing legend - talks about a concept called shipping. This pretty much means that it's not enough that you come up with an idea, or even that you BEGIN working on it. You have to come to a point where it gets into some sort of finished phase and put out there. Easier said than done, right? Whether it's fear of failure, fear of ridicule or just fear that absolutely nothing will happen at all - there will most likely be more internal things holding you back than external. In order to begin a path of success in truly changing things, you have to have the courage to do -- to take the next step. Why? Because action leads to clarity. The more you create and ship, the clearer your vision gets. **One of Maya Angelou's famous quotes: "Nothing will work unless you do"**. Just start - take the next step.

These last 2 currencies are special because they actually multiply in value the more you spend them. The more time you spend understanding people and their needs, the better your ideas will become. The more time you spend taking the next step of action, the faster you'll be able to create and implement useful solutions. It's all about momentum.

Take the next step. Just start.

For me, it started with an amazing class with Dr. Donna Howard that sparked my mind around disease prevention and a conference trip with Dr. Bob Gold discussing innovation opportunities. Since I sat where students are sitting today this school has gone through a transition to a school of public health, with two units not found in most schools: Family Science and Kinesiology. Because of the unique and essential elements that these units add to schools of public health, this is an excellent example of innovation with real impact.

For you, It starts with that trip to South Africa or Japan - that gives you on-the-ground insights into a new culture.

It starts with you learning about improving your emotional intelligence and mindfulness that equips you to operate at your best - whatever comes your way.

Micro is the new macro: an initiative that galvanized a handful of people around an idea - can easily spiral up toward a movement.

Challenge yourself to take on the creator mind. Someone who holds DOING and CREATING in high regard.

Look at new ways to listen, understand problems and then collaborate to bring solutions to the table.

There will always be a time when you aren't going to be sure of yourself or will feel the need to stay comfortable. Just as I did with my awful attempt at building a droid for galactic hero work, I have full confidence that you'll figure it out and have your own adventures of great work.

Grow yourself.

Never give up.

Improve "your own world"

Which will improve OUR world.

Thank you for this opportunity and CONGRATULATIONS! I look forward to seeing you all do great things.