

## **Faculty of Dentistry Convocation Address, May 31, 2022**

### **Dr. Bob Loney**

Graduates of architecture and planning, graduates of dentistry and dental hygiene, and graduates from the Faculty of Graduate Studies,

Today we gather not just to say that we are proud of you and your achievements.

We are here to let you know that we are actually in AWE of you. Yes, in AWE of you.

Why? Many of us remember what it felt like to be your age, to have so much potential and so much ahead of us. We remember thinking that perhaps we knew what lay ahead of us. We realize now that some of what lies ahead is both unknowable and unpredictable. Life will bring surprises and choices that will change your future in ways that you cannot plan for.

And yet, seeing you today, with all of your potential, no matter what your path, we are indeed in awe of you.

Graduates, you will be forgiven for perhaps considering this convocation as being a celebration of an ending – the completion of a phase of your formal education.

Convocation is really more of a celebration of beginnings. It is true that you have just completed part of the FOUNDATION for your life and your career.

But a foundation is only a base upon which something greater is built. When we talk of physical buildings – our homes or our worksites, foundations are critical. But when nothing is built upon foundations we commonly refer to those structures as ‘unfinished’. No one builds a basement without knowing the importance of what goes on top.

Today marks the completion of one of the foundations of your life. Now you must take that foundation and build something greater.

It doesn't matter if you do what is traditionally expected with your degree or if you use it for something else entirely. The main thing is to use your knowledge and experience as a foundation to do something bigger that brings joy and makes a difference in the world.

Some think that ‘making a difference in the world’ is too difficult for most of us to achieve. But I disagree. Making a difference in the world doesn't mean achieving fame. It can be as simple as making life better for yourself, your family, your friends, or those around you. Let me give two examples: sharing and giving thanks.

You can share what you have! Ten years ago, I posted most of my teaching materials online, including about 70 YouTube videos. I did this at the time so that my own students and faculty members could have easy access to those resources. That preceded COVID-19 by a decade, but when the pandemic did arrive, we received requests from around the world for permission to use those online resources. The answer was yes, always yes, and hopefully it helped many learners. But that act of sharing wasn't really anything special other than letting others use what had already been developed. In the scheme of

things, it was just a scratch on the surface. You can make the world a better place by sharing what you have.

Let's talk about making the world a better place by giving thanks.

In some ways, the past several years have seemed unfair. People have had to miss significant milestones, some have lost loved ones – there hasn't been much good news.

But despite that, many of us have found renewed joy in activities we hadn't done for a while, even walking or biking when other activities weren't possible. Some people reconnected with friends or relatives using technologies that hadn't been heard of before. Heck, look at us here today. We are joyous just to be physically together in the same room with masks on. Three years ago, who amongst us would have thought that that was a thing to be thankful for – being together in the same room!

So I think we should embrace our need to be thankful. That includes thanking those who have helped us, those who taught and guided us, those who give us joy and make us proud for the things they have achieved. Thanking those who love us.

I believe that thanks needs to be verbalized. We need to tell each other how thankful we are for each other and why we are so thankful. We need to do that often. And we need to do that both when events like convocation merit it, and also when it is unexpected. Perhaps you are shy about expressing that kind of thanks or maybe you think words might fail you. Don't be shy and don't be silent. The recipient doesn't care – the attempt means more than the words do. Tell those you are thankful for that you are thankful and let them know often, because as we know, one never knows what could happen in the future.

Lastly and most importantly, tell those you love how much you love them. Cape Breton author Alistair MacLeod, said it simply, "All of us are better when we are loved". So simple and so profound!

In summary, graduates, my message to you is simple: #1, You are awesome, #2 You have a solid foundation – go build something greater and BE your potential, and lastly #3 Make the world a better place – sharing and giving thanks are two simple ways to do that – there are many more.

I am so happy to be here for your convocation today. It has been an honour and privilege to share my thoughts with you. Thanks so much. Congratulations to you all!