This is truly your world—all of you. And you need to be much better shareholders of it, more careful stewards of it, and more eager students than previous generations of graduates.

And so I urge you to really live in the world. Don’t just pass through it or suffer through it, don’t squander it or just endure it. Live in it. Examine it. Focus to try to see the bigger picture. Be reckless with wisdom. Trust your judgment; take chances and love with abandon. Make your own work and take pride in it.

For me to stand up here and tell you that life is precious is just ... too simple. It’s not really what you want to hear right now. So I’m going to give you my personal top ten tactics for the real world – a few little gems… a road map for our lives.

NUMBER ONE: SENSE OF HUMOR IS KEY

Sense of humor cannot be underestimated in life. My wife and I would not have gotten through my injury and recovery without it. Our shared ability to laugh, even when we are the maddest at each other, has carried us through 22 years of marriage. And learn to laugh at yourself. Being self-deprecating is one of the greatest levelers in a relationship too. But one word of caution about sense of humor—know your audience!

NUMBER TWO: FIND MENTORS
You are graduating from a school where you can brush up against giants. The teachers and staff are accomplished and accessible—and have challenged you. And they have all been committed to instilling a life-long love of learning in you.

I was lucky enough to have great mentors in my journalism career. And when I graduated from law school and went to work at a giant New York law firm doing a type of law I didn’t really like, it was the voices of my teachers, that I heard urging me to follow my passions and take the entry level reporter job for a salary that qualified us for food stamps. Mentors are how some of the most successful people in life have made their way. And when it’s your turn, mentor back.

NUMBER THREE: RECYCLE

I’m impressed with the way your generation has embraced the challenges to care for this planet. And there is much more work to be done. You understand that we all need to walk more, turn off lights and electricity and think about conservation. You have the ability to go out in the world now and influence change in your neighborhood, your town or the country.
It has got to start with all of you in earnest if we want this planet to survive.

NUMBER FOUR: HAVE FAITH

Believe in something bigger than you. It doesn’t matter if it’s Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, perhaps purity of nature. And never underestimate the power of faith to lift you up. A battle with breast cancer, a parent’s slow slide into Alzheimer’s, the loss of a child, a husband kisses a wife goodbye and the World Trade Center falls. You will need faith in ways that do not seem important now, but it will serve you like a trampoline and a foundation made of stone. At your lowest ebb, faith has the power to stop you from falling through the floor. Use it, explore it, tap into it from time to time and it will renew you in unexpected ways.

NUMBER FIVE: DO WHAT YOU LIKE AND DON’T BE AFRAID OF CHANGE

Few people really know exactly what they will do in life. It is mostly unpredictable. It is true that I first became a lawyer in my career but for some reason I decided to take a year off to teach law in China. My wife Lee and I married two days before we moved to Beijing. Nine months later, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations captured the world’s attention. I became a translator for CBS News, and got addicted to journalism.

I was truly awful on TV at first. Really bad. But I had found something I felt passionate about, telling stories, covering current events, and watching history unfold.

Many young people ask me about going into journalism or about career advice and I say, “Do what you love then the rest will come – the salary, the recognition, the satisfaction.”

You may set out today thinking you are headed in one direction and find yourself headed somewhere else completely. Don’t shy away from that if the moment comes. There are always opportunities ahead when you are willing to embrace them. And they lead to far greater possibilities than you had ever imagined.

NUMBER SIX: SNAP IT ON – BUCKLE IT UP

When an IED exploded 25 yards from my tank south of Bagdad, my skull was shattered, and the concussive force of the blast and the shrapnel caused a traumatic brain injury or TBI.
For a few months if I couldn’t come up with the words I would make them up. I would confuse the order of letters, which are often mixed up. I referred to the Verizon man as the Viagra man. And while we laughed a lot, a head injury is no laughing matter. While I have been extremely lucky with my recovery, most people with TBI live with some form of impairment for the rest of their lives.

In the military hospitals and VA’s, we’ve seen so many young men and women robbed of a limitless future by roadside bombs in Iraq. But brain injuries happen in this country too—1.5 million a year from motor vehicle accidents, sports injuries, playground falls and even domestic violence. So wear a helmet and buckle your seat belt. Believe me when I tell you how quickly life can turn—in an instant.

NUMBER SEVEN: LEARN, THINK AND ACT GLOBAL

The world is a very different place than it was 20 years ago.

In the past election for the presidency, we had both a woman and an African American run for office.

The Internet has brought us immediacy… information and has leveled the playing field in many ways. The global economy means we need to be so much more aware of our neighbors and to understand them if we are to interact effectively.

Customs, religions, cultures, differences. take what you all have learned here at school and expand on it as you go out into the world. Broaden your horizons with an open mind. Learn another language, if you haven’t studied one already. Travel – you’ll see amazing vistas and meet people that will shatter your misconceptions and hopefully inspire you. As I say if you speak three languages you are trilingual, if you speak two languages you are bilingual, if you speak one language…. You are American.

NUMBER EIGHT: VOTE.

Don’t ever take those rights for granted. Some people get angry with our government and our country and become apathetic or refuse to vote. The fact is that we have so much possibility in the United States of America. We have flaws, like any system, but we also have the ability to make our voices heard. And there are so many ways we can get involved to advocate for change if we care enough. People fought and died for our freedoms. They are fighting and dying every day now in Iraq. Whether or not you believe in this war, people are putting their lives on the line for us. That deserves our total respect. And they deserve our complete care and best medical attention when they
You don’t have the right to truly criticize our country if you don’t do anything to advocate for change. You can’t complain about our elected officials if you didn’t cast a vote.

NUMBER NINE: KISS A LOT OF FROGS

Getting married or choosing a life partner may be the very last thing on your mind right now. So you can file this one away.

There are all kinds of people out there in the world. I urge you to experience them. By meeting and knowing different people, by dating, or forming friendships and relationships with others you will also learn to better define yourself as a person. I found my 20’s to be a decade of intense growth. It was a decade when I began to figure out who I was and what I wanted to do.

But I never expected to get married at age 27 but I did. The fact is that suddenly for some reason I met a woman meant for me. On the first date I laughed for three hours straight. I just couldn’t let her go and for some reason she hasn’t dumped me after these nearly 22 years.

And now I have the last nugget NUMBER TEN— it’s the one I call the BONUS ROUND: THANK YOUR PARENTS

Yes, this one sounds self-serving and even cheesy in fact—but no matter how your parents got you here—whether they own a movie studio and paid cash for your tuition or took a second mortgage out on the house—they got you here. They sacrificed in more ways that you can imagine at this moment in your lives to give you the best education, the best upbringing, the best chance at being a better version of themselves.

So do this for me at some point today—just say thanks to your folks in whatever way you do.

And thanks to you all for listening to me today.